# Estyn

# HMCI Annual Report
# 2021-2022

# Contents

# HMCI's Foreword

In my first annual report as HMCI I'd like to start by thanking both colleagues and the sector for the welcome I've received as I've travelled the country meeting practitioners, learners and their parents, governors and bodies supporting education and training. I'd also like to thank Claire Morgan in her capacity as interim chief inspector and to former chief inspector Meilyr Rowlands for his leadership and commitment to education and training in Wales.

Education in Wales is changing and at Estyn we are evolving our approach to our work to reflect this changing landscape. In this foreword, I'll talk about these changes and highlight some themes from our work this year. These themes include the continuing effects of the pandemic, the importance of alleviating the impact of deprivation and issues affecting the teaching of Welsh as a second language and Welsh-medium education.

One of my main priorities since joining Estyn has been ensuring that our work has more impact and so this year's annual report is different. We've tried to make it more accessible, timely and useful to practitioners whilst retaining the rigour and breadth people expect from our work. To this end, in September we published our first early insights summarising what's working well and what needs improving in each sector, and our reflections on key themes in education in Wales. We also provided resources for practitioners on areas for improvement in the form of self-reflection questions.

**Learner resources**
Primary resource
Secondary resource

This full version of the annual report expands on the messages shared in September and includes the usual commentary and analysis. As well as this, there are guides to contextual information about each sector. Another key aspect of our work each year is producing thematic reports on a range of important topics. We have chosen five of our thematic reports from 2021-2022 and produced summary versions of these as part of this annual report.

Learners remain the primary focus of our work and we are continually looking for ways to improve our engagement with them. Therefore, for the first time we have created resources for pupils in primary and secondary schools based on themes from our annual report. We hope to expand on this work in the future.

For all sectors, 2021-2022 was dominated by dealing with the ongoing impact of the pandemic. Education and training providers responded with fortitude to these challenges, placing learners at the heart of their work. In light of this, we recognised the need to slowly and sensitively resume our work. Although we had carried out monitoring visits and online inspections in a few sectors during the autumn term, one of my first decisions was to delay the re-commencement of the majority of our core inspections until after February half term as we judged that the system remained under critical pressure.

We were pleased and grateful that headteachers volunteered to pilot our revised inspection arrangements in schools. The pilot model built on our engagement visits and the recommendations of the 2018 report 'A Learning Inspectorate'. This new approach took into consideration the impact of the pandemic whilst retaining the rigour expected of Estyn but without summative gradings. This was a significant change and one that aligns with national efforts to develop a self-improving system. It also reflects our commitment to working more closely with education providers to highlight best practice and have more professional dialogue on areas for improvement.

We have received positive feedback about our new approach. In particular, that the removal of summative gradings has enabled providers and inspectors to focus more closely on strengths and areas for development. This new approach is not without its challenges, of course. Feedback from parents in particular highlighted difficulty in communicating our findings without gradings, which is why we have launched our first parent friendly versions of inspection reports to better explain the findings.

Despite the many challenges the pandemic brought, there have been some positive outcomes for the education system. For example, it brought institutions closer to their learners and to the communities they serve. It also helped to highlight for the public, educators' passion for their vocation and their ingenuity in adapting to the difficulties they faced. Although many of the issues that arose during the pandemic started to show signs of gradual improvement, challenges remained. For example, the numeracy and literacy skills of many learners, particularly the oracy skills of younger pupils, were slow to improve. A few pupils demonstrated challenging behaviour as they struggled to readapt to the routines and expectations of school life. Across the system we saw increasing demand for well-being and mental health support, and attendance, particularly amongst the most disadvantaged learners, remained at lower levels than pre-pandemic.

The effects of the pandemic were longer lasting on certain sectors and groups of learners than others. Learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds and those learning Welsh as a second language were affected particularly negatively by the pandemic. In addition, for PRUs, special schools and work-based learning providers recovery has been slower and more challenging. Recovery for these groups and sectors will take time. It was, however, encouraging to see learners welcome the return to face-to-face learning and the move towards more normal education.

In evolving their new curriculum, the majority of providers recognised the importance of adapting and improving their teaching as well as their curriculum content. However, not all providers gave sufficient priority to improving the quality of teaching and learning alongside their curriculum design. Many leaders remained concerned about assessment and progression and what progress through the curriculum should look like. The support received by schools from local authorities and consortia was often too generic rather than sufficiently bespoke.

In autumn 2022-2023 Estyn strengthened the emphasis in our inspection frameworks on providers' work to alleviate the impact of poverty on educational attainment. The work of schools and other providers are of course only one part of the solution to tackling child poverty. We are also focusing on the work of local authorities in this area, in particular how they coordinate their support services. We will continue to focus on providers' work to mitigate the impact of deprivation over coming years. In this annual report we have provided examples of the type of practice we see in providers who are particularly effective in tackling the impact of poverty and disadvantage.

Local authorities published their 10-year Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) in 2021-2022. This was a significant milestone in preparing to meet the national targets set out in the Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg 2050' plan. There was variation in the scale of ambition and commitment to deliver these plans. Many of the plans set out clear steps to increase Welsh-medium places in schools and settings and there is a clear focus on improving Welsh-immersion provision in line with the recommendations from our report on Welsh Immersion Education - Strategies and approaches to support 3 to 11-year-old learners. In our inspections, we continued to see shortcomings in the quality of teaching and learning of Welsh in English-medium schools and the majority of the WESPs did not make concrete and ambitious plans to address this aspect.

During periods of lockdown, pupils did not have enough opportunities to develop and use their Welsh language skills. This had a significant impact on pupils' confidence, fluency and inclination to speak Welsh in all schools. Also, there was clear frustration amongst educational leaders regarding the lack of Welsh-speaking staff across the education system. In addition, progress towards developing practitioners' confidence and ability to use the language and their understanding of how to teach Welsh was limited. We saw some promising collaboration, for example between a local authority and providers of Welsh for Adults and higher education to deliver professional learning for school-based staff and students of initial teacher education. However, overall, progress towards increasing the use of the Welsh language remains a significant area of concern.

This year we undertook a range of inspection activity and thematic reviews of post-16 education. We looked at the overall curriculum opportunities across schools, colleges and work-based learning for 16-19 year olds across Wales. We found that there was too much variation in the opportunities for young people depending on where they live. As in previous years, there was a lack of collaboration between providers to address this variation. The new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research aims to promote greater coherence and collaboration across post-16 provision. We contributed to the discussion on the reform of further and higher education and the review of vocational qualifications that took place prior to the establishment of this commission.

Education has evolved as providers responded in an agile and flexible way to the changes brought about by the pandemic, but the system will continue to feel the pandemic's impact for years to come. Whilst all providers rightly focused on learner and staff well-being, our strongest providers continued to have open and honest self-evaluation and an unrelenting focus on teaching and learning, alongside national and local priorities.

Finally, I wish to highlight once more the resilience and innovation displayed by educators across Wales over recent years. We are grateful for the dedication and commitment that they have shown in the face of enormous challenges.

**Owen Evans**
His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales

# Key themes

# Recovery from COVID-19

Across all sectors, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be felt throughout the academic year 2021-2022. This impact was apparent through continued operational and hygiene restrictions, such as the requirement to wear masks. These restrictions gradually eased as the year progressed, but as providers returned to a more 'normal' way of operating, the full impact of the previous year and a half on learners, staff and the general work of providers became more apparent.

In contrast to the previous year, no national lockdowns took place, but cases of COVID-19 amongst learners and staff caused disruption to teaching, learning and continuity of provision throughout the year. Some schools and other settings had to send year groups or classes home because of staffing issues caused by cases, and providers struggled to find supply staff. This was a particular challenge at the time of the rise in cases of the Omicron variant in Wales after Christmas and a further rise in cases in the summer term. This affected learners in special schools and PRUs especially, as they struggled to establish relationships with unfamiliar staff. The pandemic had a negative impact on the progress of many learners across most sectors, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

An additional consequence of the pandemic was recruitment, particularly to support staff roles, including administrative and teaching assistant roles. Providers often found themselves competing against similarly or better paid jobs, but without being able to offer the flexibility of working from home and therefore struggling to attract candidates. This was a particular challenge for non-maintained settings where staff had gained alternative employment when they were closed during the pandemic. Recruiting Welsh-speaking staff continued to be a challenge across all sectors.

In most sectors, learners welcomed the return to face-to-face learning, which they generally preferred to online provision. This was particularly the case in schools, colleges, ITE (Initial Teacher Education) providers, learning in the justice sector and work-based learning, where engagement with learning was better than during periods of remote learning. In adult learning, including Welsh for adults, many learners liked the flexibility offered by online provision and felt that it fitted in well with their lifestyles. They also felt that online learning benefited their mental health and general well-being. As in England, there was a significant increase in the number of learners who elected to be home-educated following the pandemic. Despite a general preference for face-to-face provision in most sectors, providers saw the benefits of retaining aspects of online working, especially for staff professional learning and meetings. Staff across sectors improved their ability to deliver remote learning. Providers in sectors such as ITE, further education and work-based learning started to consider how they could retain aspects of remote learning in their provision.

There were some common pandemic-related features that were apparent across all or several sectors. These included positive features, such as:

- Leaders across sectors responded with agility to the pandemic, adapting their provision regularly and creatively to meet frequently changing restrictions. As the year progressed, many providers re-introduced activities that had been affected, such as activities in practical subjects, extra-curricular opportunities and trips.

- There was a strong focus on the well-being of learners and staff. This led to increased and more wide-ranging provision for supporting well-being in most sectors.

- Over the course of the year and a return to more 'normal' education, many of the 'issues' exacerbated by the pandemic, such as the deterioration in learners' oracy and social skills or learner anxiety, showed gradual improvement but continued to persist.

- Overall, improved and increased communication during the pandemic led to better relationships with learners, parents and carers and a better understanding among providers of the families and communities they served.

There were also some common issues that affected a range of sectors:

- There was a general increase in demand for support for emotional and mental health issues across most sectors.

- Attendance rates in schools and PRUs in particular remained below pre-pandemic levels and issues of persistent absence proved more stubborn and difficult to tackle than previously.

- Overall, the literacy and numeracy skills of many children and young people were adversely affected by the pandemic, though they started to improve fairly swiftly on returning to face to face education. This was less of an issue for learners in sixth forms and adult learners, who generally engaged well with their learning during the pandemic. Providers in the further education and work-based learning sectors reported that, overall, learners had lower levels of literacy and numeracy skills on entering courses than was the case pre-pandemic. This was mainly due to gaps in their learning over the previous year and a half.

- The decline in learners' oracy skills was a particular concern in schools and non-maintained settings, especially for the youngest children, though this generally improved on returning to face-to-face provision.

- Learners' ability and readiness to use spoken Welsh was negatively impacted by long periods of non-contact with the language. In both Welsh and English-medium providers, many learners lacked confidence in speaking Welsh when they returned as their main contact with the language had always been through their educational provider. In secondary schools in particular there was a general decline in the use of Welsh between peers. Many Welsh-medium providers placed a strong emphasis on improving learners' spoken Welsh, which had a positive impact.

- In many sectors there was a notable negative impact on the social skills of some learners, particularly in the first term of the academic year. For example, in non-maintained settings there was an increase in the number of children with less developed social and personal skills, who found it difficult to share and play with other children. In specials schools, PRUs and the justice sector, a few learners struggled to settle back in to more normal routines. In secondary schools, a minority of pupils had difficulties re-engaging with school life and expectations, leading to an increase in behaviour issues in the first term in particular.

- For sectors preparing for the Curriculum for Wales, the pandemic led to a slowing of progress on curriculum reform in some providers. This was the case in a few primary schools and many secondary schools, where the legislation timescale regarding the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales is different. This meant that students on ITE courses had very variable experiences of curriculum reform, depending on the schools in which they were based.

- Pandemic-related restrictions had a significant impact on vocational education and practical subjects and experiences. In work-based learning and further education,

limitations on practical assessments and work placements led to a backlog of incomplete qualifications and a lack of practical experiences. Subjects such as music, design and technology and physical education were also severely affected by restrictions.

- Across sectors, many providers gradually resumed the aspects of their self-evaluation and quality assurance processes that had been paused because of the pandemic. However, a few providers across all sectors were slow to re-start this work, which led to them having an incomplete understanding of some important strengths and areas for improvement.

# Curriculum reform

This was a difficult period for providers as they continued to face the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic at the same time as attempting to maintain their momentum in developing teaching and learning to align with the Curriculum for Wales. The impact of the pandemic, as well as the effectiveness of providers' capacity to secure change and improvement, meant that progress was variable. For example, COVID-19 restrictions limited opportunities for practitioners to identify and share effective pedagogy within and between providers. Despite the challenges, in many cases, leaders worked with staff to find innovative ways to continue collaborative work to develop the curriculum and pedagogy. In the primary sector, experience of learning phase pedagogy and a more established approach to applying skills across the curriculum supported teachers to begin to adapt their pedagogy, for example delivering more authentic learning experiences for pupils.

In the secondary schools that were making suitable progress towards curriculum reform, they focused closely on improving teaching, developing staff understanding of curriculum design and progression in learning. They also considered their approaches to transition between primary and secondary carefully. In these cases, schools used their transition arrangements to support pupil progress as well as helping pupils to settle into school life. In the secondary schools where progress towards curriculum reform was least effective, they started to design their curriculum too quickly without thinking carefully about improving teaching or considering the knowledge, skills and experiences their pupils need to succeed. In addition, schools indicated that the demands of subject specific qualifications made it difficult for them to consider their approaches to curriculum design and delivery.

## Vocational qualifications reform

In the post-16 sector, Qualifications Wales continued to progress a series of occupational sector reviews as part of its vocational qualifications policy linked to the reform of vocational qualifications in Wales. New 'made for Wales' qualifications in health and social care, childcare, construction and building services were developed as a result of this work. Although leaders in schools, colleges and work-based learning providers were generally positive about the development of these new Wales specific vocational qualifications, many expressed frustration with early issues regarding the design and implementation of these qualifications. This resulted in reviews and amendments to these qualifications. The future of many existing qualifications, such as BTECs, was uncertain due to planned funding changes in England linked to the introduction of vocational technical qualifications (T-levels) and withdrawal of funding for many existing qualifications. The

**Summary findings**
This section of the Annual Report presents our full findings on this theme for the academic year 2021-2022. Click here to view a summary of these findings.

impact on the 16-19 curriculum in Wales was uncertain as awarding organisations were yet to publish their plans to continue offering qualifications affected by these changes to providers in Wales. Post-16 providers in Wales were especially worried about the likely impact of these reforms on the availability of vocational qualifications. In March 2022, the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language announced that they would review the current offer of vocational qualifications in Wales and use the findings to bring forward reforms.

## Improving teaching

Across all sectors that were preparing to implement the Curriculum for Wales, practitioners appropriately considered and explored approaches to teaching to support curriculum implementation and improve their practice. In a minority of non-maintained settings, there was a notable shift towards more child-led approaches, much of this supported by the publication of the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. In these settings, this often led to practitioners planning learning experiences that followed the children's interests, whilst still building their knowledge, understanding and skills progressively. This was also the case in many primary schools, where teachers increasingly devised ways to engage pupils in planning what and how they learned. However, the effectiveness of these approaches was variable.

In the secondary sector, teachers began to consider ways to develop their approaches towards teaching to maximise benefits for pupils' learning. Where this was most successful, teachers identified natural synergies between subjects and collaborated effectively between departments to plan opportunities for pupils to build on their knowledge and understanding and apply their skills. Where it was less successful, schools implemented cross-departmental working without adequately considering the benefits and pitfalls. Too often this involved making whole scale changes to departments and Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) without thinking about their vision for curriculum and teaching. This often led to schools implementing an overarching theme for a whole department or area without first thinking about effective learning in the separate disciplines. This led to tentative links being made and did not have a positive impact on pupils' learning or progress. In September we published a set of prompts for teachers to use with pupils to explore how they can work together more closely to plan learning.

Overall, across all sectors, practitioners welcomed the opportunity to adapt their practice to meet the needs of pupils in their settings more effectively. They often spoke of an increased sense of freedom to experiment and explore new approaches. Where this was most effective, leaders encouraged practitioners to reflect carefully on their practice whilst maintaining a clear focus on the impact on pupils' outcomes and progress.

In our 2018 thematic report, 'Improving Teaching', we reflected on what constitutes effective teaching and provided some useful examples of how schools had gone about making changes. The 'Teaching and Learning' and 'Early Years' toolkits from the Education Endowment Foundation provide valuable summaries of the cost and impact of various approaches to improving learner progress.

## Curriculum design and planning

Providers increasingly adapted their curriculum to reflect the context of their setting and the needs of their learners. In the best cases, leaders ensured an initial focus on arriving at a collaborative vision for the curriculum based on engagement with learners, parents, staff and, in a very few cases, the community, before moving swiftly on to its development. Often, this included ensuring that the curriculum provided valuable opportunities for learners to explore the historic, cultural and social features of their community and Wales. In many cases, providers also used their review of the curriculum to enhance opportunities to learn about the diversity of society in Wales and the wider world. We

**Pupil resources**

https://annual-report. estyn.gov.wales/ pupil-resource-primary/

https://annual-report.estyn. gov.wales/pupil-resource-secondary/

explored these themes in detail in our reports:

- [Celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion - Good practice in supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) learners](#)
- [The teaching of Welsh history including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history, identity and culture](#)

Most special schools are generally well placed to implement curriculum reform. In most cases, the curriculum offer was already generally well matched to the principles and purposes of the Curriculum for Wales. Special schools have continued to use their existing strong networks to work collaboratively on developing their curriculum offers. Nearly all special schools are implementing the Curriculum for Wales from September including just under a third of special schools with secondary aged pupils.

## Assessment and progression

Both primary and secondary schools often used the 12 pedagogical principles outlined in the Successful Futures report to help inform initiatives to improve teaching. Many schools placed a valuable, renewed focus on formative assessment strategies to ensure effective feedback to pupils as they carry out tasks and undertake their learning.

A very few primary schools used curriculum guidance confidently to develop a picture of what progress looks like through their own individual curricula. In these schools, where a vision for progress was more clearly developed, schools used the frameworks and statements of 'what matters' to plan carefully for progress across the school. They incorporated opportunities for classroom assessment that allowed teachers to adapt their practice lesson by lesson and, over time, to move pupils towards overarching aims and objectives. These schools understood that the primary purpose of assessment is as a tool to be used by teachers for evolving effective practice and supporting learning.

Around half of secondary schools have already begun to introduce the Curriculum for Wales in Year 7. Despite generally positive attitudes towards the opportunities for development afforded by the Curriculum for Wales, perceived barriers continued to impede progress in a majority of secondary schools. These included a lack of certainty around future qualifications and accountability arrangements. Work is ongoing to develop new GCSEs and vocational qualifications, but this is in the consultation phase therefore there are no firm details yet. Many primary and secondary schools also continued to request additional guidance on assessment and planning for progression.

Many leaders across all schools and PRUs identified concerns about assessment and progression in the Curriculum for Wales, especially over identifying and describing what progress through the curriculum should look like.

## Professional learning

In many cases, providers accessed and devised appropriate professional learning opportunities to assist staff with preparing for the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. The sharing of effective practice within schools was used increasingly well to support teachers to develop their approaches to teaching and learning, particularly once COVID-19 restrictions began to ease. Frequently, schools began to engage more purposefully with national and international research to inform the changes they were making. In the best cases, teachers reflected well on the impact that their adaptations were having on the progress of pupils, and they modified ideas identified in research well to suit the context of their school. However, in many cases schools prioritised curriculum design over improving the effectiveness of teaching and failed to acknowledge sufficiently the significant impact improving the quality of teaching has on ensuring the progress of pupils.

ITE partnerships ensured that their programmes paid due regard to preparing new teachers for the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. As part of this, they enabled students to consider curriculum planning and approaches to teaching and learning that

align with curriculum reform. The pandemic limited some of this work and, in many cases, students were not exposed as fully as would have been desirable to the practicalities of curriculum design.

## Partnership working

The four regional consortia and the three local authorities no longer in a consortium developed suitable approaches to support schools to develop their curriculum. As part of this, they began to develop stronger approaches to supporting effective collaboration between primary and secondary schools. However, as we indicated in our thematic report, 'The Curriculum for Wales – How are regional consortia and local authorities supporting schools?', too often consortia and local authorities failed to ensure that support was sufficiently bespoke to the needs of providers and they did not evaluate the impact of their work effectively enough. ITE partnerships also provided valuable opportunities for primary and secondary students to work across phases to explore cross-curricular work and teaching and learning approaches. In most cases, non-maintained settings began to work with their partner primaries, and primaries with their cluster secondary schools, to consider consistency and progression across their curriculums. However, in nearly all cases this work remained at an early stage of development and focused on specific elements of the Curriculum for Wales, such as the development of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) from primary to secondary.

Valuable links between special schools and external providers began to re-establish as COVID-19 restrictions eased. This helped to ensure beneficial learning experiences for pupils, such as visits to local places of interest, the development of vocational skills and work-related learning opportunities.

Pioneer schools were well supported by the regional consortia and Welsh Government to engage with the national development phase of the Curriculum for Wales. However, across all sectors, providers that were not involved in the pioneer schools' network felt that there were too few opportunities for them to learn about this work and to use it to influence the development of their own provision.

# Additional learning needs reform

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 ('the Act') attained Royal Assent in January 2018. It provided a new statutory framework for supporting children and young people (up to 25 years of age) with additional learning needs (ALN). The Act, Code and regulations made under it replaced existing legislation surrounding special educational needs (SEN) and the assessment of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). Implementation of the ALN system set out in the ALN Act for children is phased over the school years 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024.

From 1 September 2021, the ALN system commenced for all children up to, and including, Year 10 who were newly thought to have, or were newly identified as having, ALN on or after 1 September 2021. From 1 January 2022 the ALN system commenced for children up to, and including, Year 10 who had already been identified as having SEN, were in receipt of special education provision (SEP) via Early Years Action/Plus or School Action/Plus, and attended a local authority nursery, local authority school or PRU on 1 January 2022. This was a phased implementation across specified year groups.

Following the making of an Amendment Order, the time available to move children who were due to move to the ALN system between January 2022 and August 2022 was extended, so that they may be moved during the 2022 to 2023 school year. All children and young people identified as having ALN are required to have an individual development plan (IDP) in place.

Despite the disruption caused by the pandemic and the challenges it posed for providers, nearly all continued to make steady progress in reforming their provision to meet the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs Code. In nearly all cases, the members of staff most associated with delivering the changes, for example additional learning needs co-ordinators (ALNCos) in schools, had a good understanding of the new requirements and were positive about the changes. In particular, the move towards personcentred practice (PCP) and the greater involvement of learners and parents in planning and reviewing provision was seen as a positive development.

The embedding of understanding of additional learning needs (ALN) reform across all staff within providers was, however, more variable. In primary schools, ALNCos were largely successful in disseminating guidance and training to other members of staff. This proved more problematic in many secondary schools, as it is challenging to ensure that all teaching staff realise that provision for ALN is everyone's responsibility, particularly where teachers view themselves as subject specialists and do not routinely consider the needs of pupils with ALN as they plan and deliver lessons. Welsh-medium providers continued

**Summary findings**
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to express concerns around the availability of Welsh language resources to support ALN work.

Support from local authorities and regional consortia to assist providers in implementing the changes was generally useful. For example, local authorities provided effective professional learning opportunities including workshops, on-line modules, professional discussion opportunities and good quality resources for staff to use. Most non-maintained settings benefited from local authority training and support through the new statutory role of Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer (EYALNLO).

By July, nearly all providers had successfully begun to identify those learners who need additional learning provision (ALP) and mapped out the provision needs for other learners without ALN. In most providers, leaders ensured a range of suitable interventions, support packages and curriculum provision to address the needs of pupils with ALN at all levels. In many non-maintained settings, leaders began to develop one-page profiles for children that enabled them to clearly identify children's preferences, interests and emerging needs on entry to the setting. In a few sectors, providers worked collaboratively to develop their provision and ensure consistency. For example, many ALNCos in primary schools worked in partnership with their cluster of schools to create pamphlets and letters to inform parents about ALN reform. In special schools, PCPs have been a well-established element of their provision for a significant period. This placed them in a good position to implement ALN reform and allowed them to provide support to colleagues in mainstream schools to develop effective PCPs and to influence the design and use of IDPs.

Learners in post-16 are not yet impacted by the ALN reform. As part of our thematic report on the work of Careers Wales advisers, we found that learners with additional learning needs and their parents valued the specialist support they receive from Careers Wales' advisers to plan for their transition into post-16 specialist education provision. There is still uncertainty in the system about how this independent and impartial advice will be provided under future arrangements where local authorities will be responsible for funding specialist post-16 placements and how that might impact on learners' transitions into further education in independent specialist colleges or independent living skills provision in further education colleges.

# Tackling the impact of poverty and disadvantage

The damaging impact of poverty and deprivation on the lives of children and young people in Wales has been a consistent theme in Estyn's Annual Reports. In 2021-2022, external research and our inspection and engagement work showed that children and young people from deprived backgrounds were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. In many cases, the progress of these learners fell behind that of their more privileged counterparts and their attendance, which was already poorer, became worse. Research by End Child Poverty also showed that child poverty in Wales was worse than in all the other UK nations, with an average of 34% of children in Wales living in poverty.

In statements made in March and June of 2022, the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles, emphasised the importance of focusing on poverty and disadvantage in all aspects of educational provision:

> *Above all else, it is our national mission to achieve high standards and aspirations for all by tackling the impact that poverty has on attainment and to create a truly equitable education system in Wales. (https://gov.wales/radical-action-needed-create-truly-equitable-education-system-all)*

Our inspection and engagement work showed that some providers were particularly effective at tackling the impact of poverty and disadvantage on their learners. Even though these providers worked to alleviate the specific impact of poverty through provision such as free or affordable school uniform for all, food banks, affordable proms and so on, the main thrust of their work was on delivering high quality provision for all their learners, regardless of their backgrounds and on removing barriers to learning so that all learners had equitable experiences and chances. This relentless drive on comprehensive provision and high standards in all that they did meant that all learners were enabled to thrive. The features underlying the work of these providers offer valuable principles that would benefit the work of all providers, regardless of their context, and are captured below:

- **Leaders demonstrated a wholehearted commitment to inclusion and high standards, and conveyed a clear vision that was shared by all involved with the provider and permeated all aspects of its work.** For example, at Cathays High School in Cardiff the work of the school is underpinned by the school's mission of 'Opportunities for All' and the headteacher has a clear vision for raising aspirations, broadening horizons and maximising the achievement and well-being of all pupils. Read the full report here.

- **There was a relentless focus on high quality teaching and learning for all.** For example,

in Pantysgallog Primary School in Merthyr there is a strong culture of talking about teaching approaches developing at the school. Teachers work in groups to improve their classroom practice in a supportive way and to learn from each other. Leaders encourage staff to discuss and reflect on their teaching methods and to seek advice about ways to improve. Read the full report here. Teaching in Porth Community School challenges pupils to engage with ambitious tasks that stimulate and enthuse them to tackle difficult concepts. Pupils respond with relish and show just how much they can achieve when given the confidence and support to succeed. Read the full report here.

- **There was a strong moral commitment and a culture of high aspirations for all learners, not only broadening horizons through experiences such as trips, talks about universities, competitions and so on but through everyday experiences, such as the level of challenge in lessons, expectations of behaviour and engagement, and the quality of language expected in day-to-day interactions.** For example, Whitmore High School in Barry offers its pupils an extensive range of activities and extra-curricular clubs provide valuable opportunities for pupils of all ages and abilities to thrive, develop socially and learn new things. Most teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and many are good role models in the way they speak and use erudite language to communicate with pupils. Read the full report here.

- **The providers offered comprehensive well-being provision that was tailored to the needs of individual learners and helped to remove barriers to learning.** For example, the Wrexham and Flintshire adult learning in the community partnership provides a good balance and useful range of courses for adults who want to become re-engaged with education, to improve their job prospects, upgrade their English language skills (English for speakers of other languages – ESOL), develop their literacy, numeracy or digital skills or improve their health and well-being. Courses are provided in a variety of appropriate locations, including centres in community venues in rural and urban areas across the two local authority areas. The partnership uses non-accredited short courses well to attract hard-to-reach learners who are less confident about entering or returning to education and training. There is also a small but growing family learning provision, where parents and their children play and learn together, for example through learning the heritage skills of wool felting at the children's schools. Read the full report here.

- **There was effective multi-agency working between the provider and a range of external services within the local authority, charities and beyond. This meant that all agencies had a shared understanding of the needs of individuals, families and the community, and were pulling in the same direction to offer co-ordinated support.** For example, Merthyr Tydfil local authority values its partnerships with third sector organisations and recognises the important role they have in supporting the priority to tackle the impact of poverty on the educational success of children and young people. The local authority has established a network of services that work with education providers, including statutory services provided by the local authority and services provided by a range of third sector organisations. Read the full report here.

- **The curriculum was flexible and genuinely met the needs of all learners, while also making all learners feel part of the provider's community.**

- **The provider was part of the local community and the local community was integral to the provider. The providers knew, understood and supported individual learners, their families and the community very well.** For example, in Clwyd Primary School in Swansea, the school's work in partnership with parents and support agencies is exemplary. There is considerable trust and a shared belief that the school is doing the right thing for pupils and always acting in their best interests. Parents have opportunities to attend workshops focusing on literacy, numeracy and family learning. They also attend sessions from guest speakers on a range of topics, including mental health and anxiety. Specialist agencies attend the school regularly to provide parents with direct support and advice. The pupil-run café enables parents to meet and develop relationships; this is particularly beneficial to those with children in the STF who often live outside the school's traditional catchment area. Read the full report here.

- **Providers looked outwards, to other providers and to research, to find solutions and improve their provision, but always ensured that whatever they adopted was suitable for their context, staff and learners.**

- **The development of early language skills to prepare young children living in poverty to make a successful transition to school is a key element of provision in non-maintained settings. Where this was most successful, settings worked effectively with a range of partners including health, local authority officers and primary schools to identify children's needs, plan interventions and ensure consistent approaches to children's language development.** For example, in Merthyr Tydfil local authority, partnerships to support early years provision are particularly strong. These include partnerships with health visitors to encourage good pre-school parenting and with primary schools to support highly effective transition from Flying Start and non-maintained settings. A multi-agency approach ensures that appropriate plans are in place to support children who need additional help when they start primary school. Read the full report here.

- **All learners were supported to develop the basic skills that they needed, with a particular focus on literacy skills (especially reading and speaking), and basic numeracy skills.** For example, in Waun Wen Primary School in Swansea, the focus on developing pupils' vocabulary in all lessons contributes strongly to the progress that pupils make across the curriculum and is a strength of the school. There is an effective whole school approach to developing a love of reading and literature. The development of pupils' reading skills is a priority across the school and there is a systematic approach to developing their skills. There is good use of practical apparatus to promote pupils' understanding of mathematical skills in all classes and this contributes significantly to the strong progress that pupils make in developing their numeracy skills and to their ability to explain their mathematical thinking with assurance. Read the full report here.

- **Providers enabled all learners to see a relevant and feasible future pathway for themselves throughout their educational journey.** For example, the work of the Isle of Anglesey's Youth Service is a notable aspect of the support for learners. There is a youth officer in every secondary school on the island. They offer a drop-in service for learners, support the school's personal and social education provision, and run youth clubs and evening activities in the community. The service also offers opportunities for learners at risk of disengagement to gain qualifications and experiences, such as employment preparation courses and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Read the full report here.

- **Leaders consistently evaluated the impact of their work on the lives and life chances of the children and young people in their care. All partners are involved in regular opportunities to evaluate the approaches to supporting learners and their families.**

# Providers that have made rapid improvement and no longer require monitoring

When inspectors identify serious shortcomings in the quality and consistency of teaching, and the effectiveness of leadership overall at the time of the core inspection, providers are placed in follow-up. For schools and PRUs, there are two statutory categories of follow-up, namely requiring special measures (SM) or in need of significant improvement (SI), as well as a non-statutory category of Estyn review (ER). Other sectors have different arrangements, but all have levels of follow-up. Inspectors then monitor the improvements that the providers make over time. We continue to monitor a provider until the improvements are robust enough to have an impact on outcomes for learners, and leaders demonstrate an improved capacity to bring about further improvements. Twenty-seven providers in statutory categories met these criteria and were removed from follow-up in 2021-2022. Details of these providers can be found here. In addition, 39 providers across all sectors were removed from non-statutory follow-up.

Valuable lessons can be learned from providers that have been removed from follow-up. These include lessons about how to make rapid progress and what does and doesn't work in terms of supporting improvement.

## What were the key improvements inspectors noted when providers were removed from further follow-up?

- Leaders had a clear, shared vision and high expectations for the provision, based on strong collaboration amongst teachers and other practitioners. See Plasnewydd Primary School's cameo.

- There was improved leadership capacity, and a resilient, well-focused, stable leadership team. Leaders had focused on building leadership capacity and planning for succession through professional learning. See Ysgol Bryn Celyn's cameo. This resource provides self-reflection questions on how improving providers can build their leadership capacity.

- There were improved, supportive professional relationships and sense of teamwork among staff at all levels. Leaders supported teachers to reflect on practice and respond positively to recommendations highlighted in the initial core inspection report. See Ysgol Bryn Alyn's cameo.

**Summary findings**
This section of the Annual Report presents our full findings on this theme for the academic year 2021-2022. Click here to view a summary of these findings.

- Staff shared a clear understanding of good quality teaching and learning. They took professional responsibility for improving the quality of their own practice. See Croesyceiliog School's cameo. This resource provides self-reflection questions on how improving providers can focus on high quality classroom provision.

- Leaders came to understand the importance of ensuring that the curriculum met the needs of their learners and their community.

- There was robust monitoring by leaders at all levels that led to accurate evaluations of what was and wasn't working well, and fed directly into improvement priorities and professional learning.

- Everyone, including the learners, understood the importance of good behaviour and attitudes to learning, and regular attendance.

- Worthwhile professional learning focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

- There was a willingness among leaders to adjust improvement plans and actions based on up-to-date information and evidence. In particular, leaders in these provisions introduced flexible process and were responsive enough to adjust their plans as a result of the impact of COVID-19 and their likely ability to implement their original planned actions. See Ysgol Gymraeg Ffwrnes' cameo.

- Leaders prioritised wisely. They understood that they could not do everything at once and focused first on what needed most attention. See Tŷ Gwyn Education Centre's cameo.

- Leaders did not 'jump on every bandwagon'. They came to understand that introducing too many strategies and not tailoring strategies to the context of the school or provider could overwhelm staff and learners and become counterproductive. See Adult Learning Wales' cameo.

- Where appropriate, local authorities successfully used their statutory powers to impose additional, experienced governors to join the existing board. These arrangements were generally successful in developing the capacity of the governing body. In a very few schools in special measures, IEBs (interim executive boards) replaced the governing body to provide strategic direction and appropriate challenge and support to the school's leadership. IEBs operate for a defined period of time before transferring governance arrangements back to a governing body.

- In both schools and PRUs, there were strengthened working relationships with the local authority, including robust multiagency working that provided a coordinated approach to meeting the diverse range of learners' needs in specialist provisions. In non-maintained settings, close working with local authority support teachers and umbrella organisations to provide staff training had a positive impact on staff confidence and expertise. See Powys County Council Education Service's cameo.

- There were improved relationships with stakeholders and providers sought and acted on the views of learners, staff and parents in particular. See Abertillery Learning Community's cameo.

- In non-maintained settings particularly, there was a clear focus on providing children with opportunities for unhindered play. Practitioners used indoor and outdoor space and resources to encourage children to develop self-confidence, making decisions for themselves. Practitioners were becoming more aware of the importance of supporting play, intervening where appropriate to support a particular skill. See Cylch Meithrin Llannerch-y-medd's cameo.

- In these settings, leaders responded appropriately to issues of non-compliance raised by CIW inspectors during joint inspections, to ensure that they complied fully with national minimum standards for regulated childcare.

When a provider is removed from follow-up, there is clear evidence that nearly all learners are beginning to make the progress they should. This is because they are engaged in their learning, have positive attitudes and behave well. Teachers plan worthwhile learning activities that take good account of learners' starting points and challenge all learners appropriately.

Most often, when providers are ready to be removed from follow-up, inspectors note a relentless focus across the provision on improving the quality of classroom practice. Teaching and learning are the provider's clear, core purpose and integral to the vision. Everyone has high expectations of what learners can achieve, and learners have appropriately high aspirations for their futures.

# How have providers achieved these improvements?

The case studies below provide examples of how these providers brought about improvements, to the point of being removed from further follow-up activity.

## Provider: Cylch Meithrin Llannerch-y-medd

**Level of follow-up: Estyn monitoring**
**Removed: December 2021**

Leaders at Cylch Meithrin Llannerch-y-medd have established a clear vision for the setting based on providing a wide and enriching range of experiences for the children. They have established self-evaluation processes, which include all stakeholders and provide the setting with manageable priorities for improvement. As they develop their approach to delivering the curriculum for non-maintained settings, they have raised the expectations of practitioners and have provided opportunities for professional learning. They work closely with the local authority's advisory teachers, and with umbrella organisations, such as the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, to introduce elements of responsive planning, and to develop practitioners' confidence. They now make far more effective use of the different learning areas, creating a stimulating environment for the children to play. They have shared their work with other settings across the authority.

## Provider: Ysgol Gymraeg Ffwrnes

**Level of follow-up: Significant improvement**
**Removed: November 2021**

As in many other schools during this academic year, the COVID-19 pandemic affected Ysgol Gymraeg Ffwrnes' ability to implement improvements. Leaders demonstrated sound judgement when adjusting their improvement plans, such as by changing the timeframe for implementing some activities or using technology to better support their improvement goals. Although the pandemic restricted the opportunities for direct monitoring, leaders, including the governors, continued to evaluate important aspects virtually. For example, they scrutinised the quality of distance learning provision to identify what was good and what needed to improve. Leaders created a bespoke school improvement plan that includes the core inspection recommendations as well as other priorities. Leaders monitored their progress against the actions carefully, clearly stating what had been achieved and what the next steps would be. As a result of robust self-evaluation procedures, the school made good progress against the core inspection recommendations.

## Provider: Tŷ Gwyn Education Centre

**Level of follow-up: Special measures**
**Removed: November 2021**

At Tŷ Gwyn Education Centre, the introduction of trauma-informed approaches and practice has contributed significantly to improvements in provision across the PRU This has been achieved through professional development for all staff, including accreditation as trauma-informed practitioners. The therapeutic model of support and intervention for pupils is a strength. The model is enhanced greatly by the assistant educational psychologists based full-time at the PRU. This approach deepens staff understanding of pupil behaviour and impacts in turn on increased levels of pupil engagement and progress.

## Provider: Croesyceiliog School

**Level of follow-up: Estyn review / Special measures**
**Removed: November 2021**

Croesyceiliog School was inspected in 2018 and placed in non-statutory follow-up (Estyn review). When inspectors re-visited in 2020, progress was found to be too slow and the school was deemed to require special measures. An executive headteacher was appointed, who quickly developed a clear vision for the school's improvement. Roles and responsibilities at senior and middle leader level were refined to make best use of the existing staff, and these leaders ensured that the school's improvement work had a sustained focus on developing effective classroom practice. Valuable professional learning activities helped leaders to develop their capacity to accurately evaluate their areas of responsibility, especially the effectiveness of teaching. This enabled them to identify precisely the specific aspects that required development.

The strategic direction provided by the executive headteacher helped staff to work collaboratively, for example by regularly sharing good practice. As a result, the school made rapid progress against the recommendations from the core inspection.

## Provider: Plasnewydd Primary School

**Level of follow-up: Special measures**
**Removed: October 2021**

Plasnewydd Primary School was placed in special measures following the core inspection in 2018. The school was removed from further follow-up in 2021. Following a period of leadership turbulence, all staff now understand and accept their roles and responsibilities but know that they will be held to account for any underperformance where appropriate. Teachers and support staff appreciate the support, coaching and mentoring that they receive from leaders to help them to do their best for the pupils in their classes. Leaders now have the confidence to tackle any underperformance robustly. However, they also ensure that they balance addressing underperformance with support for their colleagues, for example when teachers move to classes in unfamiliar age groups, or when temporary staff cover for absence.

This collaboration between staff and leaders, along with clear, high expectations of everyone to do their best, has contributed to the school's improvements over time. Together, these actions have helped to build a culture where all staff relish their core responsibility for the education and progress of pupils in their class, and across the school. This shared culture supports everyone to become '#proud to be Plas'.

## Provider: Bryn Celyn Primary School

**Level of follow-up: Significant improvement / Special measures**
**Removed: 2014 and revisited in 2022**

Bryn Celyn Primary School in Cardiff was placed into significant improvement, and then special measures, following its core inspection in 2011. The school serves an area of significant deprivation where the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 74%. The school was removed from statutory follow-up in 2014, following three years of regular monitoring from Estyn and intensive support for the local authority and regional consortium.

When inspectors returned in 2022 to complete a core inspection, the school had improved markedly and did not require any follow-up. Nearly all staff had remained at the school, including the headteacher, creating a cohesive, well-focused culture of collaboration. Leaders have established a strong partnership with parents that has been highly successful in raising pupils' aspirations. Inspectors found a much-strengthened focus on pupil achievement and, as a result, significant well-embedded improvements to the quality of teaching and classroom practice.

## Provider: Abertillery Learning Community

**Level of follow-up: Significant improvement**
**Removed: February 2022**

At Abertillery Learning Community, after a period of staffing instability, the headteacher and senior leadership team provide strong leadership that is committed to securing high quality teaching and provision for pupils of all ages. They strengthened arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning across the school. As a result of more robust monitoring and appropriate professional learning, teaching across the school has improved and had a positive impact on pupils' progress, behaviour and attitudes to learning. Staff have a good understanding of what is expected of them and what they can expect from leaders. This has helped to improve the morale of staff, create a sense of teamwork across the school and raise expectations around what pupils can achieve. Leaders also strengthened their arrangements for consulting with pupils on many aspects of the school's work, which led to notable changes to the school's provision and general improvement.

## Provider: Ysgol Bryn Alyn

**Level of follow-up: Special measures**
**Removed: October 2021**

Ysgol Bryn Alyn had been in special measures for just under a year when the current headteacher was appointed in 2018. She focused initially on ensuring that pupils and staff felt pride in being members of the school community, improving pupil behaviour and strengthening leadership. Over the course of three years, and particularly during the pandemic, she worked on forging a sense of teamwork across the school. This was crucial to the school's improvement and helped to change the culture and ethos of the school. To support positive pupil behaviour, the school revised its curriculum so that there is now a broader range of provision to meet pupils' differing needs and interest.

Leaders also introduced a new behaviour policy and developed internal provision and support strategies to help disaffected pupils. The roles and responsibilities of leaders were clarified and distributed appropriately. Professional learning around aspects such as self-evaluation, improvement planning and being a leader has helped leaders to better undertake their roles and have a clearer understanding of the strengths and areas for development within their areas of responsibility. Governors recognised that in the past they had not been sufficiently aware of what was happening in the school. They now ensure that they are well informed and challenge the school more effectively.

## Provider: Adult Learning Wales

**Level of follow-up: Estyn review**
**Removed: June 2021**

Adult Learning Wales was inspected in January 2019 and placed in Estyn review. The provider was removed from the list of providers requiring Estyn review in June 2021, following a desk-based review of evidence on progress made since the inspection.

Following the core inspection, the provider responded swiftly to the recommendations contained in the inspection report by widening the participation of staff and external partners in self-evaluation processes and improvement planning. Leaders also implemented a range of initiatives to improve the ways in which tutors shared good practice and resources across the organisation. These included improvements to online resource areas and the introduction of lead tutor roles.

Leaders gave particular attention to improving the quality of information and guidance relating to supporting learners with additional learning needs (ALN) and to ensuring that all staff received appropriate training on ALN. For example, staff now make good use of clear flow-charts that provide tutors with an easy reference tool to help them understand how and when to apply for help for self-referring and identified learners requiring ALN support. This helped to improve access to additional learning support. Tutors also benefited from useful training to help them identify learners with ALN and to adapt their teaching approaches to provide more effective support.

## Provider: Powys County Council Education Services

**Level of follow-up: Significant concern**
**Removed: October 2021**

Following our monitoring visit in the autumn term, we judged that Powys education services had made sufficient progress to be removed from our list of local authorities causing significant concern. Officers and elected members had responded well to the findings of the core inspection, acknowledged the challenges they faced and worked quickly to begin to address the recommendations that we made.

The chief executive appointed a new director of education who strengthened the relationship between the education service and schools. A positive feature has been that, although the improvement work was at an early stage at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, officers and elected members maintained a robust focus on the implementation of the improvement strategies at the same time as addressing the urgent needs of schools caused by the pandemic.

We found that the local authority had made strong progress in aspects of its work that caused concern during the core inspection. For example, support for schools including those participating in the Welsh Government's pilot multi-agency approach has resulted in secondary schools showing sufficient progress to be removed from a statutory category of follow-up. Officers also improved the planning and co-ordination of provision for pupils with special educational needs and those who require extra support.

The local authority implemented an ambitious programme of school organisation proposals based on the Transforming Education Strategy. These proposals have included the opening of a new all-age school, the merger of a number of primary schools and the closure of small rural schools, as well as changes to the language category of schools. Officers and relevant members of the council engaged well with parents, pupils, staff and governors to discuss proposals and allay concerns.

Providers that have made enough progress to be removed from statutory follow-up (schools, pupil referral units and local authorities) or focused improvement (for non-maintained settings) during the academic year 2021-2022

| Provider | Sector | Local authority | Level of follow-up | Date removed from follow-up | Core inspection start date |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ysgol Awel y Mynydd | Primary | Conwy | SM | 04/07/2022 | 09/12/2019 |
| Pentip V.A. C.I.W. Primary School | Primary | Carmarthenshire | SM | 04/07/2022 | 11/03/2019 |
| Ysgol Gymraeg Gilfach Fargoed | Primary | Caerphilly | SI | 20/06/2022 | 21/10/2019 |
| Ysgol Bro Sannan | Primary | Caerphilly | SI | 28/03/2022 | 07/10/2019 |
| Abermorddu C.P. School | Primary | Flintshire | SM | 08/02/2022 | 25/11/2019 |
| Craig-Yr-Hesg Primary School | Primary | Rhondda Cynon Taf | SI | 15/11/2021 | 24/09/2018 |
| Cefn Primary School | Primary | Rhondda Cynon Taf | SI | 15/11/2021 | 24/09/2018 |
| St Alban's R.C. Primary School | Primary | Cardiff | SI | 15/11/2021 | 13/05/2019 |
| Ysgol Gymraeg Ffwrnes | Primary | Carmarthenshire | SI | 10/11/2021 | 16/05/2017 |
| Ogmore Vale Primary | Primary | Bridgend | SM | 03/11/2021 | 02/10/2017 |
| Ysgol Y Castell | Primary | Carmarthenshire | SM | 02/11/2021 | 08/07/2019 |
| Plasnewydd Primary School | Primary | Bridgend | SM | 19/10/2021 | 29/01/2018 |
| Bryn C.P. School | Primary | Carmarthenshire | SM | 12/10/2021 | 19/11/2018 |
| Porth Community School | All Age Schools | Rhondda Cynon Taf | SI | 27/06/2022 | 25/11/2019 |
| Abertillery Learning Community | All Age Schools | Blaenau Gwent | SI | 14/02/2022 | 05/02/2018 |
| Ysgol Ardudwy | Secondary | Gwynedd | SM | 14/02/2022 | 03/12/2018 |
| Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen | Secondary | Gwynedd | SI | 31/01/2022 | 23/09/2019 |
| Ysgol Harri Tudur/Henry Tudor School | Secondary | Pembrokeshire | SI | 25/01/2022 | 19/11/2018 |
| St Julian's School | Secondary | Newport | SM | 16/11/2021 | 02/12/2014 |
| Croesyceiliog School | Secondary | Torfaen | SM | 08/11/2021 | 22/01/2018 |
| Ysgol Bryn Alyn | Secondary | Wrexham | SM | 19/10/2021 | 11/12/2017 |
| Milford Haven School | Secondary | Pembrokeshire | SI | 18/10/2021 | 27/11/2017 |
| Newtown High School | Secondary | Powys | SM | 12/10/2021 | 19/05/2015 |
| Aberdare Community School | Secondary | Rhondda Cynon Taf | SI | 12/10/2021 | 05/03/2018 |
| Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni | Secondary | Caerphilly | SI | 22/09/2021 | 26/04/2016 |
| Bridge Achievement Centre | Pupil Referral Unit | Newport | SM | 28/03/2022 | 12/03/2018 |
| Ty Gwyn Education Centre | Pupil Referral Unit | Rhondda Cynon Taf | SM | 02/11/2021 | 07/10/2019 |

In addition to these providers that no longer require monitoring, there are a further 16 schools that remain in statutory follow-up resulting from core inspections that took place before the pandemic. Inspectors continue to monitor and report on their progress on a regular basis. Resources that providers and local authorities may find useful:

SM – Special measures
SI – Significant improvement

Post-inspection action plans (gov.wales)
Schools causing concern: Statutory guidance for schools and local authorities
Guidance regarding schools in special measures and the induction period for newly qualified teachers (gov.wales)
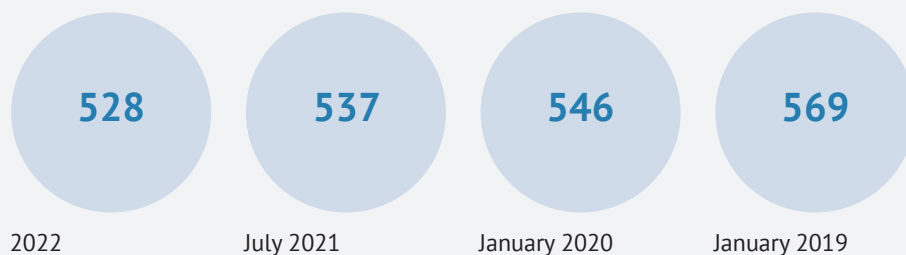
# Sector reports

# Sector report: Non-maintained nurseries 2021-2022

## Total number of settings in Wales

Numbers of settings did drop but have come back relatively strongly overall.

**528**

2022

**537**

July 2021

**546**

January 2020

**569**

January 2019

## Follow-up

Settings that have been deemed in need of follow-up activity to secure improvement following a core inspection:

**6** placed into follow-up category
**5** removed from follow-up category
**5** remained in follow-up category

**57**

engagement visits to non-maintained settings during the autumn term 2021

**60**
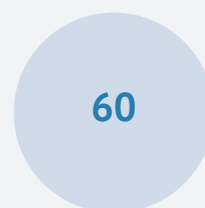
joint inspections of non-maintained settings during the spring and summer terms

January 2022:

recommenced joint inspections with colleagues from Care Inspectorate Wales following pause of 21 months due to COVID-19 pandemic

January 2022:

The Welsh Government published A Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings, based on five developmental pathways: (belonging, communication, exploration, physical development, well-being)

# Sector report: Non-maintained nurseries 2021-2022

## Learning

Relative to their stage of development, most children made good progress during their time in non-maintained nursery settings. In the very few instances where progress was not as strong, children did not consistently develop and apply a suitable range of literacy and numeracy skills in their play and structured activities. Evidence from our engagement activity in the autumn term had suggested that, because of disruption to pre-school provision caused by the pandemic, there may have been a decline in children's speaking and listening skills compared with previous cohorts. However, when our inspections restarted, we found that, with support from practitioners, many children had progressed well from a low baseline with their communication skills. For example, they would listen to adults and respond appropriately, and begin to express preferences or ask for assistance as required. As they grew in confidence, most began to chat naturally with practitioners and their friends and play with them as opposed to alongside them. Many children developed their communication skills well using technology, for example talking about photographs they took using digital cameras.

Nearly all children enjoyed listening and joining in as practitioners read stories. A minority would choose to pick up and interact with books independently. In many English-medium settings, children began to acquire simple Welsh language skills and would respond to greetings or identify colours in Welsh.

Nearly all children developed their physical skills well. By developing fine-motor skills through activities such as playing with small beads and threading them onto string, children began to develop the skills they require for early writing. Many experimented effectively with mark making, for instance by using coloured chalks to draw on paving stones or taking orders on a notebook in the role play café. They developed gross motor skills well through activities such as walking on balancing beams and by using outdoor climbing equipment that had often been acquired with COVID-19 grant funding.

Many children developed creative skills well. This was particularly the case in settings where they were encouraged and enabled to make their own choices, such as to choose to experiment with paints, create imaginative dances or use percussion instruments to make simple sound patterns. In the strongest cases, children benefited from being able to access a wide range of equipment independently with which they could enjoy expressing their creativity and develop new skills.

Many children developed early numeracy skills in line with their stage of development. For example, they began to recognise terms such as 'heavy' and 'light' when filling containers with sand and water. When provided with specific challenges, children enjoyed developing their problem-solving skills by experimenting and overcoming difficulties. For instance, they persevered and used different approaches when building a structure to a set height from wooden blocks. Many began to recognise and name simple shapes and a majority developed their understanding of number well. For example, they repeated numbers when joining in with songs, and those that were further along in their stage of development began to count objects with some independence.

## Well-being

At the beginning of the autumn term, a few leaders noted that there was an increase in children presenting with less well-developed personal and social skills as a result of fewer opportunities to play alongside other children during periods of lockdown. For example, some children demonstrated a greater reluctance to share resources, or to play with others. Once inspections resumed, we found that most children had settled well and felt secure. Many were happy in the company of their friends and practitioners and engaged with the resources available to them with enthusiasm. This led to children in most settings developing their personal and social skills well. Standards of well-being were especially strong where the provision was engaging, and practitioners played alongside children, modelling communication skills such as vocabulary and language patterns. In these cases, children were enthused and felt valued.

In many settings, children made choices about their learning, such as moving freely between indoor and outdoor areas to play and deciding which resources to play with when given the opportunity. They enjoyed playing for extended periods of time, which provided opportunities to develop a wide range of skills such as co-operating with others. Similarly, in many settings, children enjoyed social occasions such as snack times, and chatting naturally with friends or adults. In the strongest settings, children developed self-care skills very well by choosing when or what to eat or by helping to serve themselves or their friends. They began to develop independence well, for example by getting their own tissue when they need to blow their nose or putting on their own coat to go outside. Children increasingly influenced what or how they learn as practitioners worked towards implementing the principles of the Curriculum for Wales. For example, they suggested that a climbing wall was added to a steep slope so that they could access the slide with greater ease.

## Teaching and learning experiences

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, most practitioners continued to provide suitable learning experiences for children during the autumn term. Nearly all placed a strong emphasis on providing opportunities for children to play and learn outdoors, often making use of new resources. A few settings increased their use of natural and real-life resources, such as twigs and stones in the outdoor areas, or everyday household items like saucepans in the home area. Where the learning was most effective, practitioners provided children with a wide range of resources that stimulate them, and that children could access easily.

During the autumn term, a minority of settings started to embrace new ways of working in preparation for the Curriculum for Wales, for example by experimenting with a more child-led approach. From the spring term onwards, following the publication of the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, which aims to 'create in children positive dispositions towards learning' (p.3) more settings began to adapt their approaches to teaching and learning. The document set out the importance of provision that includes enabling adults, engaging experiences and effective environments to support children to realise the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales. The document also outlines five developmental pathways that it recognises as 'fundamental to the learning and development of all young children' – belonging, communication, exploration, physical development and well-being. Overall, the document has had a positive impact in supporting practitioners to engage in curriculum reform.

In working towards the principles of the Curriculum for Wales, many practitioners provided more opportunities for uninterrupted play, allowing children to lose themselves in their imagination, persevere with tasks, and choose for themselves when they are ready to move on to different activities. In the strongest cases, practitioners planned activities that followed the children's interests, and intervened skilfully during sessions to progress the children's learning. For example, they played alongside the children, modelling correct language patterns as they chatted and asked questions that in turn introduced children to new vocabulary and encouraged them to think.

Many practitioners provided plentiful opportunities for children to experiment and to solve problems, for example by challenging children to channel water in the outdoor area. In the strongest examples, practitioners continued to find ways to introduce children to new experiences, for example by planning activities that invite children to celebrate Welsh heritage and cultural diversity rather than focusing solely on the children's current interests. However, in a very few cases, settings stripped back adult-intervention too far. As a result, practitioners did not identify learning opportunities as children were playing and did not encourage children to develop their skills to the next step. By concentrating solely on children's interests, a very few practitioners missed opportunities to introduce a broad-enough range of learning experiences for children.

Many settings developed their use of observations of children in sessions as opposed to more formal assessments of children's learning, although this practice was generally at an early stage of development. In a few cases, these observations did not inform future planning sufficiently to ensure that activities were sufficiently challenging for children.

## Care, support and guidance

As in previous years, settings continued to provide strong levels of care, support and guidance for children, with practitioners developing warm working relationships with children, treating them with respect and looking after their needs. In nearly all cases, children felt secure, valued and ready to learn.

Practitioners promoted positive behaviours and assisted children to develop social skills like sharing and considering one another's feelings. They encouraged children to begin to understand their Welsh culture and heritage. Practitioners worked to ensure that children started to recognise the diverse ways people live their lives. For example, they provided children with opportunities to find out about and explore a range of religious and cultural celebrations. Many promoted healthy lifestyles well, such as by encouraging children to choose for themselves from a range of fruit and vegetables at snack times.

However, in a few settings, we identified safeguarding concerns during inspections, usually linked to procedures for keeping children safe. For example, staff were not confident about what they should do if they were concerned about a child's well-being, and a very few settings were not complying fully with safe recruitment practices.

Following lockdowns, leaders told us that they have seen an increase in the number of children experiencing speech, language, emotional and behavioural issues. Evidence from inspection has shown how leaders have worked well with external agencies where necessary to provide support for children with ALN. As a result, most children, including those with ALN, make good progress. Leaders in Welsh-medium settings have expressed concerns about the availability of specialist support through the medium of Welsh.

Most leaders and practitioners have utilised the opportunities available to access training on the new ALN Act. They have welcomed the new statutory role of the Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer (EYALNLO) in local authorities, and appreciate the support from them. Leaders have started to develop their approaches to ALN, for example by developing one-page profiles for children. These enable them to identify children's preferences and interests on entry to the setting as well as to identify any emerging needs.

# Leadership

Leaders dealt well with unprecedented levels of disruption during the pandemic, particularly through the winter months when rates of COVID-19 infection were at their highest. Despite the staffing challenges this posed, most leaders managed to run their settings effectively, adhere to evolving safety guidance and maintain staff morale. Leaders found managing staff absence due to self-isolation a particular challenge, especially as cover staff were in very short supply. In a minority of settings, staff gained alternative employment during the pandemic and the recruitment of suitably qualified and skilled staff was an ongoing significant challenge. Such concerns were even more acute in Welsh-medium settings.

When inspections resumed, we found that leaders were working effectively to ensure that their settings took into account the changing needs of their children. Many had effective self-evaluation and improvement procedures that resulted in adaptations to the setting. For example, they made changes to the provision based on feedback from parents. However, in a few settings, leaders had not fully recommenced quality assurance procedures, such as staff observations and supervisions. This meant that they were not always successful in identifying suitable targets for improvement for practitioners or the settings as a whole. Nearly all leaders created and maintained positive links with external partners and parents in particular. For example, many settings provided parents with useful information about the setting, its work and their child's progress. In response to the challenges of the pandemic, many settings adapted to make greater use of digital communication.

It has been a priority for leaders to focus on developing practitioners' understanding of the Curriculum for Wales and the Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings. In many cases they ensured that practitioners accessed professional learning to support this understanding. In the strongest cases, leaders ensured that professional learning linked to a clear vision for provision in the setting, based on a sound understanding of child development. Leaders in nearly all settings ensured that practitioners kept up to date with mandatory training that helps keep children safe, for example safeguarding and food hygiene training.

This resource provides self-reflection prompts to help leaders in non-maintained settings evaluate the quality of their provision.

# Sector report: Primary 2021-2022

## Schools

**1,225**

**No. of primary schools:**
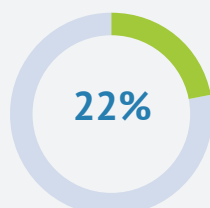2020 = 1,234
2021 = 1,228
2022 = 1,225

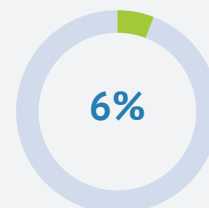The number of primary schools in Wales has remained largely consistent over the last three years.

## Pupils

**267,185**

**No. pupils in primary schools:**
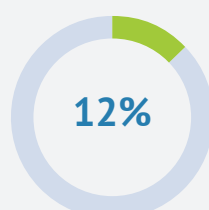2020 = 272,006
2021 = 273,063
2022 = 267,185

**22%**

**Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals:**
2020 =19%
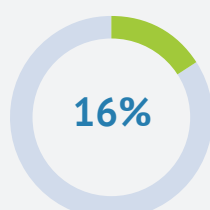2021 = 21%
2022 = 22%

**6%**

**Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language (A-C):**
2020 = 6%
2021 = 6%
2022 = 6%

**12%**

**Percentage of pupils able to speak Welsh:**
2020 = 13%
2021 = 13%
2022 = 12%

**16%**

**Percentage of pupils with additional learning needs:**
2020 = 22%
2021 = 21%
2022 = 16%

## Follow-up

**No. in follow-up September 2021**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 7  | 6  | 23 |

**No. removed 2021-2022:**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 7  | 6  | 22 |

**No. went into follow-up 2021-2022:**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 3  | 1  | 9  |

**Total in follow-up August 2022**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 3  | 1  | 10 |

SM – Special measures
SI – Significant improvement
ER – Estyn review

## Core inspections

No. of inspections: **84**
Welsh-medium: **23**
Bilingual: **5**
English-medium: **56**
Faith: **15**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, core inspections only took place between the end of February and July 2022

## Engagement visits

No. of visits/calls: **182**
Welsh-medium: **51**
Bilingual: **5**
English-medium: **126**
Faith: **18**

## Case studies

No. of case studies: **28**

Schools with case studies: **23**

# Sector report: Primary 2021-2022

## Learning

Inspectors found that many pupils started school with skills in literacy, mathematics and physical development below those expected for their stage of development. The impact of the pandemic led to a majority of pupils entering nursery and reception classes with low levels of social and independent skills. This was particularly the case in areas of high socio-economic deprivation. Most pupils, including pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), made suitable progress in their skills, knowledge and understanding from their various starting points. However, vulnerable pupils often made less progress than their peers.

Most schools recognised a need to focus on developing the communication skills of younger pupils following periods of lockdown. In these schools, many pupils listened attentively and developed their communication skills well. Through consistent and engaging learning activities, they improved their spoken vocabulary quickly and talked with increasing confidence with each other and adults. Many pupils who learn through the medium of Welsh made strong progress in their Welsh oracy skills because of an increased focus by practitioners on developing pupils' language skills. However, a majority of pupils in English-medium schools lacked confidence to speak the language as their vocabulary and sentence patterns were underdeveloped. This was partly due to fewer opportunities to use Welsh during the pandemic, but also reflects our findings from previous years. Similarly, the pandemic impacted negatively on the language skills of pupils in Welsh-medium schools where Welsh was not spoken in their homes.

In most schools, pupils developed their reading skills through a variety of approaches, and many made sound progress. In the most successful schools, teachers encouraged a love of literature and developed a culture of reading through a rich literacy curriculum. In a few schools where there was an over-focus on reading techniques, pupils did not develop an enthusiasm for reading and this hindered their progress.

In many schools the impact of the pandemic led to poorer progress in the development of pupils' writing skills. In particular, there was a deterioration in the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation. On pupils' return to school, teachers recognised a need to provide enhanced opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills. For example, younger pupils practised their mark making skills in the outdoor area and older pupils returned to producing extended pieces of writing. However, a few pupils continued to find producing longer pieces of writing a challenge and required increased support. In a minority of schools, pupils of all abilities often made basic mistakes with grammar,

St Mary's RC Primary School in Chepstow used professional learning well to develop the Welsh language skills of staff and raise standards for pupils.

spelling and punctuation. Too often, they repeated these errors over time and did not regularly edit or refine their work to make improvements.

Many pupils made sound progress in their mathematical development. In the most successful schools, the youngest pupils used apparatus, such as counters, blocks and number rods, well to develop their understanding of mathematical concepts and had a good understanding of mathematical vocabulary. Older pupils developed resilience in tackling mathematical problems and were willing to use a range of different approaches and trial and error methods to find a solution. In schools where the development of pupils' mathematical skills was less effective, a minority of pupils used their mathematical problem solving with variable success as their understanding of a few concepts was less developed. As in previous years, despite slight improvements, a majority of pupils were not able to apply their numeracy skills well in other curriculum areas.

Most pupils acquired beneficial skills in information and communication technology (ICT) during the pandemic. Younger pupils developed skills quickly and applied them well to support their learning. Older pupils used their knowledge of different apps and programs to present information effectively in a variety of contexts. In general, pupils used their digital skills well to support and extend their learning in other areas of the curriculum. Although pupils developed many aspects of digital competency such as communication effectively over time, in a few schools there were gaps in pupils' learning, such as the use of databases and spreadsheets.

Teachers placed a strong emphasis on the development of pupils' creative and physical skills as they returned to school in September 2021. Many pupils developed their creative skills well through activities designed to support their well-being. Increased use of outdoor areas by most schools supported pupils to develop their physical skills. For example, younger pupils engaged more in activities to develop their balance skills and were more willing to take managed risks in their play.

## Well-being and attitudes to learning

The well-being of pupils and staff continued to be a priority for schools during the autumn term. Most pupils enjoyed being back in school, socialising with their peers and engaging in face-to-face learning.

Pupils showed a great deal of resilience and adapted well to changes to school timetables and routines. In a few schools there was an increase in referrals to outside agencies due to concerns around pupils who had difficulty in regulating their behaviour or were not attending school regularly. This was particularly true in areas of socio-economic deprivation where families had been most affected by the pandemic. In most schools, overall attendance rates had not returned to pre-pandemic levels by the end of the academic year.

Most pupils coped well on their return to school in September. They felt safe and cared for. In a few instances, pupils started to think more about their emotional health and took part in activities to support this, such as listening to calming music, taking about their experiences and taking part in more physical activities that promote relaxation. This generally continued in schools that introduced these activities as they realised the long-term benefits to pupils.

Increasingly, pupils understand and talk about children's rights. For example, pupils in many schools considered how the war in Ukraine was affecting the rights of refugees. As in previous years, we found that nearly all pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and exercise, but not all pupils use this information to make healthy choices. Most continued to know about keeping safe online and how to guard against potential dangers.

## Cameo: pupils influence school life

At Clwyd Community Primary School, Swansea, pupils took full advantage of opportunities to influence what and how they learn, for example through their work in a considerable number of pupil voice groups. These groups included a Safety Squad, and a Rights Respecting group that helps pupils to recognise and promote the children's rights in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Over time, nearly all pupils developed a secure understanding of their rights, for example by creating class charters that set out agreed expectations for pupils.

In most schools, as they prepared for the Curriculum for Wales, pupils developed an awareness of the four purposes of the curriculum. In a minority of schools, pupils did not have a good enough understanding of how to strengthen these characteristics in themselves through their actions, such as how to become more ambitious or behave more ethically. This resource provides self-reflection prompts to support primary schools to plan for the development of the four purposes.

In most schools, nearly all pupils continued to behave well in lessons. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning were strongest in schools where pupils found learning interesting and stimulating, and the pace of learning was well judged. In these schools, pupils engaged well with tasks, persevered with challenges, found alternative solutions to problems and made strong progress. In most schools, pupils collaborated well with their peers.

## Teaching and learning experiences

Inspectors found that a majority of schools continued to focus on improving pedagogy, often using the pedagogical principles from Successful Futures as a vehicle to discuss effective approaches to teaching and learning. In these cases, teachers frequently used research or Estyn publications, such as 'Improving Teaching', to help develop their practice. COVID-19 restrictions limited opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively to improve their professional practice as observing lessons, triad working, mutual observations became very difficult to arrange.

Where schools were most effective in developing pedagogy, they reviewed and strengthened their approaches to teaching and assessment to support learning before designing the content and structure of their local curriculum. This ensured that they had a strong foundation upon which to build a new curriculum and evaluate its impact on pupils' learning and well-being. However, in a few schools, designing the curriculum took priority over improving the quality of teaching and opportunities to discuss and improve the quality of pedagogy were missed.

Many schools quickly returned to foundation learning. However, in a few cases, this provision continued to be too formal and over directed by practitioners. This had a detrimental effect on pupils' wider skills, such as independence, problem solving and resilience. Almost all schools trialled approaches to teaching with older pupils that entailed 'authentic' learning experiences aimed at encouraging pupils to apply and deepen their skills across the curriculum. In the best cases, this included providing pupils with beneficial opportunities to make choices about how they will apply their skills, for example by choosing different ways to record their findings or planning ways to solve a problem. Where teaching was less effective, however, pupils merely chose from a menu of tasks and these were often at too low a level compared to the ability of pupils. In a few schools, teachers planned learning experiences across the curriculum that built well on the direct teaching of language, literature and mathematics. Many schools placed a beneficial emphasis on outdoor learning across all ages.

In the few schools where teaching was strongest, teachers used assessment for learning techniques well to gauge pupils' learning and adapt activities. They used questioning effectively to probe pupils' understanding and prompt their thinking. In these schools, teachers ensured that pupils understood why they were learning a particular topic or skill and how to be successful with their learning. As in previous years, we found that, where teaching was most effective, there are strong working relationships between practitioners and pupils, lessons are fun and engaging, and teachers match learning closely to pupils' ability.

A minority of schools developed a sensible approach to assessment, which incorporated observations, discussions with pupils and feedback that informed next steps in teaching. However, a majority of schools were unsure about how to develop their assessment processes to align with the Curriculum for Wales.

Schools continued to be at varying points in their planning for the Curriculum for Wales. In many schools, where curriculum development progressed well, leaders and staff considered a range of approaches carefully. They explored in depth how each approach might support the progression of pupils' knowledge and understanding, as well as their skills development. Often, they used research about curriculum design and evidence from their own enquiries to inform their decision-making. However, by July 2022, a few schools were still at an early stage in their preparations for the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales.

In the strongest schools, staff invested time in deepening their understanding of the learning pupils must develop over time and considered this in the context of their school and its community. This enabled them to plan themes and topics that are relevant to the needs and interests of pupils. Most schools recognised the importance of pupils' voice in the development of their local curriculum. Gradually, schools reflected on when it is most appropriate for pupils to inform and influence their school curriculum during the planning, trialing and review phases. In the strongest schools, leaders involved all staff, learners, governors, parents and carers thoughtfully in developing their knowledge of the curriculum and in contributing to the design process. This resource provides self-reflection prompts to help school councils and pupil groups to consider how they can work with staff to improve their contribution to what and how they learn.

Overall, primary and secondary schools did not plan well enough in partnership with each other to ensure consistent progression in knowledge and skills across the curriculum. This was especially the case for ICT and Welsh in English-medium schools.

# Care, support and guidance

Primary school staff identified that gaps in pupils' health and well-being increased, and inequalities widened during school closures. In most schools, pupils' well-being was their priority and they continued to provide strong support for this area. In many cases, particularly in areas of social deprivation, this extended to supporting families by signposting them to other agencies or charities. As a result of the pandemic, nearly all staff developed a better understanding of the needs and circumstances of the families in their school communities. This resulted in improved collaboration and working relationships between the school and home setting.

## Cameo: staff and pupil well-being questionnaires

At Ysgol y Llys, Denbighshire, leaders gave pupils and staff the opportunity to share their feelings and concerns through well-being questionnaires. Leaders analysed the results and looked for trends and common themes. Consequently, the school was able to target the specific well-being needs of the pupils and staff and implement the necessary interventions. Now the school has a permanent well-being officer who leads on intervention support and provides the required support for pupils and staff across the school.

Many schools implemented programmes to support pupils' experiencing emotional stress, and a few introduced activities such as daily exercise in the outdoor environment. In general, providing well-being interventions in schools had a positive impact on reducing pupils' anxiety.

In many schools, pupil voice groups had increasing opportunities to influence school life. Where this was most effective, there were significant examples of pupils leading change and leaders ensured that pupils from all backgrounds and abilities were represented. In a few schools, pupils' opportunities to influence what and how they learn continued to be limited.

Although over time most schools have provided extra-curricular activities that enhance pupils' academic and social skills, many were affected by the restrictions of the pandemic. We saw these begin to re-establish slowly, and by the end of the summer term only a few schools returned to offering a wide range of beneficial and engaging provision.

Most schools prepared well for ALN reform. Nearly all schools received training from their local authority and regional consortium to plan and prepare for the changes. Many additional learning needs co-ordinators worked with colleagues in their school clusters to share information and best practice. Most schools identified pupils needing additional learning provision (ALP) and mapped out the provision needs of other pupils without ALN. Staff in many schools developed an understanding of person-centred practice and talked about how this approach improves annual review meetings for pupils with ALN. Many Welsh-medium schools continued to express concerns about the availability of Welsh language resources to support ALN work.

In most schools, staff made sure that pupils understood and acted with sensitivity to issues of equality and diversity. Schools that had a strong culture of inclusion continued to challenge stereotypical behaviours and explored a range of related issues including, in a very few cases, those facing people who identify as LGBTQ+. In a few schools, pupils did not have enough opportunities to consider issues of equality and diversity.

Most schools monitored pupils' attendance well and by the end of the summer term had refreshed their systems to challenge low attendance. Many formed strong links with outside agencies to support families who continued to find it difficult to ensure that their child attends school regularly.

In a few schools, issues relating to safeguarding pupils, including staff knowledge of child protection referral processes and site safety, were of concern.

## Leadership

In primary schools across Wales, leaders showed continued resilience and creativity as they adapted provision to meet the challenges of the pandemic. In many cases, leaders responded rapidly to changing circumstances to keep the school community safe whilst trying to maintain the quality of teaching and learning. Often these proved to be conflicting priorities. For example, leaders frequently found themselves working with staff to make difficult decisions around the layout of classes and availability of resources to prevent the spread of COVID-19, knowing that these measures risked limiting opportunities for pupils to develop key learning skills, such as the ability to collaborate with others. Facing these kinds of challenges created a stronger team ethos in many schools as staff pulled together to deliver home learning, deal with issues of staff and pupil absence, and keep pupils, staff and the community safe. As COVID-19 restrictions eased, governors in many schools returned to onsite engagement with leaders, staff and pupils.

Research carried out following the initial periods of lockdown indicates that half of all education professionals in the UK felt that their mental health and well-being had declined either considerably or a little. Inspectors noted that leaders in many schools in Wales had responded to this by placing an increased focus on considering and supporting staff well-being.

In response to the pandemic and the challenges of curriculum and additional learning needs reform, leaders in many schools sought to strengthen partnerships with other schools, parents, and outside agencies. In the strongest examples, leaders developed very strong partnerships with parents to build considerable trust and a shared belief that staff were doing the right thing for pupils and acting in their best interests. Similarly, leaders focused on developing stronger ties with other schools to support the design of the Curriculum for Wales and to address the requirements of ALN reform. Increasingly, leaders focused professional learning on preparations for these initiatives.

Engagement with research to support the development of pedagogy and the curriculum is now a feature of many primary schools in Wales. Staff in over half of schools conducted in-house inquiries, often based around exploring the 12 pedagogical principles or how to improve pupils' depth of understanding within the areas of learning and expertise in the Curriculum for Wales. Others worked with higher education institutions, for example as part of the National Professional Enquiry Project (NPEP). In the Chief Inspector's Annual Report for 2018-2019, we noted concerns over practitioners not focusing sufficiently on the impact that research-driven changes in pedagogy have on outcomes for pupils. It remains important that leaders are clear about the purpose of engaging in and with research and that they have clear processes for measuring the impact of changes to pedagogy and whether they are worth pursuing. By July 2022, a few schools had only just begun to think about their vision for teaching and the curriculum in preparation for the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales from September 2022.

In all schools the pandemic impacted to varying extents on the quality of provision and the progress of pupils. In a few schools, leaders struggled to re-establish self-evaluation processes. This meant that they did not always identify the need to focus on key features of provision, such as elements of teaching and learning and, in particular, the effectiveness of foundation learning. Where self-evaluation was at its strongest, leaders developed a strong culture of trust amongst the leadership team and other staff that created a climate of openness and honesty. In these schools, most members of staff had a role in self-evaluation and school improvement activities, and self-evaluation was an integral part of the school culture. This is a feature of effective schools and, where this culture exits, staff work collegiately to reflect upon and improve their professional practice. This has a highly positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

# Sector report: Secondary 2021-2022

## Schools

**182**

**No. of schools:**
2021 = 182
2022 = 182

The number of secondary schools has reduced over recent years, largely due to the increase in the number of all age school

## Pupils

**175,957**

**All pupils**

**154,953**

**No. of pupils in compulsory education**

**21,004**

**No. of pupils in sixth forms**
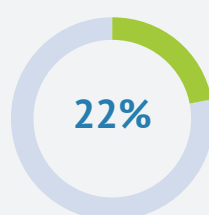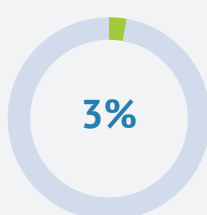
**22%**

**Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals**

**3%**

**Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language (A-C)**

**17%**

**Percentage of pupils able to speak Welsh**

**18%**
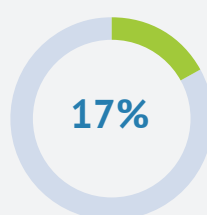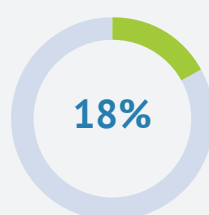
**Percentage of pupils with additional learning needs**

## Follow-up

**No. in follow-up September 2021**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 12 | 8  | 8  |

**No. removed 2021-2022:**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 5  | 5  | 7  |

**One downgraded from SI to SM**

**No. went into follow-up 2021-2022:**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 0  | 1  | 2  |

**Total in follow-up August 2022**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 8  | 3  | 3  |

SM – Special measures
SI – Significant improvement
ER – Estyn review

## Core inspections

No. of inspections: **11**
No. not in follow-up: **8**
Welsh-medium: **3**
Bilingual: **1**
English-medium: **7**
Faith: **2**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, core inspections only took place between the end of February and the end of May 2022

## Engagement visits

No. of visits: **39**
Welsh-medium: **0**
Bilingual: **5**
English-medium: **34**
Faith: **4**

## Case studies

No. of case studies: **10**

Schools with case studies:
Whitmore High School
Stanwell School
Cathays High School
Ysgol Penglais
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Myrddin

# Sector report: Secondary 2021-2022

## Learning

Since their return to the classroom, most pupils responded well to taking part in activities previously unavailable to them because of COVID-19 restrictions. These included working in pairs, whole class 'live' discussions, team sports and practical activities such as science experiments, cooking and using musical instruments. A majority of pupils made steady progress in their subject knowledge and understanding, and skills. A minority found returning to the classroom challenging and did not make enough progress.

In general, pupils in the sixth form did not experience as much loss in their learning as younger pupils as they were more likely to engage with the remote learning activities given to them. Many demonstrated a deep awareness of subject concepts and were articulate pupils who are able to express themselves with sophistication. In many cases, pupils with additional learning needs made good progress against their targets as a result of well-considered and co-ordinated provision.

During periods of lockdown, most pupils did not learn as well as they would have, had they been in school. Pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds made substantially less progress than other pupils. This finding is consistent with research in England that found that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds experienced greater learning losses than more affluent peers as a result of the pandemic.

Due to the pandemic, Year 7 pupils came into secondary education with a significantly reduced transition experience. As a result of substantial efforts from school staff in reorganising these experiences online, many pupils adapted well and continued to make suitable progress in their skills. In a minority of cases, curricular transition had not ensured that pupils built on the skills developed in Key Stage 2 well enough. As a result, pupils repeated work they did in their primary schools. This was especially the case in Welsh in English-medium schools and ICT.

Pupils in Year 11, and those in the sixth-form, experienced significant uncertainty in preparing for their examinations. In many cases, useful support from teachers meant that these pupils developed their ability to prepare for and sit examinations suitably. In some schools, pupils in these year groups completed tests very frequently, which caused anxiety and did not always lead to progress in subject knowledge or skills.

During periods of lockdown where pupils learnt remotely, they did not get enough opportunities to develop their oracy skills. Since their return to classroom learning, a majority enjoyed the opportunities to engage in whole class or group discussions. During

these discussions, a majority of pupils made suitable progress and a few developed their ability to express themselves eloquently. In a minority of cases, pupils did not make enough progress in their ability to communicate through speaking and listening. These pupils had lost motivation and confidence when responding to teachers' questions or engaging in discussions with others. The need to wear face masks contributed to this decline as they muffle sound and make facial expressions difficult to read. This made developing communication skills in Welsh or modern foreign languages particularly difficult. A minority of schools planned carefully to develop pupils' speaking skills.

A majority of pupils maintained, although did not develop, their reading skills suitably during lockdown periods. However, in a minority of cases, pupils' ability to read aloud was underdeveloped. In these cases, pupils read with poor fluency, hesitating when encountering unfamiliar words. They tended to read without expression. In general, pupils did not read aloud frequently enough across the curriculum and did not receive sufficient support to develop this skill. In the majority of schools, pupils developed their reading skills well. Most pupils skimmed and scanned texts to gain relevant information well. Many were able to make basic inferences from texts. A majority of pupils were able to read for meaning appropriately and use information to make suitable predictions or inferences. A minority of pupils did not develop these reading skills well enough.

Many pupils improved their keyboard skills during periods of lockdown. However, these periods had a notably detrimental impact on pupils' handwriting and their ability to present coherent pieces of written work. In a majority of schools, pupils wrote at length in a reasonable range of subjects. However, too frequently, pupils completed undemanding writing tasks such as copying or gap-filling. A majority of pupils wrote with suitable accuracy. They spelt most commonly used words correctly and applied grammatical rules appropriately. However, a minority of pupils made too many basic spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.

In a majority of schools, pupils developed their numeracy skills across the curriculum appropriately. Most were able to make basic measurements competently and a majority were able to convert between different units. However, as a result of lockdowns, opportunities to make more sophisticated measurements such as in science experiments had been limited. A majority of pupils understood how to present data in graphical form well. As they progressed through the school, they developed the ability to select the appropriate type of chart or graph to present their data. By the end of Key Stage 4, a majority were able to construct and plot scatter graphs suitably. However, in a minority of cases, pupils did not interpret these graphs. Most pupils developed their sense of proportion well and could estimate quantities appropriately. In general, they could apply formulae suitably and a majority developed the ability to manipulate these as they progressed through Key Stage 4. Too frequently, pupils did not consider the reasoning behind the methods they used to solve mathematical problems, mainly as they did not get the opportunities to do so.

During periods of lockdown, it was very difficult for pupils to make enough progress in subjects that need 'hands-on' learning such as music, design and technology, sports, art and the practical aspects of science. Many pupils did not engage in enough physical activity during periods of lockdown. As a result of careful planning in many schools, pupils reacquainted themselves with these aspects of their learning and made steady gains in these subject-specific skills. When given the opportunity, most pupils showed strong creative skills. During the summer term, a minority of schools returned to the pre-pandemic range of extra-curricular activities.

The pandemic had a detrimental impact on pupils' Welsh language skills in English-medium, bilingual and Welsh schools. In a majority of Welsh-medium and bilingual schools, pupils maintained their command of the language suitably. This was as a result of a great deal of hard work and careful planning from staff during the pandemic. Most pupils had a wide vocabulary and could discuss a range of topics with suitable fluency. Many could produce well-written pieces of work that express their ideas clearly. However, in nearly all of these schools, pupils' inclination to use the language with their peers declined notably during periods of lockdown. A majority of these schools made rebuilding pupils' ability to speak Welsh a priority. This was beginning to have a positive

impact. However, in a minority of schools, this was not the case and some pupils were reluctant to use the language in all circumstances, including with their teachers.

In a few cases in English-medium schools, pupils made very good progress in their ability to communicate in Welsh. In these lessons, pupils engaged enthusiastically with the learning tasks they were given and developed their ability to speak, understand and read Welsh well. In too many cases, pupils made only modest progress and continued to make very basic errors in pronunciation and sentence structure. They did not use their Welsh frequently enough apart from in their Welsh lessons and generally lacked the confidence to speak Welsh. In nearly all cases, pupils who received their education in Welsh in primary school but then attended an English-medium school did not make enough progress in the language.

## Well-being and attitudes to learning

During periods of lockdown, many pupils faced periods of loneliness, boredom and anxiety. Some pupils remained resilient and used the opportunities offered to them by schools to learn online or through the packs of work given to them. However, the lack of structure normally provided by the need to regularly attend school resulted in disrupted sleep patterns, difficulties conforming with routines and poor behaviour for certain pupils. A majority of pupils did not participate well enough with the learning opportunities offered to them during these times. Research by the School Health Research Network found evidence of decline in the mental health and well-being of pupils in schools in Wales between 2019 and 2021, based on survey questions designed to measure mental well-being, depressive symptoms, and loneliness. King's College London found that the mental health of certain groups of young people was affected more than others, particularly those with special educational needs, and girls.

Many pupils relished the opportunities offered to them as a result of returning to 'normal' schooling and settled back into school routines well. A few remained extremely anxious about the return to school or had got into the habit of not attending. Overall, attendance was still well below where it was before the pandemic. Absence rates for pupils eligible for free school meals increased substantially, which caused particular concern because the pre-pandemic absence rates of this group of pupils were already high. More detailed findings regarding the impact of the pandemic on attendance rates in Wales can be found in this paper by the former HMCI, Meilyr Rowlands.

Research from the Education Policy Institute shows a clear link between regular attendance and progress. They found that secondary aged pupils with a low level of absence experienced a learning loss of around a month in reading by the end of the autumn term. This compares to around 2.7 and 5.1 months for pupils with a medium and high level of absence respectively. This supports their theory that the more time pupils

spent in schools when schools re-opened for all pupils, the smaller the degree of learning loss. Pupils in year groups where they normally have external examinations experienced significant uncertainty about how they would be assessed. This led to increased levels of anxiety for many of these pupils.

In a few schools, behaviour was exemplary, and pupils consistently showed high levels of care and respect to one another. However, a minority of pupils found returning to the classroom challenging and found it difficult to regulate their behaviour. In the majority of schools, incidences of low level disruption were higher than before the pandemic.

Most pupils said that they had not experienced bullying personally. However, a very few pupils reported that they were being bullied. In many cases, pupils reported that staff dealt well with any cases of bullying, although in a few cases this problem was not dealt with satisfactorily. Despite the best efforts of many staff, there were instances of bullying or harassment as a result of pupils' sexuality, race or gender in all schools. A degree of sexual harassment is experienced by some pupils in all schools. A majority felt that staff deal appropriately with this issue, but others felt that staff turn a blind eye to it and do not address this matter well enough.

Many pupils enjoyed their lessons and showed positive attitudes to their learning. These pupils demonstrated resilience and took increasing responsibility for their own learning. However, a minority of pupils lacked confidence and needed encouragement to persevere and look for solutions when they faced difficulties. In a few schools, many pupils were diligent and had high aspirations for their future. In these schools, they took part in stimulating extracurricular activities that helped them expand their horizons. See the Whitmore High School case study for ideas on how to develop an effective culture for learning. In a few cases, pupils showed a lack of interest in their work and engaged in disruptive behaviour, which impacted on their learning and that of others.

In many schools, pupils benefited from a wide range of opportunities to influence school life and develop their leadership skills. The Ysgol Bro Myrddin and Stanwell School case studies provide helpful examples. As well as the school council, many schools had pupil groups that promote awareness of issues that are of concern to them such as the environment, promotion of the Welsh language or LGBTQ+ issues. Most pupils in the sixth form had beneficial opportunities to develop their leadership and interpersonal skills through activities such as leading various pupil groups, leading houses, and mentoring and supporting vulnerable pupils.

Most pupils developed their understanding of how to make healthy eating and drinking choices suitably, although most schools reported increased issues with vaping on the school site. In a minority of cases, staff offered pupils high levels of encouragement to take part in extracurricular activities and the school offered many opportunities that catered for a wide range of interests.

## Teaching and learning experiences

During periods of lockdown, teachers had to make significant adaptations to the way in which they taught. One positive outcome of this was that most teachers developed their ability to use a wide range of digital applications to enhance their teaching. Since pupils returned to the classroom, teachers faced stringent safety and hygiene measures that inhibited their teaching. These included:

- prohibitions on moving around the classroom
- the need for pupils and staff to wear facemasks
- prohibitions on certain activities such as group or practical work
- the need to 'quarantine' pupils' work before marking

These measures posed a significant barrier to effective classroom teaching.

Since the lifting of these measures, many teachers returned to their previous methodologies such as organising group work, moving around the classroom to check pupils' understanding and offering individual support. However, a few remained anxious and tended to remain at the front of the class and deliver their lessons from there. In these cases, there was a lack of beneficial interaction between teachers and pupils.

In a very few schools, teaching was exceptionally effective in bringing about improvements in pupils' learning. In these cases, nearly all teachers knew their pupils well and used information from assessment skilfully to adapt their teaching. Most teachers planned their lessons meticulously and provided pupils with stimulating and high-quality learning resources. They were ambitious for their pupils and offered them very high levels of challenge. They explained complex ideas by breaking them down into simpler steps and modelled sophisticated problem-solving approaches so that pupils could emulate and apply them. They supported pupils' learning through targeted individual assistance and withdrew the level of support skilfully to develop their independence. See Whitmore High School's case study for information on how they developed a whole-school approach to securing high standards in teaching and learning.

In most schools, teachers fostered positive working relationships with pupils and managed their classrooms effectively. In general, they were good language models and had strong subject knowledge and understanding. A majority of teachers had appropriate expectations of what pupils could achieve and planned their lessons effectively, organising knowledge and skills into sequential steps that build logically on each other. They shared their learning aims clearly with pupils and fostered a learning environment where pupils were unafraid of making mistakes. They adapted their teaching to match pupils' understanding skilfully.

There were common shortcomings in teaching in a minority of lessons. Most frequently they included:

- low expectations of what pupils could achieve
- poor planning, where pupils were given series of unchallenging tasks that kept them busy but did not bring about improvement
- a lack of communication around what pupils were expected to learn
- a lack of adaptation to meet pupils' level of ability or understanding
- poor control of pupils' behaviour
- in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools, there was often insufficient encouragement for pupils to use Welsh, and teachers did not always use the language in their teaching or in their interactions with pupils

A majority of teachers used a wide range of assessment methods appropriately. In the most effective cases, they did not mark all pieces of work thoroughly. Instead, they constantly monitored pupils' understanding during lessons and offered them verbal feedback and advice on how to improve their work there and then. These teachers targeted extended pieces of work that allowed pupils to draw together several aspects of their recent learning. These pieces of work were marked carefully against shared criteria and teachers offered pupils useful written feedback on things they'd done well and aspects that required improvement. Teachers ensured that pupils responded to these and made improvements.

A majority of teachers used a wide range of questioning techniques to develop pupils' thinking and get them to elaborate on their answers well. They ensured that all pupils were involved in answering questions. The most effective teachers got pupils to comment on other pupils' responses, this ensured that they had to listen carefully and developed their ability to thinking critically. However, a minority of teachers either did not ask pupils questions or relied solely on closed questions to check recall.

Although many leaders were positive about the possibilities for innovation offered by the Curriculum for Wales, many schools put their plans for substantial change to their curriculum on hold in the short-term because of the pandemic. Where leadership was

strong, secondary schools returned to their planning during 2021-2022 and were making good progress to prepare for Curriculum for Wales, with a determined focus on improving teaching and high quality professional learning.

A notable feature from a number of secondary inspections was the way that schools were designing their curriculum with a strong focus on their locality, as exemplified in this case study from Cathays High School. In the best cases, schools recognised the need to foster strong curriculum links with their partner primary schools to support curriculum design.

Progress towards the Curriculum for Wales was slower or inconsistent across the curriculum in some schools. This is because they focused too much on curriculum vision and design at the expense of improving the quality of teaching and provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills. This set of self-reflection prompts is intended to support secondary schools when planning for the Curriculum for Wales.

Schools in general were concerned about how they would assess and track progress under the new curricular arrangements, and about the implications of new qualifications for the Curriculum for Wales.

In many schools, staff had been trialling new approaches to their planning. Where these were most successful:

- departments thought carefully about the subject knowledge, skills and experiences that pupils need to develop
- where appropriate, staff considered carefully where learning would benefit from natural synergies between subjects
- progression in pupils' skills and knowledge had been carefully planned beforehand (see the Ysgol Penglais case study)
- staff planned any collaborative work carefully and were given time to think about their approaches to teaching and learning
- departments had worked on developing their teaching approaches to maximise the benefits for pupils' learning

Where these approaches were less successful, departments:

- had planned thematic or cross-curricular approaches without careful consideration of why this might be beneficial
- had thought more about what they want pupils to do rather than what they want them to learn
- had produced tick sheets for pupils to identify which particular aspect of the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales they were developing
- had not considered carefully enough how they would approach their teaching

Overall, secondary schools did not plan well enough in partnership with primary schools to ensure consistent progression in knowledge and skills across the curriculum. This was especially the case for ICT and Welsh in English-medium schools.

In general, schools offered pupils appropriate learning opportunities in their personal and social education (PSE) programmes. However, in a minority of cases, planning for relationships and sexuality education (RSE) especially around areas such as sexuality, sexual health and attitudes towards relationships, was at an early stage. In a majority of schools, humanities departments were planning appropriately to expand their examination of the history of minority ethnic groups in Wales. For more details see our thematic report on the Teaching of Welsh history, including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history, identity and culture and our resource for pupils to explore this issue. A summary of the report is available here.

In general, most schools offered their pupils a reasonably broad and balanced curriculum. However, a growing number of schools were allowing pupils to make subject choices for qualifications in Year 8. This strategy allowed pupils more time to study and prepare

for examinations. However, it restricted the breadth of pupils' learning experiences. In addition, many pupils were not ready to make these choices during Year 8, having only experienced four terms in secondary schools. In a very few cases, the school's curriculum did not meet statutory requirements.

This year, we also looked at the overall curriculum opportunities across schools, colleges and work-based learning for 16 to 19-year-olds across Wales. We found that there is too much variation in the opportunities for young people depending on where they live. You can read more about our findings here.

## Skills

Many schools planned suitably to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. However, planning to develop pupils' ICT skills was at an early stage in most schools.

A majority of Welsh-medium schools paid good attention to developing pupils' command of Welsh and celebrating Welsh heritage and culture, as exemplified in Ysgol Bro Myrddin's case study. In a minority of cases, this aspect was not enough of a priority.

In bilingual and English-medium schools, there were too few opportunities for pupils to use Welsh outside of Welsh lessons. Often, bilingual schools did not offer pupils a wide enough range of courses to study through the medium of Welsh.

## Care support and guidance

School staff were acutely aware of pupils' needs upon their return to school following periods of lockdown. Nearly all schools made pupils' well-being a priority. In most cases, staff offered strong support for pupils with specific emotional, health and social needs and made good use of external agencies when necessary. Increasingly, schools expanded and adapted their own provision to support pupils' well-being because of increased demand and difficulty accessing external services. As a result of their efforts in this area, many pupils felt well cared for by their school and adjusted well to returning to 'normal' schooling.

In all schools, staff strived to develop an inclusive ethos. Most offered pupils a wide range of opportunities to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They encouraged pupils to celebrate difference and promoted equality strongly. In many cases, they also provided them with helpful advice on future pathways, as illustrated in this case study from Stanwell School.

Most schools had well-considered procedures for dealing with any incidents of bullying and harassment and many had an effective behaviour policy that was applied consistently by most staff. In response to an increase in low-level disruption and difficulties experienced by a minority of pupils in readjusting to school routines following the pandemic, many schools reviewed their behaviour policies and had a renewed focus on this. In a few cases, there was inconsistency in the way in which staff applied sanctions and rewards. This often led to confusion among pupils and a sense of unfairness. Many schools were developing their provision for preventing and tackling incidents of sexual harassment appropriately. See our report on Peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils for more information. We also have resources for schools to use to explore this issue, as well as a pupil-friendly version of the report and a summary of the report here.

Nearly all staff understood their roles and responsibility in keeping children safe and there were suitable arrangements for staff training in matters relating to safeguarding and child protection in nearly all schools. However, in a few cases, schools' systems for recording pupils' concerns were not sufficiently robust or secure. In few cases, schools did not ensure that the site was secure enough or that they complied with health and safety legislation sufficiently.

The provision for pupils with additional learning needs was a strength in many schools. In general, learning support teams knew pupils with additional learning needs well and provided well-considered support for their learning. In most cases, schools were making good progress in preparing for the requirements of the Additional learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) (ALNET) act. In general, 'One-page profiles' and 'Individual Education Plans' provided staff with detailed information on how to meet the needs of specific pupils and included clear, measurable targets. Where schools had a specialist resource base, they provided a safe and welcoming environment and ensured that pupils within them were integrated into mainstream classes appropriately.

Most schools had effective systems to track pupils' progress and well-being. Staff used information from this system well to provide well-considered interventions to support pupils' well-being and their academic progress.

Since September 2021, most schools kept a close eye on pupils' attendance and increasingly promoted the importance of consistent attendance, although found tackling persistent absence particularly challenging.

## Leadership

During periods of lockdown, school leaders faced new, rapidly evolving problems. They reacted with fortitude and resilience to keep their school community safe and to mitigate the impact of measures to control the spread of COVID-19. Leaders experienced considerable additional demands on their workload. Despite the huge challenges they experienced, many leaders kept an eye on future developments and continued to make strategic decisions where these were possible.

During periods of lockdown, many schools altered the timings and structure of the school day. Many schools retained some of these aspects, especially 'split breaktimes and lunchtimes' where different year groups have their breaks at different times. However, these arrangements involved extra demands on staff to supervise pupils and impacted negatively on lunchtime clubs. In a very few cases, lunchtimes were too short for pupils to socialise, relax or pursue other interests but some pupils, especially those who are younger, said that this arrangement was beneficial as they did not feel intimidated by older pupils.

Most senior leaders developed their communication with parents and guardians substantially during periods of lockdown. In many cases, this took the form of weekly vlogs or emails to provide updates on policies, and surveys to canvass parents' views on the school's provision. In general, parents and guardians very much appreciated this regular contact, and relationships between home and the schools have become closer.

During periods of lockdown and after the return to face-to-face teaching, leaders prioritised the well-being of both pupils and staff. The normal quality assurance processes such as lesson observations were suspended. Since returning to more usual school life and processes, senior leaders carefully considered the balance between holding staff to account and supporting their well-being. In a majority of schools, leaders returned to implementing their whole suite of activities to inform self-evaluation. However, because of the hiatus in these activities, leaders did not always have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in their schools. A common shortcoming among leaders at all levels was a lack of understanding of how to evaluate teaching in light of its impact on learning. This set of self-reflection prompts supports schools to improve this aspect of their work.

In most schools there was a strong sense of collaboration. Roles and responsibilities were distributed thoughtfully, lines of accountability were clear and there was good communication. In a few schools, however, the distribution of responsibilities was not equitable and too many heavy responsibilities were given to a few senior leaders.

In many cases, senior leaders were responding to national and local priorities such as the additional learning needs transformation programme and the development of their curriculum well. A majority of Welsh-medium and bilingual schools placed a high priority on ensuring that pupils were developing their command of the language. However, in a minority of instances, this was not the case.

In many schools, governors played an active and beneficial role in supporting the school. In the best examples, they had a comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and offered leaders robust challenge that helped guide their decisions. In a few cases, governors did not understand their role in offering leaders challenge well enough.

All schools received substantial uplifts to their budgets due to specific grants. As a result, most schools were in a positive financial position. However, due to the conditions and timescales linked with spending specific grants, leaders were not always able to use these additional funds to bring about the greatest impact.

In a majority of schools, professional learning was well planned and had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. In the most effective cases, leaders planned a range of beneficial activities that helped staff keep abreast of findings from relevant research to inform their practice and newly qualified teachers were supported effectively through a comprehensive induction programme. The case studies from Cathays High School and Ysgol Penglais explain how leaders have developed the professional learning provision in their schools. In a few cases, professional learning did not focus strongly enough on improving teaching.

# Sector report: Maintained all-age 2021-2022

## Schools

**23**

**All-age schools in Wales January 2022**

Opening September 2022: **1**
In consultation: **3**

The sector continues to grow, with discussions in local authorities across Wales regarding establishing all-age schools.

## Pupils

**22,516**

**All pupils**

**5,243**

**No. of pupils of primary age**

**13,984**

**No. of pupils of secondary age (Compulsory education)**
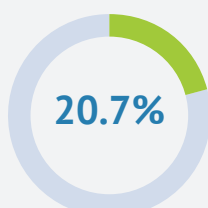
**1,550**

**No. of pupils in sixth form**

**20.7%**

**Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals**

**1%**

**Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language (A-C)**

**33%**
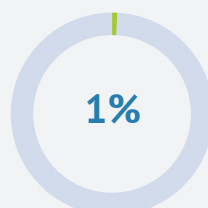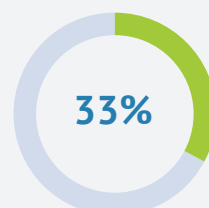
**Percentage of pupils able to speak Welsh**

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## Follow-up

**No. in follow-up September 2021**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 0  | 2  | 1  |

**No. removed 2021-2022:**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 0  | 2  | 1  |

**No. went into follow-up 2021-2022:**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 1  | 0  | 0  |

**Total in follow-up August 2022**

| SM | SI | ER |
|----|----|----|
| 2  | 0  | 0  |

SM – Special measures
SI – Significant improvement
ER – Estyn review

## Core inspections

No. of inspections: **3**
No. not in follow-up: **2**
Welsh-medium: **1**
Bilingual: **0**
English-medium: **2**
Faith: **1**

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, core inspections only took place between the end of February and the end of May 2022.

Ystalyfera Bro Dur

Tonyrefail Community School

Christ the Word School

## Engagement visits

No. of visits: **3**
Welsh-medium: **1**
Bilingual: **0**
English-medium: **2**
Faith: **1**

## Case studies

No. of case studies: **1**

Schools with case studies:
Ysgol Ystalyfera Bro Dur

# Sector report: Maintained all-age 2021-2022

The number of all-age schools in Wales is increasing, with more due to open in the next few years. Research into all-age schools, including the benefits of this model, is generally limited, due mainly to the relatively low numbers of all-age schools in Wales and in other countries. There are potential benefits from an all age model, including improved pedagogy and care, advantages for developing learning, and potential challenges for leadership. Overall, with the small number of inspections undertaken to date and the impact of the pandemic, it's too early to say whether this model has delivered on its potential.

**Summary findings**
This section of the Annual Report presents our full findings on this theme for the academic year 2021-2022. Click here to view a summary of these findings.

## Learning

On returning to school from September 2021, schools reported that pupils' skills had not developed as expected during the pandemic. This was a similar picture to that observed in primary and secondary schools. Schools' assessment of pupils' skills identified a decline in their language and communication skills. Pupils' oracy skills were particularly affected since pupils did not engage enough in speaking activities while at home. Schools planned interventions to try to strengthen pupils' skills.

In the schools inspected, pupils' literacy skills were variable. In the best cases, pupils were willing to contribute orally and offer extended responses when prompted. They displayed strong writing skills, writing effectively for different purposes and for different audiences. Many of these pupils produced extended pieces of writing with clear expression. In other instances, pupils lacked basic literacy skills, made frequent spelling and grammar errors and were not able to articulate their opinions fluently. These shortcomings could often be attributed to weaknesses in teaching. In general, many pupils' numeracy skills were developing suitably and their digital skills had developed well.

## Well-being

Pupils were happy to be back in school following the pandemic but they required more emotional and mental health support. In two inspections, pupil well-being was strong due to the quality of the support and guidance provided across the school. Many pupils behaved well and showed respect towards their peers and adults. They displayed a healthy attitude towards their learning and maintained concentration whilst learning. In many cases, pupils developed sound leadership skills that enabled them to make

positive contributions to the life of the school. In a few cases, pupils did not engage well with their learning. They were reluctant to participate in discussions to support their learning and only gave very brief responses to teachers' questions. They did not develop their resilience and determination sufficiently, often because teachers did not provide opportunities for them to do so.

## Teaching and learning experiences

Throughout the year, improving teaching remained a key priority for most all-age schools. Many teachers worked together to plan and implement a curriculum that considers progression across all phases. Most schools had developed their vision for the Curriculum for Wales and started to trial approaches and resources. Schools were trialling new experiences and teaching strategies with Year 7 pupils as a continuation of the experiences pupils had received lower down in the school.

Teachers with expertise in different aspects of the curriculum worked together to ensure that pupils across all phases receive worthwhile experiences. This included subject specialists teaching pupils of primary age in technology workshops, drama studios and science laboratories.

## Curriculum reform

Planning and readiness for the Curriculum for Wales varied across schools. Many primary phases had adapted their curriculum suitably, but this had not always continued into Year 7. In a few cases, schools trialled activities in Year 7 that helpfully built on experiences in lower years. In general, all-age schools provided interesting and exciting learning experiences for pupils of primary school age and were beginning to develop teaching to deliver similar experiences for older pupils.

## Care, support and guidance

Pastoral care and support for pupil well-being were a strength in most all-age schools, having been a priority since schools re-opened. Pupils generally felt safe in school, well looked after, supported, and valued. In our inspection of Ysgol Ystalyfera Bro Dur, care, support and guidance were particularly strong and ensured that pupils felt well respected and valued. This developed them into well informed citizens within their community, Wales and the wider world.

In the majority of schools, staff used information well to identify pupils who needed support for their well-being or learning. They used this information well to meet the

needs of these pupils. Where this was not as successful, leaders did not track pupils' progress well enough or arrange sufficient support for pupils to make progress.

Many schools have developed appropriate processes to allow pupils to participate in making decisions through providing them with opportunities to influence what and how they learn. In a few schools, pupils' impact on whole-school decisions was underdeveloped.

In two out of the three schools inspected, the arrangements for safeguarding pupils were robust and nearly all staff understood their roles in keeping pupils safe. In these schools, the culture of safeguarding was well established. All schools worked closely with outside agencies to respond and provide appropriate support to pupils and their families. However, in one case, leaders were not proactive enough in addressing issues related to the well-being and safety of pupils. In addition, the school's system for recording safeguarding concerns was not sufficiently rigorous.

## Leadership

Overall, successful all-age leadership teams normally comprised a good balance of leaders with backgrounds in a range of age sectors. As they have become more established, schools have developed leaders to take on whole school responsibilities, for example in co-ordinating planning for progression of pupils' skills or leading an area of learning. This resource provides self-reflection prompts to help all-age schools consider the extent to which they benefit from providing all-through provision.

The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement across the sector was variable. However, in the best examples, schools evaluated provision and standards across and between phases. Teachers scrutinised pupils' work across age ranges and evaluated progress over time. This provided an increasingly accurate picture of pupils' progress during their time in the school, and the impact of provision across the school. This allowed leaders to address any dips in learning promptly. In less effective schools, evaluation and improvement planning was not precise enough. Leaders did not evaluate the work of the school in terms of its impact on pupils' learning well enough. This contributed to them having a far too positive view of the school's work and, consequently, improvement plans lacked detail on what exactly needed to improve.

Professional learning in all-age schools was particularly useful when it focused on whole school, cross phase aspects, such as the development of pupils' skills. This involved sharing good practice in teaching internally or between similar schools. However, external professional learning was often not tailored specifically enough to the needs of the all-age sector.

In January 2022, we published a thematic report on the challenges and successes of establishing all-age schools in Wales. Amongst its recommendations are for the Welsh Government to consider introducing national all-age schools guidance to support all-age schools, their leaders, governors and local authorities. This is in recognition of the sector being distinct from primary and secondary schools. The report also acknowledges how well all-age schools work together through the national forum for all-age schools. A summary of the thematic is here. The full version of the report is available on our website.

Case studies from a selection of all-age schools in the report provide useful information that other schools can relate to or use to improve their practice.

# Sector report: Maintained special 2021-2022

There are 40 maintained special schools in Wales providing education for almost 5,500 pupils.

The number of pupils in special schools has increased year-on-year for the past 10 years. Three schools provide education through the medium of Welsh. There are no special schools in Ceredigion or Monmouthshire.

Many special schools provide education for children from 3-19 years. Increasingly special schools are educating children with more complex needs. Typically, special schools provide education for pupils with cognition and learning difficulties that can be classed as profound, severe or moderate. In addition, our special schools cater for pupils with autistic spectrum condition; speech, communication and language difficulties; or physical and/or medical including sensory conditions such as hearing and/or visual impairments. A few schools have residential respite provision and a very few schools cater almost exclusively for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

## Engagement visits

We made engagement visits to two schools during the year. In addition nine schools contributed to thematic work.

## Core inspections

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, core inspections only took place from the end of January to July 2022. During this time three schools were inspected.

## Follow-up

Two schools were removed from the category of Estyn review and one remains in Estyn review. One school was placed in special measures.

**Summary findings**
This section of the Annual Report presents our full findings on this theme for the academic year 2021-2022. Click here to view a summary of these findings.

# Learning

The needs and age range of pupils that attend maintained special schools vary considerably.

Overall, due to the strong support and encouragement they received from staff, most pupils met revised personal targets and developed appropriate skills.

Most pupils developed their communication skills well and became increasingly confident in using these skills in different contexts. For example, they expressed understanding and needs through gesture, sign, writing and vocalisations, including speech. More able pupils engaged in detailed and meaningful conversations and used subject specific and technical language well. Pupils developed their reading and writing skills appropriately, from recognising and understanding symbols to choosing and reading books from a range of fiction and non-fiction texts. Pupils' writing skills extended from sensory mark-making and single letter formation to writing at length and for different purposes including analysing poetry as part of an English literature course.

Many pupils developed numeracy skills that allowed them to, for example, understand the difference between big and small or long and short. Where appropriate, pupils developed their numeracy skills and were able to recognise numbers and their value and complete operations such as additions, subtractions, multiplication and division. Over time, pupils gained an understanding of the value of money and how to use money in real life contexts, for example to budget trips to the shop and calculate the change they should receive.

Many pupils developed and applied their creative skills well. This included participating enthusiastically in the school choir. In addition, pupils engaged eagerly with song and dance activities that are used to good effect to reinforce their learning. Pupils produced attractive artwork including watercolours and digital photography. They created exciting computer games and produced props and special effects for school-based media productions. For example at Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn, film skills had a significant and positive impact on pupils' confidence, engagement, resilience and skills development. The school kindly provided a case study on Enhancing curriculum experience through film skills.

In their April 2022 publication Young People not in education, training or employment (Welsh Government, 2022, table 4), the Welsh Government identified that young people between the ages of 16-18 years, with a disability, are nearly three times more likely not to be in education, employment or training compared with non-disabled young people of the same age. This has worsened over at least the previous three years. The report suggested that just under a fifth of disabled 16 to 18-year-olds were not in education, training or employment.

# Well-being

During the autumn term 2021, we noted that a few pupils struggled to reintegrate and conform successfully to expectations and routines and leaders reported that the social and emotional needs of pupils overall had increased. Through our inspection work over the next two terms, we noted that many pupils, with the sensitive support of staff, demonstrated positive attitudes to learning and persevered well. Many pupils had positive attitudes to learning and they re-engaged well with their classmates. Pupils learned once again to become accepting of individual differences and supportive of one another. As a result, pupils became increasingly confident in their learning and as individuals.

In his report for Welsh Government, Attendance review – implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for school attendance the former Chief Inspector of schools in Wales noted that "…schools with the lowest attendance rates during the pandemic and its aftermath have been special schools…" (Welsh Government, 2022, p14). This could be attributed to families not wishing to send their children to school, perhaps because of their particular healthcare needs or due to the additional health threats that COVID-19 posed, although it is difficult to generalise based on the available evidence. Attendance of pupils in special schools has been improving but is generally lower than pre-pandemic levels.

# Teaching and learning experiences

By the end of the summer term, most special schools were generally well placed to implement curriculum reform. In most cases, the curriculum offer was generally well matched to the principles and purposes of the Curriculum for Wales. Special schools used their existing strong networks to work collaboratively on developing their curriculum offers. Nearly all special schools are implementing the Curriculum for Wales from September, including just under a third of special schools with secondary aged pupils.

Generally, leaders across special schools recognised the continued need for a flexible curriculum to respond to the needs of pupils due to their differing experiences during the pandemic. Schools ensure that the skills of staff are generally very well matched to the needs of pupils. Through our inspection work, we noted that valuable links with external providers began to gradually resume. These provided pupils with beneficial learning experiences, including visits to places of local interest, the development of vocational skills and work-related learning opportunities. These experiences engaged learners well, developing their confidence and self-esteem. Where these external links do not exist, the curriculum offer is too narrow and not always matched well enough to the needs and aspirations for pupils.

Generally, staff continue to have a secure understanding of the needs of pupils. Enhanced communication between schools and parents ensured that schools quickly understood the changing needs of pupils. Most special schools responded appropriately to the experiences of their pupils over the period of the pandemic. They continued to sensitively adapt their planning and re-arranged class groups and re-purposed spaces to allow for the teaching of pupils in small groups or on an individual basis where appropriate.

Staff absence and arranging for suitable cover continue to be a challenge in special schools. Pupils with complex difficulties often found it challenging to establish relationships with unfamiliar staff. Overall, staff have shown great resilience and creativity in adapting to the restrictions that were in place, including operating strict contact groups that limited the movement of pupils around the school and restricting whole school events. In our inspection of Crownbridge Special Day School, we commented on the increased use of online platforms that allowed pupils to host and present whole school assemblies. "…These are uplifting experiences, enjoyed by pupils who engage with passion, enthusiasm and unbridled enjoyment…"

## Care, support and guidance

In recent years, care, support and guidance have been good or better in many special schools. In our report Summary of engagement calls and visits to schools and PRUs Autumn 2021 (Estyn 2022, p.7), we noted that nearly all leaders in special schools continued to share clear approaches to assessing, monitoring, and evaluating pupil well-being. Providing well-being interventions has had a positive effect on pupils. These approaches, together with re-establishing routines, relationships and structures, assisted greatly in restoring the regular attendance of many pupils. School staff supported families well. For example, at Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn, family engagement had a very positive impact, ensuring that pupils were safe and supported in their well-being and learning.

A literature review conducted by the Welsh Government highlighted a number of relevant pieces of research on the impact of disasters on the well-being and mental health of school aged children. This included research by Asbury and others, which found that parents reported that there were increased mental health difficulties experienced by children with additional learning needs. Such difficulties included anxiety, low mood, acting out and behaviour changes, and parents suggested that children that had better understanding of the COVID-19 situation had better outcomes than those who had a limited understanding. Further research by Pearcey and others on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic acknowledged that children with additional learning needs were worried about returning to school because of "…things being uncertain or different, changes to routine, the enjoyable parts of the school not happening, and being away from home…".

Our thematic report Impartial careers advice and guidance to young people aged 14-16 years provided by Careers Wales advisers (Estyn, 2022, p19) highlighted that careers advisers have a strong understanding of the needs of pupils in special schools and provide a high degree of advocacy for them, representing their views and needs in meetings. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) no longer gives careers advisers a statutory role in assessing pupils' needs or advocating on their behalf. Staff in special schools, local authorities and Careers Wales were not clear about how, or if, this role would adapt to ensure that pupils with ALN have access to independent advice and guidance and support to plan their transition into future education, employment or training.

In general, special schools were well placed to implement ALN reform. Personcentred practices were a long-standing feature of the work of the sector and staff in many special schools have used their expertise to support colleagues in mainstream schools in developing personcentred practices.

Over time, the expertise in special schools has been used to influence the design and use of locally agreed individual development plans that are beginning to replace statements of special educational needs. However, as of July 2022, it was not always clear to

schools or parents whether individual development plans would be maintained by local authorities or schools, and this has created uncertainty for parents and schools.

In a preliminary report titled 'The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales', Davies noted that many parents of pupils with autism that attended specialist settings, including special schools, were happy with the school (Davies, 2021). This contrasts starkly with the 46% of parents that were happy with mainstream schools. These results broadly align with those provided by parents in our pre-inspection questionnaires.

## Leadership and management

Leaders in special schools continued to face operational challenges daily. They generally showed great resilience and adaptability. They remained optimistic and were generally resolute in securing provision that meets the wellbeing and learning needs of pupils and ensured that staff too were supported during times of organisational and personal challenge.

Staff absence continued to be an issue and, in a few cases, impacted negatively on the school. Leaders identified continued challenges in securing supply teachers to cover absences.

Leaders in many special schools ensured that staff had suitable opportunities to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills across a wide range of issues, including the delivery of national initiatives such as curriculum and ALN reform. Activities in relation to self-evaluation and improvement planning began to resume as the effects of the pandemic eased. Schools inspected have generally reflected well on their responses to the unpredictability brought by the pandemic.

# Sector report: Independent special schools 2021-2022

**37**

**No. of schools January 2022**

**36**

**No. of schools January 2021**

Independent special schools educate pupils from 3 to 18 who have a wide range of additional learning needs (ALN), including autistic spectrum condition (ASC) and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.

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. A minority of all independent special schools educate day pupils only. Independent schools, including independent special schools, are the second largest group of providers for pupils educated other than at school (EOTAS) after PRUs.

Nearly all placements at independent special schools are funded by local authorities in Wales or England.

## Core inspections and monitoring visits

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 five independent special schools and carried out monitoring visits to 18 schools. The findings from all inspections and visits have informed this report.

In two of the five schools inspected, inspectors did not report on learning or wellbeing and attitudes to learning. This is because the number of pupils was too few to report on without identifying individual pupils.

## Independent school visits

In addition to our core inspections and monitoring visits we also carry out a range of other work with independent schools:

- Six initial registration visits, to register a new independent school

- Six follow-up to registration visits, to ensure that a newly opened independent school continues to comply with the independent school standards

- 31 material change visits, to provide the Welsh Government with advice regarding a change in circumstances of an independent school

## Independent School Standards

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

Four of the five schools inspected and 7 out of the 18 schools visited as part of the monitoring process failed to meet at least one of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. Where schools had shortcomings in compliance with regulations, these related mostly to the quality of education and teaching provided, although a few schools also had shortcomings in the welfare, health and safety of pupils and the suitability of the premises and accommodation.

This year, the Welsh Government formally requested us to undertake one unannounced focused inspection under section 160 of the Education Act 2002 (Great Britain, 2002). The inspection had a particular focus on standard 3 and standard 1 of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, which relate to the welfare, health and safety of pupils and the quality of education provided (National Assembly for Wales, 2003). At the time of the focused inspection, the school did not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard fully.

We are regularly monitoring all of these schools to ensure that they make the necessary improvements to maintain registration.

# Sector report: Independent special schools 2021-2022

## Learning

In one of the schools inspected this year, and in around six-in-ten of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process, many pupils made at least suitable progress in their learning and in important aspects of their development that support this.

In these schools, many pupils made secure progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills in relation to their starting points. In lessons, they developed their social and communication skills effectively. They worked together in pairs or small groups and listened and responded appropriately to contributions made by other pupils in class discussions.

Many pupils developed valuable independent living skills, which prepared them well for their post-school placements. For example, they improved their independence skills in the local community, such as by using a laundrette and public transport.

However, in two of schools inspected and in around four-in-ten of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process, shortcomings in the quality and consistency of teaching and assessment and in the quality of therapeutic support meant that pupils did not make consistent progress in their learning.

### Cameo

At Red Rose School, nearly all pupils develop their independent living skills effectively. For example, younger pupils develop these skills by preparing simple snacks at break times. As pupils progress through the school, they practise and develop these skills in houses owned by the school. They learn how to use a range of kitchen appliances safely, and develop a range of household skills including bed making, budgeting, shopping, and meal preparation. In addition, pupils practise their independence skills in the local community by using a launderette and developing their travel skills using public transport. Nearly all pupils benefit from these opportunities to develop important life skills in preparation for their post-school placements. Most pupils gain qualifications linked to these activities, which recognise their achievements successfully.

# Well-being and attitudes to learning

In two of the schools inspected, and in around seven-in-ten of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process, many pupils improved their well-being and attitudes to learning as a result of the effective well-being support they received. As a result, they felt safe, enjoyed coming to school and maintained their placements successfully.

In these schools, many pupils engaged well in lessons. They showed curiosity, made decisions about their learning, and developed purposeful working relationships with their peers. Over time, and in relation to their needs and abilities, they built their resilience and acquired attitudes and behaviours that help them to become more successful learners.

Most pupils felt that adults listened to their views and that they had regular opportunities to make choices and decisions for themselves. Where teachers planned effectively to develop pupils' personal, social and health education, many developed a sense of their place in the wider community and acquired a greater understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and safe.

However, in one of the schools inspected and in three-in-ten schools visited as part of the monitoring process, limitations relating to the physical environment, inconsistency in the use of behaviour management strategies used by staff, and shortcomings in the quality of therapeutic support meant that some pupils, particularly those with more complex needs, did not make suitable progress. In addition, the poor attendance of a minority of pupils limited the progress these pupils made in their learning and well-being.

# Teaching and learning experiences

One of the schools inspected this year and around six-in-ten schools visited as part of the monitoring process provided a broad and balanced range of learning experiences that met the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

In these schools, the provision for personal, social and health education covered important area such as healthy relationships, personal safety and well-being. However, overall, in all schools, a few aspects of this provision were underdeveloped, for example learning about sexual harassment, radicalisation and exploitation.

In only one of the schools inspected this year, and in around six-in-ten schools visited as part of the monitoring process, was the quality of teaching, planning and assessment strong. In these schools, teaching and learning support staff planned engaging activities based on their knowledge of individual pupils' needs and interests. In particular, they had a robust understanding of the ALN of their pupils, and of the therapeutic approaches needed to support them.

In four of the schools inspected this year, and in four-in-ten of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process, teaching and learning experiences required improvement. This is because teachers' planning did not link well enough to pupils' needs and did not demonstrate how pupils can develop their skills and understanding progressively in ways that link clearly to their long-term destinations. In addition, shortcomings in the physical environment and the quality of teaching and learning support because of frequent changes to the staff team limited the progress pupils made across the curriculum.

## Cameo

Bettws Lifehouse provides a flexible, broad and balanced curriculum that is well suited to the needs, interests and aspirations of pupils. In the lower school, the stimulating curriculum allows pupils valuable opportunities to learn through play, exploration and authentic activities. This helps pupils to engage productively in lessons and to develop important skills for learning such as social and thinking skills. Pupils in the upper school are offered a broad range of relevant qualifications and experiences, which allows pupils to follow a pathway that meets their needs and interests successfully. As a result, pupils access qualification routes that are relevant and effectively support their postschool pathways.

## Care, support and guidance

In four of the schools inspected this year and in seven-in-ten schools visited as part of the monitoring process, care, support and guidance were a strong aspect of the school's work. In these schools, pre-entry and initial assessment processes were robust and ensured that teachers had an accurate understanding of pupils' individual ALN and starting points. These schools provided a strongly nurturing and inclusive environment that helped many pupils to develop resilience and feel safe.

In these schools, the work to promote pupils' personal and social development was a strength. This provision included suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their cultural understanding and awareness of the world around them, and staff planned effectively to prepare pupils for their next steps in life. Leaders ensured that there were strong systems to communicate with parents and carers, and guide the work of the therapeutic or clinical team. As a result, these strategies supported the work of teaching staff well.

Across this sector, safeguarding was a strong aspect of schools' work. However, in two schools inspected, leaders did not monitor the application of policies and procedures closely enough. In these schools, and in two-in-ten schools visited as part of the monitoring process, the application of behaviour management strategies and communication was inconsistent. In addition, therapeutic approaches were not co-ordinated well enough to meet the needs of pupils and staff.

# Leadership

Throughout the period of the pandemic, including at times of general lockdown, leaders of independent special schools have shown considerable commitment and resilience in ensuring that their schools remained open to support the well-being and safety of their pupils. Where schools are attached to residential homes, this usually meant that they maintained face-to-face teaching for nearly all of this period. Frequently, these schools operated without the support of local authorities or other networks of support.

In one school inspected this year, and in around five-in-ten schools visited as part of the monitoring process, leadership and management were a strength of the school. In these schools, leaders communicated a clear strategic direction for the school, as well as ensuring effective day-to-day management of the school. Programmes of professional learning linked closely to the school's strategic priorities and self-evaluation and improvement planning processes were robust and inclusive. As a result, these schools made strong progress against recommendations from previous monitoring visits and inspections.

However, in the other schools visited this year, shortcomings in the quality of leadership limited the progress pupils made. These shortcomings meant that quality assurance activities focused too much on demonstrating compliance rather than providing an in-depth evaluation of what works well and what needs to improve. Improvement planning was not detailed enough and did not identify the resources and timescales required to achieve the school's priorities. In these schools, professional learning did not focus sufficiently on developing teachers' understanding of the core skills of teaching and supporting pupils with a broad range of complex needs. As a result, these schools made only slow progress against recommendations from previous visits.

## Cameo

At Headlands School, the senior leadership team provides highly effective strategic leadership for the school. Leaders at all levels understand their roles and responsibilities well. Leaders communicate a clear vision, share a strong commitment to continuous school improvement and have high expectations of pupil attainment and behaviour. As a result, senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

Staff across the school share a strong commitment to professional learning and benefit from valuable opportunities to identify and share good practice. This has helped the school to make important improvements, for example to strengthen the integrated therapeutic approach.

This resource provides self-reflection prompts to support strengthening leadership in independent special schools.

# Sector report: Independent mainstream 2021-2022

**36**

No. of schools January 2022

**10**

Including 10 boarding schools

**37**

No. of schools January 2021

## Independent School Standards

In independent schools, we inspect the extent to which the school complies with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

All schools inspected in 2021-2022 met these Standards.

This year, the Welsh Government formally requested us to undertake one announced focused inspection under section 160 of the Education Act 2002 (Great Britain, 2002). The inspection had a particular focus on standard 3 of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, which relates to the welfare, health and safety of pupils (National Assembly for Wales, 2003). At the time of the focused inspection, the school did not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard fully. We will continue to engage with this school and monitor whether they make the required improvements to maintain registration.

In addition we carried out three improvement conferences with a school that failed the regulatory requirements for standard 3 in the previous academic year. This school now meets all the regulatory requirements and is removed from follow-up.

## Case study

Cardiff Muslim Primary – practical support for pupils with additional learning needs

## Independent school visits

In addition to our core inspections and focused inspections, we also carry out a range of other work with independent schools:

- One response to an action plan where a school does not meet the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003

- Three initial registration visits, to register a new independent school

- Three follow-up to registration visits, to ensure that a newly opened independent school continues to comply with the independent school standards

- Visits to six independent schools as part of our thematic report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment

- Seven material change visits, to provide the Welsh Government with advice regarding a change in circumstances of an independent school

## Core inspections

This year, we inspected four independent mainstream schools.

Three schools are all-age schools and one is a primary school.

In addition, two of the schools are boarding schools.

# Sector report: Independent mainstream 2021-2022

## Learning

In the schools inspected this year, a swift response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic ensured that standards remained high and pupils continued to make strong progress.

Across the schools inspected, pupils had well-developed communication skills. Nearly all pupils were articulate, and confident speaking to visitors. They were at ease discussing their work and when responding to questions. However, a few pupils did not always listen well enough when others were speaking.

In nearly all the schools inspected, most pupils displayed strong reading skills alongside a love of books and literature. A few pupils were exceptionally competent readers and could read and comprehend a wide range of texts. These reading skills enabled pupils to successfully access written material across the curriculum.

The standard of writing of most pupils was strong across all schools. Pupils developed the appropriate skills to write for different audiences and purposes. A very few pupils made repeated basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Most pupils developed extremely strong mathematical skills and, when given the opportunity, successfully applied their numerical skills in a different context. A very few older pupils presented as highly capable mathematicians, who applied their mathematical skills accurately and securely across the curriculum.

The digital skills of nearly all pupils developed well due to the effective online provision made by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included a strong focus on using digital technology to communicate effectively, to complete their work and for research.

## Well-being and attitudes to learning

In all schools inspected, pupil and staff well-being remained a strong focus. Pupils demonstrated pride in their school and had a strong sense of belonging, which contributed effectively to their well-being.

Nearly all pupils enjoyed constructive and trusting working relationships with their teachers. Pupils were confident to speak to staff and knew that any concerns would be

**Summary findings**
This section of the Annual Report presents our full findings on this theme for the academic year 2021-2022. Click here to view a summary of these findings.

dealt with swiftly. Nearly all pupils worked diligently in class and enjoyed their lessons. They co-operated with each other maturely in pairs and small groups. Most showed respect for the contribution of others and offered support to their peers. They were enthusiastic learners, keen to participate and answer teachers' questions. However, in a very few cases during class discussions, pupils did not always wait for their turn to contribute or give others sufficient time to share their ideas.

## Teaching and learning experiences

In all the schools inspected, the curriculum was broad and balanced and met the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) 2003. In addition, particularly at Key Stage 4, the all-age schools frequently provided a highly bespoke curriculum well suited to the interests and talents of the pupils. The extensive cocurricular opportunities that independent schools offer had been curtailed due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, three-quarters of schools swiftly reintroduced educational visits and planned trips further afield. These experiences strongly supported pupils' well-being.

However, in half of the schools inspected, one of their recommendations related to the provision for personal and social education. In these cases the delivery of this important area of the curriculum was unco-ordinated or the practice did not match the policy. Pupils were missing out on important aspects of this subject. This was also the case in schools we visited as part of the work for our 'We don't tell our teachers' report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment. In these schools, there was often not enough curriculum time for personal and social education for older pupils and pupils did not have enough opportunities to talk openly about their experiences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

Across the schools, nearly all staff had positive and supportive working relationships with pupils and knew them extremely well. Teachers had high expectations of themselves and of their pupils.

Where teaching was most successful, activities were often open ended and adapted effectively to offer pupils an appropriate level of challenge. In these cases, teachers provided pupils with high-quality feedback, which clearly identified areas in which their work could be improved.

Where teaching was less successful, teachers planned activities that were too narrowly focused or too heavily teacherled for pupils to be able to direct their own learning and therefore benefit from opportunities to develop wider skills and independence. Also in these cases, pupils were not provided with the opportunity, or expected to respond to, helpful feedback about their work.

# Care, support and guidance

Leaders and staff placed a high priority on the well-being of all pupils.

Where appropriate, schools liaised constructively with external agencies, for example to provide specialist support for pupils' mental health. In addition, one school in particular made highly effective use of the local and wider community to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

In nearly all schools inspected, the additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) ensured that pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) received the support that they needed to succeed with their learning. In one school this was a particular strength.

All schools inspected had an appropriate culture of safeguarding and there was a strong culture in half of schools inspected. All staff understood their role in ensuring that pupils were safe and well cared for. However, in the other schools, staff were not always clear about who they should report to if they had concerns relating to senior members of staff or record checking was not always robust. Where inspectors identified these issues, they were subsequently addressed with the schools. This reflects the findings of our thematic report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment where in nearly all schools visited staff know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil. However, in many schools, teachers and, to lesser degree, senior leaders and support staff are not fully aware of the prevalence of peer-on peer harassment as pupils do not systematically report their concerns to school staff.

# Leadership

In the schools inspected, leaders had high ambitions for their pupils and high expectations of their staff. The headteacher was supported well by their senior team and, together, they set a clear, shared vision and ethos that everyone subscribed to. Most leaders monitored the school's work closely and had an accurate understanding of the strengths and shortcomings across the school. Where leaders' monitoring identified shortcomings in practice, these were addressed promptly, for example through mentoring and coaching support.

Where there were shortcomings in leadership, improvement planning processes did not always focus well enough on pupils' progress, the standards they achieved and the quality of teaching. As a result, the school's arrangements to evaluate progress towards making improvements in these important areas were not effective enough.

In threequarters of the schools inspected, professional development opportunities, whether through sharing good practice or attending external courses, remained strong. However, in a quarter of schools only a minority of staff had engaged in the opportunities for professional learning.
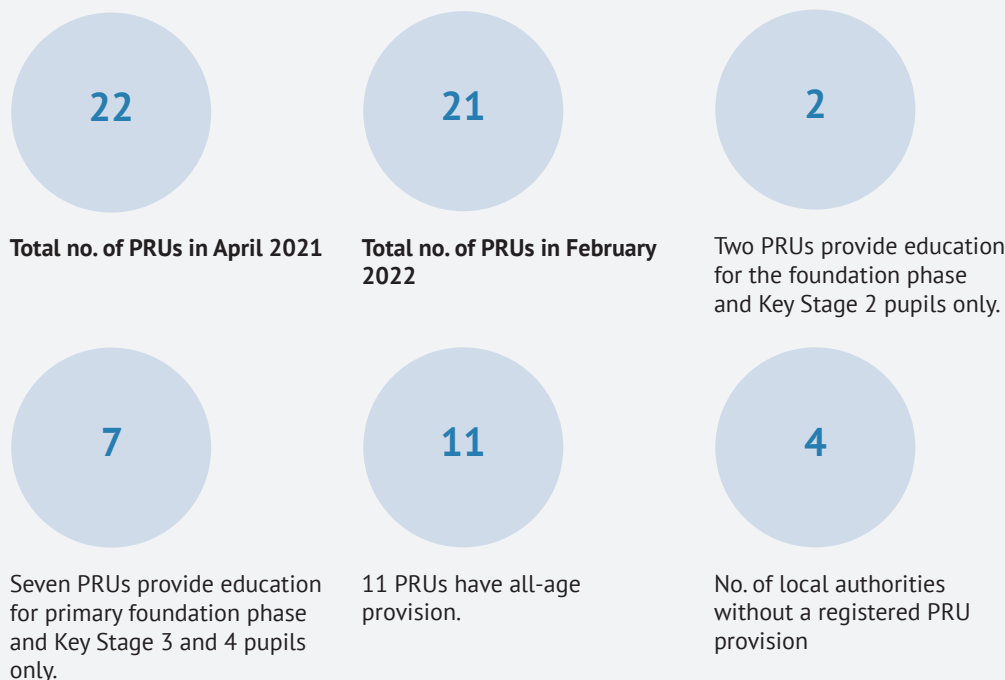
In half of the schools inspected, the role of the governing body was underdeveloped, particularly their role as critical friend.

This resource provides self-reflection prompts to support strengthening leadership in independent schools.

# Sector report: Pupil referral units 2021-2022

Pupil referral units (PRUs) are legally both a type of school and education otherwise than at school (EOTAS). They are established and maintained by a local authority to provide suitable education for children and young people who, by reason of illness, exclusion or otherwise, may not receive such education (section 19 of the Education Act 1996).

## PRUs

**22**

**Total no. of PRUs in April 2021**

**21**

**Total no. of PRUs in February 2022**

**2**

Two PRUs provide education for the foundation phase and Key Stage 2 pupils only.

## Pupils

**857**

**No. of pupils in PRU provision in January 2022**

PRUs are the largest provider for education other than at school (EOTAS).

**7**

Seven PRUs provide education for primary foundation phase and Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils only.

**11**

11 PRUs have all-age provision.

**4**

No. of local authorities without a registered PRU provision

## Models of provision

- A wide range of models are in place across Wales.
- There is a mix of single site provision PRUs and portfolio PRUs arranged over multiple sites.
- Age ranges at PRUs vary, with some all-age PRUs and some catering for a specific age range.
- Registration in PRUs can be part and fulltime. Pupils can be registered at more than one establishment.
- Pupil numbers in individual PRUs vary from around 20 to over 120.
- PRU leaders can have additional responsibilities on behalf of local authorities, such as managing home tuition or hospital tuition services.
- All PRUs are required to have a management committee.

## PRU provision

Total number = **21**
Welsh-medium = **2**
Bilingual = **1**

## Core inspections

No. of core inspections = **2**

## Engagement activity

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, core inspections only took place from the end of January to July 2022. During this academic year, inspectors conducted engagement calls or visits to every PRU.
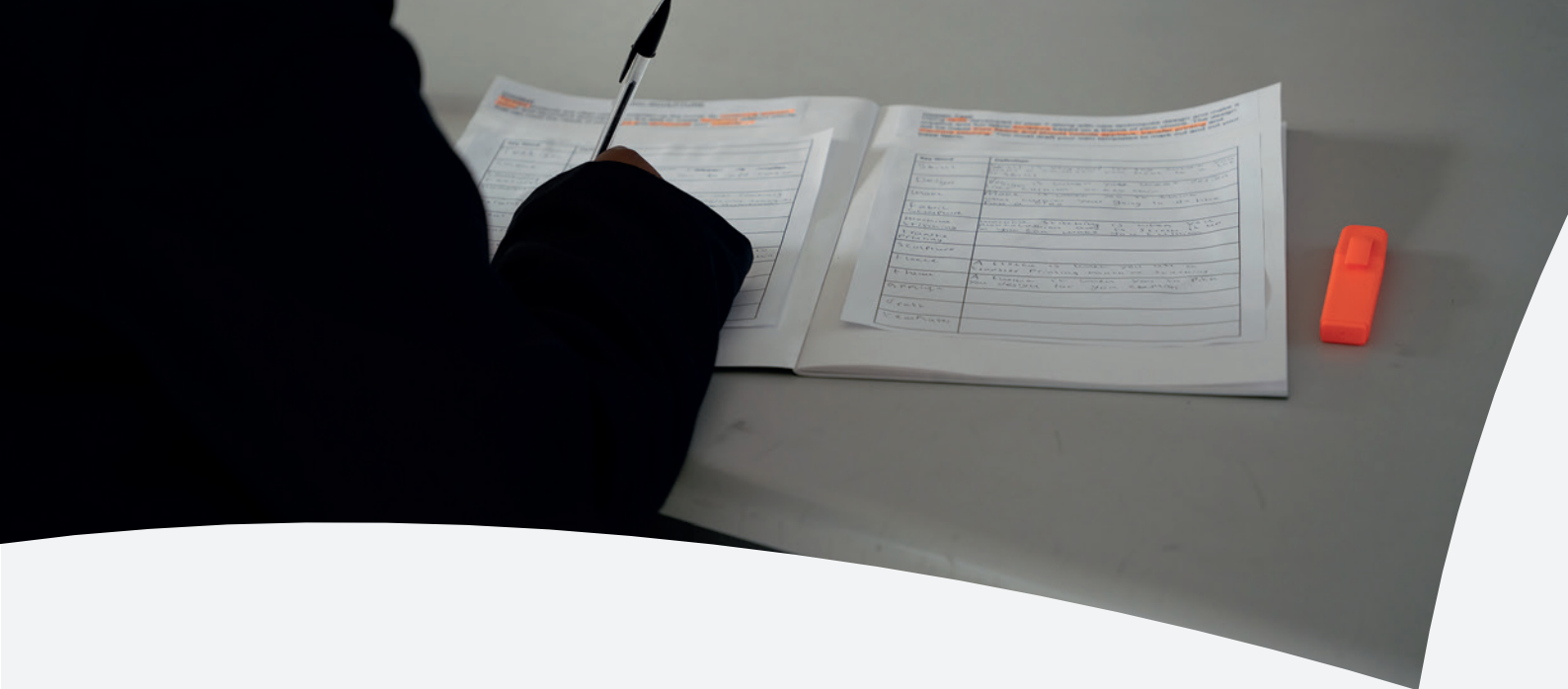
## Follow-up

September 2021 no. of PRUs in follow-up = **2 (both special measures)**

No. of PRUs removed from follow-up 2021-2022 = **2**

Total no. of PRUs in follow-up August 2022 = **0**

## Case studies

Bryn Y Deryn PRU

# Sector report: Pupil referral units 2021-2022

## Learning

Many pupils in the PRUs inspected made progress from their initial starting points. Overall, they responded well to re-establishing routines and structures, and demonstrated resilience. However, most pupils needed additional support for their emotional well-being and mental health. In addition, ongoing attendance issues and persistent absenteeism continued to be a challenge and impacted on pupils' progress.

Over time, many pupils' social skills and tolerance of working with others, which had been adversely affected by the pandemic, improved. However, for many pupils, previous gaps in learning were exacerbated by the pandemic. For example, many pupils did not develop their ICT skills progressively due to a lack of consistent and planned opportunities across the curriculum.

Most pupils accessed a suitable range of recognised qualifications at the end of Year 11. PRUs quickly re-established effective processes for transition planning for when pupils leave the PRU. As a result, in the PRUs inspected, nearly all pupils leaving PRUs in the academic year 2020-2021 progressed into education, training or employment.

## Well-being

Pupils who did not engage well with learning prior to the onset of COVID-19 continued to be a cause for concern throughout the pandemic. Overall, pupils' social, emotional, behavioural and mental health needs increased in the wake of the pandemic, and a few pupils struggled to conform successfully to expectations and routines as the crisis subsided. The PRUs that addressed these issues most effectively focused on maintaining positive working relationships with pupils.

**Summary findings**
This section of the Annual Report presents our full findings on this theme for the academic year 2021-2022. Click here to view a summary of these findings.

### Bryn Y Deryn PRU

There was a notable culture and ethos of supporting well-being across the PRU. Nearly all pupils consistently engaged with the established routines in morning pastoral time. The positive working relationships between staff and pupils supported a family approach that allowed pupils to manage their behaviours more successfully. Nearly all pupils reviewed and acted upon purposeful targets for improvement during this time. As a consequence, nearly all pupils were punctual to lessons, able to settle quickly into learning situations and demonstrated exemplary behaviour in lessons.

Nearly all pupils in the PRUs inspected took part in opportunities to influence what and how they learnt. For example, school council meetings were well established, and pupils felt that staff listened to their viewpoints.

## Teaching and learning experiences

Leaders adopted a flexible approach to the curriculum, with a particular focus on pupils' well-being and their behavioural, emotional and mental health needs. Leaders reported concerns about the variability of pupils' engagement with learning. In response, PRUs increased the provision of additional therapeutic interventions to support and re-engage pupils in their learning.

Ongoing staff and pupil absence linked to COVID-19 affected the continuity of provision and the quality of teaching and learning across PRUs. While leaders often talked confidently about how they were developing their curriculum based on the four purposes, the operational challenges presented by the pandemic led to a variation in the preparedness for the Curriculum for Wales. This resource provides self-reflection prompts to support PRUs to prepare for the Curriculum for Wales. In both providers inspected, programmes for personal and social education were well established and had been a key focus since the pandemic.

Nearly all staff fostered positive and valuable working relationships with their pupils. They showed that they understand and know their pupils well and recognised the potential barriers to learning that pupils could face. In many cases, teachers aimed to mitigate the impact of the pandemic by teaching pupils in small groups or on an individual basis. However, in both PRUs, strengthening consistency in teaching was an area for improvement. In both providers, the range of learning experiences to support pupils to make informed choices around future careers and the world of work was strong.

### Canolfan Addysg Conwy

In Key Stage 4, the PRU provided a good range of learning experiences to help pupils make informed choices around future careers and the world of work. These experiences were delivered through strong partnerships with the local college, the careers adviser and other external partners. The PRU arranged visits for pupils to the college of their choice and from local businesses to explain the work that they do to support pupils to gain skills for the workplace. This work was a strength of the PRU.

Overall, the PRUs inspected had comprehensive assessment arrangements to identify pupils' strengths and areas for development. Assessment outcomes were used well by teachers to plan appropriate learning experiences to engage pupils and support them to make progress based on their individual needs. Overall, staff had a good understanding of

pupils' additional learning needs (ALN). They took account of pupils' individual education plans (IEPs) or individual development plans (IDPs) and targets, and planned well for these in their teaching.

## Bryn Y Deryn PRU

Comprehensive assessments on entry to the PRU, alongside effective liaison with partner schools and agencies, allowed staff to identify and plan well for pupils' individual learning and well-being needs. These initial assessments fed into a valuable record of achievement document. Progress was tracked effectively across all areas of achievement including engagement, learning targets and career aspirations. In addition, 'learner journey' documents supported planning for next steps in learning or development, with a focus on careers and post-16 options.

## Care, support and guidance

Both the PRUs inspected had a caring and inclusive ethos. This ethos permeated the work of the PRUs and had a significant positive impact on pupils' well-being. Leaders faced challenges in meeting the increased social, emotional, behavioural and mental health needs of their pupils in the wake of the pandemic. In most cases, the increased range of therapeutic interventions based on traumainformed practices provided by the PRUs had successfully begun to address these challenges. However, PRUs reported that external support to address attendance issues could be overly burdensome and not sufficiently timely. In addition, access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs) was too variable.

For new pupils entering PRUs, there were comprehensive assessment processes to assess their needs and abilities. These arrangements supported most pupils to settle quickly and well into the PRUs.

Both PRUs had a well-developed person-centred planning approach. A combination of individual education plans (IEPs) and individual development plans (IDPs) were in place across the PRUs. This reflected the local authority approach at the time in response to ALN reform. Staff used IEPs and IDPs well to plan and deliver relevant learning experiences for pupils. Overall, however, inconsistencies in arrangements across local authorities regarding 'ownership' of pupils' IDPs remained an area for concern amongst leaders in PRUs.

Both PRUs had effective strategies for communication with parents and carers. These were significantly strengthened during the pandemic and PRUs continued to build successfully on this practice. Safeguarding culture and practice across the PRUs were strong.

## Leadership

In our engagement with providers, leaders in PRUs reported that continued staff absence due to COVID-19 was having a negative impact on pupils' progress. For example, pupils often found it challenging to develop relationships and had difficulty learning effectively with unfamiliar staff. In addition, finding suitable agency staff was very challenging. Despite this, leaders continued to place high priority on the well-being of both staff and pupils.

Leaders reported that they had additional responsibilities to manage local authorityled services such as home tuition services and hospital tuition. This has benefits of creating a more flexible and co-ordinated approach to supporting young people who receive education otherwise than at school (EOTAS). However, a few leaders report that the challenges associated with these additional responsibilities were adding to their workload.

In both PRUs inspected, self-evaluation processes and monitoring and quality assurance systems continued to operate. These processes allowed leaders to plan strategically for improvement and to strengthen provision. Leaders demonstrated a high level of resilience and flexibility and managed change well.

Leaders maximised professional learning opportunities during the pandemic. Virtual training events provided them with the opportunity to support staff development more flexibly. Leaders were keen to re-establish visits to other providers to maximise sharing of good practice across the sector.

Generally, the professional learning opportunities for staff align to PRU priorities effectively. This is providing staff with the skill set needed to support the complex needs of the pupils across PRUs more successfully. Staff benefit from professional learning opportunities that reflect the complex needs of pupils well.

Overall, the level of support and challenge offered to leaders by management committees had improved. In both PRUs, strengthened collaborative working arrangements with local authority officers were improving the quality of PRU provision. Across local authorities, there are inconsistencies in the budget arrangements for PRUs.

Links : Summary of engagement calls and visits to schools and PRUs – autumn 2021 | Estyn (gov.wales)

# Sector report: Independent specialist colleges 2021-2022

## 7

No. of independent specialist colleges January 2022

## 7

No. of independent specialist colleges January 2021

Independent specialist colleges educate around 200 learners across Wales aged 16 years and over. The colleges provide for a diverse range of learners' needs, including autistic spectrum condition, 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.

Nearly all placements at independent specialist colleges are funded by the Welsh Government in Wales or local authorities for learners from England.

### Core inspections and monitoring visits

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 five monitoring visits and no core inspections. The findings from all these visits have informed this report.

**Summary findings**
This section of the Annual Report presents our full findings on this theme for the academic year 2021-2022. Click here to view a summary of these findings.

## Learning

Over time, many learners made strong progress in relation to their individual starting points. They developed their communication and practical skills particularly well. For example, they followed a visual recipe for cooking a meal for supper or used signing to make an oak bench in the woodwork area.

In three colleges, many learners developed their practical skills through well-planned and purposeful tasks in a range of realistic contexts. For example, in one college, learners made coat hooks and door handles in an iron forge, collected eggs on the farm, and grew food to be used in the college kitchen and residential homes. They followed established routines to complete tasks with increasing independence such as creating shopping lists, buying ingredients and making pastries as part of their life skills curriculum.

In all colleges, most learners successfully completed relevant qualifications or accreditation. However, restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on the progress of learners, particularly in regard to the readiness of learners in the final year of their course to progress successfully to their next stage of life and learning.

## Well-being and attitudes to learning

Many learners made valuable progress in developing their confidence and resilience across a worthwhile range of learning experiences that supported the development of their well-being effectively.

Many learners participated well in lessons. They understood and followed routines appropriately and worked positively with their peers to complete tasks independently or as part of a group. For example, they collaborated enthusiastically in music sessions, and supported each other well when checking the health of guinea pigs in their animal care session.

Most learners developed strong working relationships with teaching staff and their peers. Because of the skilful support they received, they felt safe during sessions, which helped them to engage well, manage their own behaviour and improve the quality of their work. With their peers, most learners demonstrated respect for each other and celebrated achievements together positively.

## Teaching and learning experiences

In all colleges, tutors and support staff provided attentive and caring support. They knew the needs of their learners well and built positive working relationships with them.

Tutors planned carefully to provide a relevant and meaningful range of learning experiences, which they adapted carefully to meet the diverse needs across the college. In many cases, planning continued to focus strongly on activities that promoted learners' wellbeing explicitly. Tutors managed risks associated with the workplace carefully and learners developed a strong understanding of relevant health and safety considerations.

This approach helped to support the development of learners' resilience, as well as valuable independence and life skills including travel training, money management and interview skills.

Where there are shortcomings in teaching, this was because teaching did not meet the complex needs of learners well enough. In two colleges, there was too much variability in teaching staff's understanding and application of communication strategies to support learners' communication needs. In one college, tutors did not plan well enough for the progressive development of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills and tutors' feedback did not identify clearly enough what learners needed to do to improve their work.

## Care, support and guidance

Four colleges visited this year provided a calm, supportive and nurturing environment that promotes the wellbeing of learners effectively. Despite the considerable challenges caused by the pandemic, staff continued to adapt approaches flexibly to meet the needs of learners and to promote their safety and physical wellbeing. As a result, most learners had high levels of wellbeing, which in turn ensured that many made at least secure progress in their learning.

In four of the colleges, leaders adapted and adjusted their provision appropriately to enable learners to continue on their programmes and maintained detailed records of learners' progress during this time. This careful monitoring helped colleges to assess the impact of the pandemic on learners' progress and identify suitable responses to address this. For example, one college put in place robust attendance plans to support anxious learners to return to fulltime face-to-face education.

In one college visited this year, the specialist provision the college itself made to support learners' complex needs was underdeveloped. As a result, many learners continued to rely on support provided by clinical teams within their placing authority and local health board to provide ongoing guidance to meet their specialist needs, even after they had joined the college.

## Leadership

In three of the colleges, leaders responded positively to the feedback from previous monitoring visits. They had an accurate understanding of the college's strengths and priorities for improvement and implemented appropriate systems to quality assure and monitor progress against key aspects of their work.

In two colleges, this approach helped to ensure that, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, leaders were able to bring about significant improvements to the college's accommodation and facilities to increase the opportunities available to learners. In two colleges however, recent changes to the leadership of the college, together with the challenge of managing the college during the pandemic, had a negative impact on the strategic leadership of the college. In these colleges, self-evaluation and quality assurance

processes lacked rigour and did not inform the college's priorities for improvement well enough.

In two colleges, professional learning did not focus well enough on or respond well enough to the full range of needs of learners who attend the college. This resource provides self-reflection prompts to support professional learning in independent specialist colleges.

Generally, leaders confirmed that they continued to face significant challenges around the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and experienced staff, including the recruitment of therapeutic staff, as well as pressures caused by recent increases in the costs of making specialist provision due to inflation. In addition, leaders expressed ongoing concerns about issues arising from the implementation of ALN reform. These include the transfer of funding for specialist college placements from the Welsh Government to local authorities, as well as concerns identified in Estyn's recent thematic report Impartial careers advice and guidance to young people aged 14-16 years provided by Careers Wales advisers (Estyn, 2022) about the future impartiality of advice and guidance for learners in special schools when considering their post-16 options.

# Sector report: Local government education services 2021-2022

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 in conjunction with regional consortia on behalf of local authorities, though the model for how this works varies around Wales.

Our local authority link inspectors carried out their regular work with local authorities and regional consortia and we worked with Audit Wales to provide local authorities with our views on what is working well in their local government education services and what needs to improve.

## Inspections

Between September 2021 and July 2022, we carried out five inspections of local government education services. One local authority, Torfaen, was judged to be causing significant concern. Many local authorities were asked to produce case studies outlining effective practice in aspects of their work.

## Follow-up activity

At the start of the academic year, there were three local authorities causing significant concern. Powys was judged to have made good progress during a monitoring visit in the autumn term and was removed from further follow-up activity. We held improvement conferences in Pembrokeshire and Wrexham authorities to determine the progress made against the recommendations from their core inspection. We identified that both authorities needed to continue working on their monitoring and evaluation processes. We will continue to evaluate the progress of education services.

# Outcomes

During our inspections last year, we were unable to provide a full evaluation of outcomes. This was due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the suspension of inspections of schools and most other education providers since March 2020. A secondary issue was the lack of data about outcomes that can be compared over time as the pandemic caused changes to the way that qualifications were awarded and affected most other data that we consider when making evaluations, such as school attendance, school exclusions and post-16 learner destinations. Therefore, for the academic year 2021-2022, we reported only on outcomes before the pandemic or those that related to more recent outcomes where the evidence base is valid and reliable.

Our inspections in primary and secondary schools in the five local authorities inspected show that the judgements made on the standards that pupils achieve in primary and secondary schools were strongest in schools in Swansea and weakest in schools in Torfaen.

Of the local authorities inspected this year, for the three years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, standards at Key Stage 4 were high in schools in Swansea and Cardiff. They were more variable in schools in Anglesey and were low in Torfaen and Merthyr Tydfil. The standards of pupils eligible for free school meals were above or in line with national averages in all of the local authorities inspected.

Pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning were good or better in three local authorities, were in line with national averages in Cardiff and lower than national averages in Torfaen. Attendance levels for the three years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic were at or above national averages in four local authorities but were lower in Merthyr Tydfil. Across Wales, pupil attendance levels are lower in 2021-2022 than they were prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. For primary aged pupils in maintained schools, attendance in 2021-2022 was 89%, compared to 94.6% in 2018-2019. For secondary age pupils in maintained schools, attendance in 2021-2022 was 83.7%, compared to 93.8% in 2018-2019.

In many local authorities, pupils have good opportunities to influence the work of education services and to give their views on decisions that affect their communities. For example, in Anglesey, pupils have contributed to a 'have your say' survey, discussing their experience of living in Anglesey, and referring to aspects such as their employment hopes for the future. In Merthyr Tydfil, young people led on the development of a young person's version of the local authority's 'Raising Aspirations, Raising Standards' strategy, and in Swansea pupils were involved in the recruitment of the Director of Education.

# Education services

In all inspections we evaluate how well local authorities supported schools to improve. In many of the local authorities inspected last year, we found that officers had created positive working relationships with their regional consortium. This contributed to ensuring that processes to support school improvement were effective. These include procedures for sharing information about schools who need additional support and 'Team around the School' arrangements. In these cases, officers from the school improvement services worked with local authority service leads, such as for education welfare and inclusion, to ensure that they had a shared and secure understanding of each school's strengths and shortcomings. This close working relationship also helped officers to intervene and provide support as soon as a risk was identified. In education services where school improvement processes are weaker, the pace of improvement in schools causing concern was too slow. This was partly because local authority officers did not challenge officers from the school improvement service well enough about the support their schools receive.

In Swansea, we found that officers worked proactively with schools to identify and support future school leaders, including for schools where recruitment is sometimes more difficult, such as Roman Catholic schools. This approach helped to ensure that leadership in schools in Swansea was strong. In the three-year period prior to the pandemic, most schools inspected in Swansea were judged to have good or excellent leadership and management, a better profile than in any other local authority in Wales. You can read about this work in the case study here.

All local authorities provided support for schools to develop their curricula in line with the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales. This work was often provided through regional consortia, although a few local authorities engaged in initiatives in addition to the national programme of curriculum support. For example, in Cardiff, officers developed a 'computation in the curriculum' course in partnership with Swansea University. This course supported practitioners to consider curriculum planning for computing, linked to science and technology. In Anglesey, the authority was part of a national task and finish group working on updating the relationships and sexuality education policy to match the new requirements within the Curriculum for Wales. However, in general, curriculum support wasn't tailored well enough to the needs of individual schools, or to groups of schools such as maintained special schools. We wrote in detail about the quality of support for schools from local authorities and regional consortia in our 2022 report, The Curriculum for Wales: How are regional consortia and local authorities supporting schools?

In all inspections we consider an aspect of **how well the local authority supports pupils with additional learning needs or those who are vulnerable**. In Merthyr Tydfil, we evaluated the provision for pupils with social, emotional, and behavioural needs. We found that local authority officers have established relationships with schools that are built on mutual trust and respect and that the services provided by the local authority to support the needs of pupils were well regarded by schools. In Torfaen, we found strengths in how the local authority supports its schools and other settings to provide for pupils with ALN. These included providing helpful advice and guidance on preparing for ALN reform and well-understood arrangements for referrals. In Cardiff, we evaluated the provision that the local authority made for children who are looked after and those that have English or Welsh as an additional language. We found strengths in the council's support for asylum seekers and refugees and officers produced a case study about this work.

## Cardiff Council's support for refugee and asylum seekers

Inspectors found that Cardiff Council provides a high level of support for asylum seekers and refugees who arrive in the area. This includes providing highly effective support for the educational needs of newly arrived children by swiftly arranging learning opportunities for them. For example, within two weeks of their arrival in the city in the autumn term 2021, officers co-ordinated teaching for large groups of children from Afghanistan. This included refugees who were accommodated in Cardiff before their dispersal to other parts of Wales. The local authority worked with local primary and secondary schools to release teachers who speak relevant languages to support these pupils. You can read more about this work here.

We made recommendations for three local authorities to improve aspects of their services for pupils with additional learning or well-being needs. In Cardiff, the focus was on improving their counselling services for young people. In Merthyr Tydfil, officers needed to focus on the impact of parttime education provision for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. In Torfaen council, improvements were needed both in the leadership of the services for pupils with additional learning needs and the council's strategy for this work. Powys County Council made good progress in addressing the recommendation to improve its provision for learners with special educational needs and other pupils who require extra support. You can read about the Council's work to improve the evaluation, planning and co-ordination of their provision for these learners here.

Last year, we reviewed **the work of youth services** in three local authorities as part of pilot inspection arrangements. We found that, through their involvement with youth workers and engagement in personal and social education sessions, many young people improved their social skills and awareness of health issues. Many also improved their practical skills, for example through English and Welsh-medium sessions on how to build motorised go-karts. Most young people who received targeted educational support from youth workers made valuable progress and attained useful qualifications.

## Cameo: Torfaen local authority youth services

An Educational Psychologist (EP) provides support to Torfaen Youth Service on three levels: individual, group and systemic. At an individual level, the EP offers one-to-one consultation to upskill and empower youth workers, which includes assisting them to deliver tailored support for young people. On a group level, the EP provides weekly reflection sessions, theme-based workshops inspired by current issues and drop-in sessions to discuss specific young people or groups. On a systemic level, the EP delivers relevant training on topics such as traumainformed approaches or the use of specific psychological activities to elicit young people's views. Where appropriate, the EP liaises with other agencies to deliver relevant bespoke training.

The youth work sector was often innovative in the ways it sought to grow provision and positively impact young people's educational outcomes. For example, Cardiff youth service developed an innovative digital offer led by young people. Details of this work are here. In Merthyr Tydfil, youth workers delivered programmes that enabled targeted pupils to attain relevant qualifications and supported most of them to progress successfully to the next stage of education or employment, which is captured in this case study produced by the local authority. Torfaen youth service funded an educational psychologist to support youth workers and inform their practice, including training on how to use cognitive behavioural therapeutic approaches to provide interventions for young people.

Overall, the local authority youth work services we inspected provided valuable support for young people through targeted, outreach, and open access provision. Youth workers provided very beneficial support for young people's emotional health and well-being. For example, they offered effective and sensitive support for young carers, vulnerable young people and those with additional learning needs to assist them in developing the skills they needed to live successful and satisfying lives within society. They provide good support where needed for young LGBTQ+ people. Targeting prioritised areas based on socio-economic needs was effective in meeting the needs of those young people. However, such targeting limited the opportunities for young people from all backgrounds to benefit from youth work provision or the support youth workers provide.

In all the local authorities inspected, there were good examples of individual Welsh-speaking youth workers who engaged well with Welsh-speaking young people and encouraged them to use their language skills outside of formal school settings. In the best examples, they normalised the use of the language in activities that appeal to young people. However, overall, strategic and purposeful planning to increase the use of the language through a proactive planned offer was either underdeveloped or at an early stage of development.

Youth work leaders worked effectively with other local authority departments and partner organisations, including the voluntary sector, to ensure a wide range of provision that evolves to meet the needs of young people. In the best examples, leaders were innovative in the way they sourced extra funding to sustain and grow their youth work offer to young people. They monitored the quality of youth work provision effectively and consulted well with young people to assess the services they access and ensure that their voice influenced policy decisions.

In Merthyr Tydfil, we evaluated the education service's work on reducing the impact of poverty and disadvantage on pupils' learning. We found that officers have forged valuable partnerships through a network of services provided by both the local authority and third sector organisations. The local authority established a corporate Tackling Poverty Strategic Group to provide leadership and governance for this work. The group includes heads of service from across the local authority and considered how resources could be used in a purposeful way to address disadvantage through cross-directorate and partnership working. Across services, local authority officers had a comprehensive overview of the needs of vulnerable learners and their families.

At operational level, service leaders from across directorates worked together well. They have a clear understanding of how their provision is part of a multi-service response to tackle the impact of poverty on education. The Early Help Hub provides a useful central point of contact for families to access support and facilitates effective multi-agency working. This approach avoids unnecessary duplication of services and is helping children and their families to receive the right support for their needs in a timely way. During the last year, referrals from schools to the Early Help Hub doubled. There was also a strong focus on reducing the impact of poverty across all council directorates in Swansea. This priority was reflected in the work of all teams in the education directorate. Through their participation in the authority's poverty forum, officers in the education team have been able to consider how best to support schools, for example by sharing information about the use of credit unions.

# Leadership and management

The support for education communities from local authority leaders and elected members during the COVID-19 pandemic strengthened relationships between education services and schools. This has been beneficial in building trust and confidence among stakeholders in the work of officers in education services as schools and other education providers have returned to more usual ways of working. In Anglesey, these improved relationships supported better engagement to discuss and gather opinions on sensitive issues, for example on the reorganisation of schools in the Llangefni area, with discussions leading to a different proposal from the one put forward initially.

In Cardiff, the chair of the children and young people's scrutiny committee worked effectively with the four other scrutiny chairs, ensuring that education was at the heart of decision-making related to COVID-19. Cardiff's assistant director for education and his counterpart with responsibility for health and safety aligned their work effectively throughout the pandemic. Consequently, education services were able to respond swiftly to the needs of schools and other education providers as the COVID-19 situation changed. This support was very well received by school and setting leaders.

Last year, we found that scrutiny of education services was sound in many local authorities. In Swansea, the education scrutiny panel engages well with schools and, where appropriate, includes the views of pupils and school leaders when evaluating agenda items brought before them. In Cardiff, the children and young people's scrutiny committee provides strong and timely scrutiny on a number of relevant issues facing education in the local authority, including sensitive school organisation proposals. Committee members follow up areas of focus and write to the cabinet member to express their observations with suitably challenging recommendations. However, in Merthyr Tydfil, members of the learning and local government education services scrutiny committee do not provide enough robust challenge to the Cabinet member or officers in order to secure sufficient accountability or promote improvement.

Last year, local authorities prepared their Welsh in Education Strategic Plans for the 10-year period from 2022-2032. The quality and ambition of these plans vary greatly. The best plans are incisive and clear about their aims, and provide certainty about action. Less successful plans have little ambition and implementation details.

The variation across Wales is due to some extent to the linguistic context and structural pattern of provision for Welsh-medium and English-medium education. For example, in the south and north-east, the norm is to have designated Welsh-medium and English-medium schools and there is very little variation to this arrangement. In the north and south-west, there are complex patterns of designated Welsh-medium schools with a continuum of various arrangements of provision.

In the south-east, references to increasing Welsh-medium provision in mostly English-medium schools are limited. Plans identify aims to either fill the surplus places that already exist in the Welsh-medium education sector or open new schools in areas that are less accessible to Welsh-medium provision currently.

In local authorities in the south and north-west, the picture is more mixed. Five local authorities state clearly their aspiration to increase Welsh provision in schools that are mainly English-medium or that have Welsh streams. For example, Ceredigion identifies in its plan the steps towards ensuring that six of the seven secondary schools significantly increase their Welsh-medium provision during the ten-year period of the WESP. It identifies the actions towards realising these aims, for example by engaging with the governing bodies of those schools as part of the initial consultation.

In the local authorities we inspected, we evaluated the progress that local authorities had made in delivering their previous plans for developing Welsh in education. In Merthyr Tydfil, officers developed an action plan from their Welsh language strategy to promote the benefits of Welsh-medium education and improve standards of Welsh in Welsh-medium and English-medium schools. The strategy aims to create an environment where Welsh is a bigger part of everyday life for people in Merthyr Tydfil – a

'shwmaeronment'. In Cardiff, officers and elected members have invested in a suitable range of capital projects to increase Welsh-medium education capacity and recognise the need to be proactive in their planning of school places to stimulate demand for Welsh-medium education across the city.

In Torfaen, we found that the local authority has placed an increased focus on developing its Welsh-medium provision in recent years. There is sufficient capacity in Welsh-medium schools to meet the immediate demand and future growth. However, learners wishing to access post-16 provision through the medium of Welsh do not have access to the same range of courses as those studying through the medium of English. In three of the local authorities, we made recommendations about ensuring that future Welsh-medium provision meets the needs of learners in their authorities. We wrote in detail about the effectiveness of local authorities' use of Welsh immersion education as a tool to increase the number of Welsh speakers in our report, Welsh Immersion Education – Strategies and approaches to support 3 to 11-year-old learners.

Last year, as in previous years, we found weaknesses in local authority self-evaluation processes, in particular at service area level. Officers do not use information available to them to support their evaluation processes well enough or set precise enough success criteria against which they can measure success. This means that evaluation processes are not helpful to local authorities in identifying priority areas for improvement. We made recommendations about improving self-evaluation processes in four of the local authority education services that we inspected last year. This resource provides self-reflection prompts to support officers in local government education services to evaluate their work.

In all local authorities inspected last year we found that councils had prioritised funding for education. For example, in Merthyr Tydfil, the local authority increased and protected its education budget at a time of budget pressures across the authority and, for 2021-2022, increased its education budget above the Wales average. In most local authorities, schools' reserves overall increased significantly over the 2020-2021 financial year, largely due to additional funding being received from the Welsh Government. Despite this, a few schools in the local authorities we inspected forecast deficit budgets in the next financial year. Local authority finance teams worked effectively to monitor school budgets and support schools in managing surplus or deficit budgets.

During the current cycle of inspections, we have focused more closely on the safeguarding culture in local authority education services. In many local authorities we found that there is a strong corporate understanding that safeguarding is everyone's concern. In these authorities, senior members of staff take on the role of designated safeguarding officers and provide clear guidance to schools and settings on policies and practices to keep learners safe. However, in Torfaen local authority, we found that elected members did not have a strong enough overview of safeguarding in education.

# Sector report: Further education 2021-2022

## Providers

**12**

There are 12 colleges providing further education courses in Wales. Many cover multiple sites across a wide geographical area.

A majority operate under a group structure, with separate college identities for individual sites or regional site clusters. A few colleges operate as wholly owned subsidiaries of higher education institutions.

## Learners at further education institutions (FEIs)

**90,395**

**All FE learners at FEIs**
(2019-2020: 94,220 -3%)

**47,590**

**Full-time FE learners**
(2019-2020: 46,290 +3%)

**42,805**

**Part-time FE learners**
(2019-2020: 47,930 -11%)

**8.8%**

**Learners at FEIs with Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic Backgrounds**
(2019-2020: 8.5%)

**12.4%**

**Learners at FEIs identified as having a "disability and/or learning difficulty"**
(2019-2020: 13.6%)

## Core inspections

No. of inspections: **2**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, core inspections only resumed in March 2022.

Bridgend College
Coleg Sir Gar and Coleg Ceredigion

## Case studies

No. of case studies: **4**

Colleges with case studies:

Bridgend College 1 2
Coleg Sir Gar (Coleg Ceredigion) 1 2

## Engagement visits

No. of visits: **12**

All engagement visits took place between September and December 2021.

Autumn 2021 – FE summary report

## Follow-up

There are currently no further education colleges in follow-up.

# Sector report: Further education 2021-2022

## Learning

In September 2021, there was a backlog of incomplete vocational assessments especially for courses requiring work placements, such as childcare and health and social care, due to the pandemic restrictions. When we inspected later in the year, many learners were successfully working towards achieving their qualifications. In lessons and practical sessions, most learners made at least appropriate progress and many produced work of a higher standard. In the best cases, learners responded well to feedback from their teachers, revisiting their learning and improving on their work.

In classes, many learners recall recent learning effectively and a majority apply learning to new contexts well. Many learners engage, support and challenge each other in group discussions and respond well to verbal questions about their work.

During our core inspections. we identified that a majority of learners were starting their courses from a lower starting point than would have been expected. Overall, these learners' knowledge and skills were not as strong as that of similar cohorts before the pandemic, reflecting the disruption to their prior learning. In particular, the majority of learners' numeracy and wider mathematical skills were less well developed than previous cohorts and many learners did not make sufficient progress in developing their numeracy skills. This is despite more learners than usual starting college with GCSE English and mathematics qualifications at C grade or higher and fewer needing to do resits. This resource provides self-reflection questions to support teachers in further education to develop learners' numeracy skills in a vocational context.

Many learners studying qualifications that involved external examinations told us that they were particularly anxious about sitting the examinations, especially as many did not sit any external examinations during Years 10 and 11 due to disruption caused by the pandemic. Learners particularly valued opportunities to practise extended writing tasks and undertake mock examinations as part of their preparation for external assessments. Other learners commented that they felt they had missed out on important opportunities to undertake practical sessions during periods of lockdown restrictions and felt that, despite a return to face-to-face delivery this year, they were not as confident as they would have hoped about practical work and their ability to cope on higher level programmes.

# Well-being and attitudes to learning

Through our engagement activity, most colleges told us that there were much higher numbers of learners facing challenges with mental health issues than in previous years. Learners' well-being was adversely impacted by the pandemic, and many experienced challenges arising from a wide range of well-being issues, bereavement and homelessness. This impacted on their self-esteem, and confidence, and on their participation and engagement in their learning.

In our core inspections this year, we found that the number of learners seeking support for their emotional well-being and mental health had increased substantially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Learners benefited from accessing a comprehensive range of well-being support to discuss these issues. Most learners felt that the support they received made a positive difference to their well-being, resilience and their ability to sustain and progress in their learning.

Many learners demonstrated a strong appetite to return to college for face-to-face teaching and to benefit from the social aspects of college life. Many engaged well with additional provision that colleges put in place to develop their wider knowledge, practical skills, personal development, and employability skills in the wake of the pandemic.

# Teaching and learning experiences

Most colleges offered both full-time general education and vocational courses in addition to an extensive range of part-time courses. They offered a broad range of provision at different levels. This provided learners with well-planned progression opportunities onto higher level courses, higher education or apprenticeships.

By the start of 2021-2022, all colleges returned to mainly face-to-face on-site delivery. This reflected the clear preference of most learners and staff. Nearly all colleges retained a few aspects of online or blended delivery. A few colleges cited examples where continuing a blended approach had been beneficial to learners. For example, in one college, teachers skilfully develop learners' digital literacy skills in their vocational or academic subjects. As a result, learners demonstrate high levels of competency using digital platforms to store, record, organise and track their own learning. Nearly all colleges had a clear rationale for the hybrid approach, although in a few instances this was not communicated clearly enough to learners.

Nearly all teachers knew their learners well and built positive relationships that fostered learning. They supported learners to make at least appropriate progress towards achieving their qualifications or learning goals. Many teachers missed opportunities to

build literacy and numeracy skill development into classes other than through specifically scheduled skills lessons.

Most colleges increased the face-to-face enrichment opportunities available for learners as pandemic restrictions eased. These included activities such as academy programmes linked to sports and other interests, skills competitions, guest speakers, educational visits and learner exchange programmes.

## Cameo: Independent living skills (ILS) learners at Bridgend College benefit from clear learning pathways

The breadth of the ILS curriculum and the range of learning programmes at Bridgend College provide ILS learners with suitable and realistic routes into work, accessing the community and developing independence. The curriculum is based around four pathways and one supported internship route. Learners are allocated routes based on their aspirations and learning needs and learning aims support a personalised, non-accredited assessment process. Learners with moderate learning difficulties are given the opportunity to undertake meaningful work experience that supports progress towards longer-term work aspirations. In 2020-2021, these opportunities led to all learners on supported internships securing full-time paid employment.

Colleges planned their assessments and curriculum carefully in anticipation of the return of external examinations, while maintaining contingencies in case of further disruption. Many helped support and prepare learners for external assessments by increasing the frequency of formal internal assessments and ensuring that learner progress was monitored regularly. College leaders felt that they did not receive timely and clear guidance from awarding organisations, and they expressed particular concern about disparities between adaptations to assessment arrangements for academic and vocational programmes.

During this year, we also looked at the overall curriculum opportunities across schools, colleges and work-based learning for 16 to 19-year-olds across Wales. We found that there is too much variation in the opportunities for young people depending where they live. You can read more about our findings here.

# Care, support and guidance

In both our core inspections, we found that the colleges generally supported their learners well throughout their time in college. This included providing support during learners' transition into college and throughout their learning programme, as well as supporting progression into further learning or employment. Transition and support arrangements for learners with additional learning needs were generally effective and managed well.

Many colleges provided useful opportunities for learners to visit the college as part of familiarisation and preparation activities prior to formal induction programmes. Most colleges adopted a systematic approach to initial and diagnostic assessment of literacy and numeracy skills needs for all learners.

Most colleges identified a significant increase in the need for well-being support for learners during the pandemic. Many used temporary funding to employ additional well-being staff. These staff worked effectively alongside teachers and tutors to identify and provide support with issues that may be affecting learners' well-being, attendance and progress. Learners were provided with a variety of helpful well-being support including counselling, mentoring and workshops.

**Cameo: Coleg Sir Gar and Coleg Ceredigion makes effective use of integrated target setting and learner progress tracking system**

The additional learning needs department at Coleg Sir Gar and Coleg Ceredigion has developed a useful screening and assessment process to help identify individual learners' needs and inform decisions on available support options. All learners have a learning and support induction during the first two weeks of their course and then undertake an online screening process. The screening and diagnostic assessment process covers time management, reading, written work, memory concentration and organisation, social and communication skills, sensory processing, learning difficulties, medical and health conditions and previous exam arrangements. Outcomes of this process are used to creates useful class profiles for all teachers and help inform the classroom practice of teachers.

Accessing impartial advice and guidance continued to be a challenge for many learners as they left school and progressed to post-16 education. Our engagement report Engagement work – further education and adult learning in the community update – autumn 2021 highlighted that learners reported that they were not sufficiently aware of the range of progression options through information or guidance prior to applying to college. A few learners felt that the advice given by their schools focused predominantly on encouraging them to progress to the schools' own sixth forms. Information sharing arrangements between providers are not always formalised. This means that learners and parents/carers are often asked to disclose the same information on multiple occasions when they progress onto new provision

Learners' understanding of issues related to radicalisation and extremism was too variable across and within colleges. In both college inspections, we found that many learners were not able to recall or demonstrate an understanding of issues related to radicalisation and extremism. Tutorial materials relating to these issues were not always adapted to meet the needs of all learners.

## Leadership and management

Leaders and managers continued to respond positively to the ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the gradual relaxation of associated restrictions. They continued to place high importance on supporting the mental health

and emotional wellbeing of learners and staff. Most colleges used additional funding from Welsh Government to invest in useful resources to improve learners' well-being and to provide additional capacity to track and support learners' well-being.

Colleges used Welsh Government funding under the Renew and Reform COVID-19 Recovery Plan to support learners to transition to college. Most colleges also continued to invest in strengthening their digital capacity and in upskilling staff in the effective use of technology to support teaching, learning and assessment.

## Cameo: Staff at Coleg Sir Gar and Coleg Ceredigion benefit from a useful range of professional learning opportunities to help improve their digital skills

During the COVID-19 pandemic, college leaders responded quickly to the need to develop the digital skills of staff in order to continue to delivering learning within a digital learning environment. The college has strengthened its professional learning provision. Leaders have developed a comprehensive range of learning pathways for staff that deliver tailored, mentored training, in which the college encourages all staff to participate. This includes a comprehensive training programme for new governors, and a programme for teaching staff to develop their management skills.

The college's approach to professional development encourages staff to reflect on and record their strengths and skills, providing a valuable framework for managers to discuss good practice and improvement needs. Staff can either choose to have their performance evaluated through formal observations or to support each other's development in small groups.

Most colleges revised their self-evaluation and improvement planning arrangements in light of challenges arising from the pandemic. Many colleges also started to make greater use of peer assessment and mentoring support as part of their strategies to improve the quality of teaching.

The effects of the pandemic have accelerated the recruitment challenges many colleges were already facing. Many colleges experienced an increase in staff turnover and reported difficulties in recruiting staff to a few specialist teaching and support roles. Almost all leaders expressed difficulties recruiting Welsh-speaking staff. Staff recruitment to lower paid roles, such as learning support assistants and ancillary staff, was cited as being particularly challenging.

# Sector report: Work-based learning 2021-2022

## Providers

**10**

**No. of providers 2022: 10**
No. of providers 2021: 17

The reduction in work-based learning lead providers is due to the new Welsh Government contract for the delivery of apprenticeship programmes starting in August 2021.

Of the 10 providers, six are further education colleges and four are independent training providers. These providers work with a range of other training providers using consortia, partnership and sub-contracting arrangements to deliver training on apprenticeship programmes at all levels.

## Learners

**46,040**

**No. of apprenticeship learners**

**9,415**

**No higher apprenticeship learners**

**20,220**

**No. of level 3 learners**

**16,405**

**No. of level 2 learners (foundation apprenticeship)**

**5,695**

**No. learners in traineeships and other WBL programmes**

## Provision

Apprentices are employed and work in a wide range of occupations. Apprenticeships are available at level 2 and 3, and higher apprenticeship levels (level 4 and above). Learners undertaking apprenticeships are full-time members of their employer's staff. Apprenticeship programmes generally take two to three years to complete.

Apprentices enter their training at different levels depending upon the job, their previous experience and the needs of employers. As well as developing their job-related skills in the workplace, apprentices work towards achieving a series of recognised qualifications.

## Apprenticeship provider visits

From November 2021 to July 2022 we conducted visits to each of the 10 apprenticeship providers. Each visit resulted in a published letter.

https://www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection-process/work-based-learning-explained#work-basedlearningmonitoringvisitsseptember2021tojuly2022

## Employability programmes for 16 to 18-year-olds

The contract for training providers to deliver traineeships and engagement programmes for 16 to 18-year-olds ran up until March 2022. From April 2022, the Welsh Government contracted training providers to deliver a new programme, Jobs Growth Wales Plus. These new employability programmes are delivered in regions, with five providers as lead providers. Two are independent training providers, one as a lead provider in all regions, the other as a lead provider in three of the four regions. There are three further education colleges as lead providers in particular regions. Other further education providers, training providers and third sector organisations have sub-contracting arrangements across the regions for this training.

Due to the change of contracting arrangements, we carried out limited work related to this provision during 2021-2022.

# Sector report: Work-based learning 2021-2022

## Learning

Since their full return to their workplaces and face-to-face activity off-the-job in September 2021, most learners engaged particularly well in their practical and theory activities. As a result, most learners made at least appropriate progress and a few made strong progress. A high number of learners have been recruited onto most apprenticeship programmes. As a result, nearly all providers are at capacity to meet their contract.

During the pandemic, several key sectors such as health and care, and childcare remained open. Learners in the health and care sector were under considerable pressure during and after the pandemic. Although they remained in the workplace and in the most challenging environment due to restrictions, their assessors were not allowed to visit. As a result, these learners were unable to complete their assessments in a timely manner in order to achieve their apprenticeships.

New entrants joining apprenticeship programmes often had literacy and numeracy skills below the levels of those learners who joined pre-pandemic. This was mainly due to lost learning from school or college. In a minority of cases, learners lacked confidence and resilience, but with personal support from their assessors and employers this improved quickly. Overall, many learners strengthened their digital skills because of the need to access remote learning and use a range of computer packages to support their learning, which was a positive development.

During this year, new entrants to apprenticeship programmes often continued to experience limited training activities on and off-the-job. In the best cases, learners benefited from strong support from their employers who made sure that learners had wide ranging opportunities to undertake on-the-job assessment tasks. Learners generally made reasonable progress in their theory knowledge, but slower progress in their practical assessments. Although assessors now have full access to workplaces, the sector has suffered from high learner drop-out rates and particularly slow learner progress and achievement. In learning areas that required learners to develop a clear understanding of science, mathematics and technologies, they missed the off the job activities and the support they gained from these sessions. Although hospitality and catering provision improved, health and social care continued to face challenges during this year. Dental nursing was also affected, with many learners leaving programmes early and not returning to the industry. Demand for construction apprenticeships was high, with employers recruiting increasing numbers of apprentices to meet their demanding workload.

# Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all learners welcomed their return to the workplace and off-the-job training. Although a very few were anxious about returning, attendance in the workplace and off-the-job was high.

Overall, learners enjoyed their training activities and demonstrated positive attitudes to their learning. They worked well with their employer, peers and clients. These learners quickly became valued members of their employer's workforce and in the best cases, especially with higher level apprenticeships, learners took responsibility for their learning. Learners continuing their apprenticeships post-pandemic and new entrants were enthusiastic about their training and motivated to succeed, with the majority keen to progress to the next level.

# Teaching and learning experiences

During the lockdown, teachers, trainers and assessors moved to remote learning quickly. This ability to respond swiftly was partly due to the previous work providers had done in using online learner portfolios and progress tracking. Many had also developed hubs where teaching and learning materials could be stored and accessed by teachers, trainers and assessors and learners.

When training centres and colleges were allowed to reopen, they prioritised learners who needed to complete outstanding practical assessments. Completing these assessments presented many problems for providers including:

- the adaptations that needed to be made, including social distancing
- the limited number of learners allowed in a workshop space
- restrictions on movement
- the need to wear face masks
- identification of COVID-19 symptoms
- restricting access and entry
- developing one-way systems
- only a few learners being able to use large workshops at any one time due to distancing rules

When learners returned to their employers and off-the-job training, they once again experienced a rich mix of activities, including remote sessions where appropriate. Most providers recognised that elements of remote learning would remain postpandemic. In most cases, learners' progress reviews could be undertaken effectively remotely, with the benefit of less assessor travel and more time to spend with the learner. Higher apprenticeship learners usually undertake their programmes remotely, especially in leadership and management and digital skills. However, on most programmes, providers did not have a clear rationale for the balance of face-to-face and remote learning activity.

Nearly all teachers, trainers and assessors developed positive working relationships with learners that helped to support them to progress with their practical and theory work. In the best cases, provider staff knew their learners particularly well and gave strong levels of personal support that helped to build learner confidence and resilience. Assessors and training staff were flexible in the way they engaged with learners to adapt delivery methods to suit their learners' needs, particularly in accommodating learners' shift patterns and work pressures. Providers placed a high priority on using their accommodation and staff resources flexibly to make sure that learners had access to facilities and workshops to complete practical assessments and catch up with lost learning.

Many teachers, trainers and assessors had appropriate expectations of learners and set realistic, but challenging, targets for the completion of written work and practical assessments. In the minority of cases where teaching, training and assessment could be improved:

- All teachers, trainers and assessors did not challenge learners to achieve high quality work.
- Off-the-job theory sessions were not engaging enough.
- Learners' individual learning plans often had generic target dates for the completion of work. These plans did not take into account learners' starting points, their prior experience or the progress they were making.

## Care, support and guidance

Across the network, work-based learning providers were acutely aware of the support learners may need to help them succeed. During the pandemic and upon the return to face-to-face activity, provider staff made learners' well-being their highest priority. In all providers, trainers, assessors and specialist support staff gave learners targeted help with their well-being and personal support needs. Where appropriate, staff referred learners to specialist agencies, such as counselling services. As a result of strong provider and external agency support, many learners remained on programmes and made progress. Due

to this focused support, many learners felt well cared for by their provider and completed or made strong progress towards completing their apprenticeship.

Many providers strengthened their procedures for tracking learners' progress and well-being during the pandemic. In the best cases, these processes included the development of an at-risk learner register. These registers allowed staff to maintain regular contact with particularly vulnerable learners and provide high levels of personal support. The registers and regular contact gave providers early warning if learners were experiencing difficulties and allowed them to put a wide range of interventions in place quickly when a need was identified. As a result, these learners generally remained on-programme and their health and well-being werewell supported.

Across the work-based learning network, teachers, trainers and assessors understood their roles and responsibility well in relation to safeguarding learners. In many cases, teachers, trainers and assessors developed learners' understanding of radicalisation appropriately.

## Leadership

During the initial year of the new apprenticeship contract, working relationships with sub-contractors and partners have been well established and relationships, processes and practices with new sub-contractors are being developed. All providers have taken on displaced learners from training providers who were not awarded an apprenticeship contract. Leaders and staff are supporting these learners well to make progress in completing their apprenticeship programmes.

Building on work during the pandemic, senior leaders strengthened their communication with key partners, including consortia members, new subcontractors, employers, and staff. This communication was wide-ranging and varied and included remote meetings, emails, and vlogs to provide updates and information on key developments such as employer demand, learner performance, and updates from the Welsh Government and awarding bodies. This was particularly beneficial to key partners and staff, who appreciated the support they were being given. This resource provides self-reflection questions to support work-based learning providers to further improve partnership working.

Professional learning was a high priority across providers, with remote delivery and digital skills being key areas of development. Leaders placed a strong focus on supporting their staff to develop their digital skills to help learners maintain their engagement and make progress. Coming out of the pandemic, leaders took the opportunity to reflect on remote learning and plan future remote learning activity where it provided most benefit to learners. In the best cases, providers recognised that remote learning suited a few learner groups better than face-to-face learning.

During lockdown and the return to face-to-face teaching, managers placed a clear focus on supporting the well-being of learners and teachers, trainers and assessors. Although providers maintained many aspects of their quality assurance processes it was particularly difficult to review the effectiveness of teaching, training and assessment. This was especially the case early in the pandemic where senior managers were mindful of the balance between holding staff to account and supporting their health and well-being. As the year progressed, in the best cases managers developed strategies to review the effectiveness of teaching, assessment and learning. However, challenges remain due to the difficulties related to the complexity of the assessment and training arrangements for vocational and technical qualifications.

# Sector Report: Adult learning in the community 2021-2022

## Partnerships

Adult learning in the community (ALC) is delivered by 13 partnerships across Wales and the further education institution, Addysg Oedolion Cymru / Adult Learning Wales.

Membership of the partnerships differs from area to area, but most include provision offered by the local authority, further education college and voluntary or community organisations.

Adult learning in the community provision normally takes places in community venues, such as libraries, community learning centres or schools.

The Welsh Government funds partnerships to deliver courses in literacy, numeracy, digital skills, English as a second language courses and other courses that help learners to apply and develop these skills.

## Learners at adult learning in the community partnerships

In 2020-2021, the overall number of adult learners was 5,555. This represents a decline of 32% from the previous year and is part of a longer-term decline in the number of adult learners on Welsh Government funded programmes. The further large fall in 2020-2021 may be at least partly due to the continued disruption to education caused by the Coronavirus pandemic.

During the pandemic, nearly all provision took place online. Since COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, all providers have now returned to mainly face-to-face delivery, although nearly all partnerships continue to deliver some of their provision in an online or blended way.

## Summary findings

This section of the Annual Report presents our full findings on this theme for the academic year 2021-2022. Click here to view a summary of these findings.

## Follow-up

There is one adult learning in the community partnership in follow-up.

## Core inspections

No. of inspections: **2**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, core inspections only resumed from March 2022.

Learn Pembrokeshire

North East Wales Adult Community Learning partnership

## Case studies

No. of case studies: **3**

Learn Pembrokeshire  **x1**

Wrexham and Flintshire ACL partnership 1 2

## Engagement visits

No. of visits: **12**

All engagement visits took place between September and December 2021.

Autumn 2021 – ALC summary report

# Learning

Nearly all partnerships reported an increase in the number of learners enrolling on ALC courses compared to the period during the pandemic, although the number of learners enrolling remained below pre-pandemic levels.

On their courses, most learners made sound progress in developing their literacy, numeracy or digital skills, or improving their English language skills.

At both providers we inspected during spring and summer 2022 (such as Wrexham and Flintshire), learners on family learning programmes made strong progress in developing their literacy, numeracy, artistic skills, social skills and general knowledge at the same time as developing their understanding of their children's learning.

# Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all learners were pleased to be back in learning after the periods of isolation during the pandemic. Many reported a loss of confidence, which returning to learning helped them to rebuild. On engagement programmes in particular, learners reported that their mental health and wellbeing had improved as a result of their learning.

Where learning took place online, many learners valued the flexibility that online learning brings. For example, in a minority of cases, learners prefer to continue with online classes as they fit better with personal commitments and lifestyle. Many engaged well and participated fully in sessions. In a very few cases, however, learners' participation in online classes was limited and the progress they made was slower than when classes were face-to-face.

# Teaching and learning experiences

In the inspections we carried out during the spring and summer of 2022, the quality of teaching was generally sound. Tutors planned and delivered their sessions well and developed strong professional relationships with their learners. Many tutors support learners well to structure their individual learning plans and set learning and personal targets.

In general, partnerships offered a range of provision, which aligned appropriately to Welsh Government priorities. However, a few partnerships did not plan their provision with partners well enough to ensure that learners have clear progression pathways within the provision or on to further, higher level studies or training. A few partnerships did not provide sufficient opportunities for Welsh-speaking learners to participate in adult learning in the community in bilingual or Welsh-speaking sessions.

# Care, support and guidance

Most partnerships provided courses tailored to learners with a range of learning needs or those who have had interrupted, disrupted or unhappy previous experiences of formal education. In planning provision, most providers took into account the need to reengage learners following the pandemic and that learners and those considering enrolling onto classes may have lost confidence during the pandemic. Most tutors provided useful individual learning support to meet their learners' needs.

We found that about half of partnerships have helpful and well-designed websites, which allow prospective learners quick access to useful information about courses. In the best cases, learners can enrol online. A few partnerships do not have well-developed websites and finding information about courses was not straightforward. A few used social media sites to advertise their provision. This is effective for prospective learners with social media accounts but does not allow straightforward access for those without.

## Leadership and management

A few partnerships such as Wrexham and Flintshire made strong progress towards developing larger regional partnerships. However, this progress was still patchy across Wales, and a few partnerships made little formal progress in this respect.

Nearly all partnerships were adjusting to different circumstances following the pandemic. These included partnerships carrying out reviews of their provision, restructuring their provision and delivery, and responding to staff changes and retirements.

In a few partnerships, relationships between partners were not formalised well enough and relied too much on personal contacts. Joint planning with partners for progression, to reduce duplication or to provide opportunities for bilingual or Welsh-medium provision, was not effective enough.

This resource provides self-reflection prompts to support adult learning partnerships to improve collaboration.

# Sector report: Initial teacher education 2021-2022

## Partnerships

There are seven partnerships (comprising universities and their partner schools) of initial teacher education (ITE) in Wales. The partnerships provide undergraduate and post-graduate routes into teaching. A part-time PGCE and an employment-based route are provided by the Open University Partnership.

## Inspection

This year, we also undertook the first inspection of the new cycle in ITE. This was a pilot inspection, which enabled us to test our new inspection guidance and approaches.

In collaboration with the sector, we undertook two further 'try-out' activities virtually, to test out different inspection methodologies. In October, we published a report that summarised the main messages from the try-outs.

## Recruitment

In September 2021, 1,402 students were recruited onto full-time ITE programmes.

Seven-hundred and eighty-five joined primary programmes and 617 began secondary programmes. In addition, 162 students (48 secondary and 114 primary) were recruited to the Open University's routes.

After several years of poor recruitment, there was an overall increase in the number of students recruited to ITE programmes in 2019-2020. However, this year, there has been a slight decrease in recruitment. Primary numbers decreased by nearly 3%, and secondary by nearly 11%. However, this trend varied from partnership to partnership. The number of students training in secondary shortage subjects remains a concern. The recruitment of students to teach through the medium of Welsh continues to be a significant problem, particularly on secondary programmes.

### Summary findings

This section of the Annual Report presents our full findings on this theme for the academic year 2021-2022. Click here to view a summary of these findings.

## Learning and well-being

Most students displayed positive attitudes towards entering the teaching profession. They particularly enjoyed their school experiences and developed good working relationships with pupils and school staff. Partnership staff felt that students developed specific qualities such as resilience and adaptability by working within the COVID-19 restrictions.

As COVID-19 restrictions eased and pupils returned to the classroom, students benefited from a renewed emphasis on well-being and behaviour in their placement schools. They learned helpful routines to organise pupils, spaces, and materials, and developed their confidence in classroom management.

Throughout the year, partnerships maintained valuable strategies to support students' well-being that they had enhanced during the pandemic. Regular 'check-ins' with university tutors and peers helped students to discuss any issues and to focus on their progress. As COVID-19 restrictions lessened, students valued the opportunity to meet tutors and their peers face-to-face. This helped them to develop positive professional relationships.

Overall, partnerships made helpful use of their tracking systems to identify students who were falling behind in their progress. They implemented robust procedures to support these students. However, a minority of students occasionally struggled to manage their workload, especially when balancing the demands of assignments and preparing for teaching.

Students worked well with one another and collaborated productively on developing their teaching. They engaged well with assignments that were linked purposefully to their school experiences. However, some students regarded their academic assignments as a necessity to pass the programme, rather than a way to enhance their skills, knowledge and understanding of teaching. There was significant variability in the quality and effectiveness of students' lesson planning.

## Teaching and learning experiences

All partnerships have designed ITE programmes with a clear rationale based on education reform in Wales. As a result, students developed their knowledge and understanding of the key features of the Curriculum for Wales well. There were valuable opportunities for primary and secondary students to work across phases to explore cross-curricular work and to explore teaching and learning approaches. In a few partnerships, students, particularly those on secondary programmes, did not have a good enough understanding of effective planning to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Overall, students' exposure to effective curriculum design and delivery was too variable. This partly due to the pandemic. Students' school experiences have been limited, and schools' progress in curriculum development differs from school to school in pace and understanding. Furthermore, partnerships' procedures to quality assure students' experiences have also been affected negatively by the restrictions, resulting in a lack of unity in learning experiences.

In the best examples, there was coherence between the taught programme in school and university. There was clear communication across the partnership and the different components of the programme were aligned well to make effective links between theory and practice.

Mentors demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting their students and help them to develop teaching strategies. They used their experience well to support students, particularly with their classroom management. However, too many mentors did not engage students routinely in linking theory to practice or help them to think creatively about their teaching.

All partnerships have developed helpful electronic systems to track students' progress and to help students take ownership of their own development. Work to ensure that tutors and mentors evaluate students' progress in school accurately, consistently and holistically was at an early stage of development. This resource provides self-reflection questions to support the evaluation of the quality of learning experiences in initial teacher education.

# Leadership

All partnerships demonstrated a commitment to collaboration and a genuine desire to support the reform of ITE in Wales. All partnerships had clear leadership structures and ensured that there was representation from across the partnership at each level of leadership. Most partnerships had developed beneficial leadership sub-groups to drive the development of important areas of the partnership's work, such as approaches to research or Welsh language development. Partnerships had begun to develop lines of accountability through their leadership structures, although, in a few instances, roles and responsibilities were not sufficiently clear.

All partnerships planned regular opportunities to reflect on the quality of the programmes and student outcomes based on data and first-hand evidence, including the views of students. However, the restrictions of the pandemic meant that partnerships had not undertaken quality assurance procedures and individual mentor development as planned. As a result, students had significantly variable experiences in their school experiences. This resource provides self-reflection questions to support the evaluation of the quality of mentoring in initial teacher education.

Although all partnerships collected a wealth of information on the views of students, they did not triangulate this well enough with other sources of evidence. Overall, self-evaluation and planning for improvement processes were not sharp enough, particularly at identifying what needs to improve in teaching and learning experiences.

All partnerships had a clear strategy to develop research and inquiry across the partnership. They were increasingly involved in national and international research. In the most effective instances, tutors and mentors drew on their own research to support students' learning. This clear focus on developing research and inquiry represents a 'culture shift' in ITE in Wales and is already having a positive impact in practice in both university and schools.

# Sector report: Welsh for adults 2021-2022

## Providers

**11**

11 Dysgu Cymraeg/Learn Welsh providers under the National Centre for Learning Welsh, which funds and quality assures their work

## Learners

**14,965**

**Individual learners during 2020-2021**

**17,505**

**Individual learners during 2019-2020**

N.B. Funding for the Work Welsh scheme was reduced in April 2020 and continued to the end of March 2021, and therefore data from 1 August 2020 to 31 July 2021 was affected.

## Summary findings

This section of the Annual Report presents our full findings on this theme for the academic year 2021-2022. Click here to view a summary of these findings.

## Case studies

**Learn Welsh North West**

Using research to underpin teaching and learning strategies: Research that underpins teaching and learning strategies | Estyn (gov.wales)

Implementing formal and informal learning methods that enable learners to integrate into the Welsh language community: Formal and informal learning approaches that enable learners to assimilate into the Welsh-speaking community | Estyn (gov.wales)

**Learn Welsh Ceredigion Powys**

Working purposefully with other organisations to provide Welsh language training for the education workforce. Inspection report Dysgu Cymraeg Ceredigion - Powys - Sir Gar 2022 (gov.wales)

## Inspection reports

**Learn Welsh North West (November 2021)**

Inspection report Learn Welsh North West 2022 (gov.wales)

**Learn Welsh Carmarthenshire (February 2022)**

Inspection report Dysgu Cymraeg Sir Gâr 2022 (gov.wales)

**Learn Welsh Ceredigion - Powys - Carmarthenshire**

Learn Welsh Ceredigion – Powys – Carmarthenshire

Learn Welsh Statistics 2020-2021

## Provision

Nearly all provision continued online during 2021-2022. As well as Learn Welsh provision, most Work Welsh programmes to increase Welsh language skills in the workplace restarted this year. Following a rapid review of provision, https://gov.wales/rapid-review-national-centre-learning-welsh-html (August 2021), provision will extend to provide 16 to 25-year-olds with free access to Welsh for adults courses.

## Inspections

3 core inspections undertaken during 2021-2022.

In WfA we give summative judgements – see outcomes below.

Nearly all lessons in the providers inspected were held online and all inspections were carried our virtually.

## Follow-up

There is no follow-up in the sector. Progress against all recommendations to individual providers is discussed with the National Centre for Learning Welsh and considered as part of their inspection. We last inspected the Centre in January 2021 and will inspect it again in 2024.

# Sector report: Welsh for adults 2021-2022

## Learning

Many learners made effective progress in acquiring and improving their Welsh language skills, particularly their speaking skills. In a few cases, however, learners were reluctant to engage with the online provision or had difficulty doing so because of connectivity issues. This resource provides self-reflection questions to support Welsh for adults providers to improve learners' speaking skills.

A notable strength of the sector is how it successfully encourages many learners to use their language skills outside the classroom and integrate positively within Welsh-speaking communities and networks. In the best examples, learners took responsibility for proactively arranging activities to practise their Welsh.

## Well-being and attitudes to learning

Many learners stated that the fact that learning continued online throughout the pandemic was beneficial to their mental health and well-being. This allowed them to acquire new skills and interact with others when many aspects of their usual lives were no longer available to them.

Providers succeeded in creating close-knit, caring communities of learners, with nearly all learners undertaking their learning online during 2021-2022. Nearly all learners clearly enjoyed their lessons and learners from all over Wales, the UK and across the world interacted beneficially with each other in distance learning that broadened their horizons. They discussed matters about their own countries and lives while practising and improving their Welsh language skills.

## Teaching and learning experiences

Teaching was highly effective in two providers inspected and ensured that learners made strong progress. Where teaching was most effective, tutors challenged learners effectively through using a wide range of techniques to extend their language skills, particularly their ability to hold extended conversations appropriate to their level. Generally, most tutors adapted their teaching approaches well to online learning. A few tutors across providers, particularly at the formative lower course levels, did not take sufficiently purposeful steps to correct recurring errors and inaccurate pronunciation. In these cases, tutors did not ensure that learners used new vocabulary and language patterns with

increasing accuracy and confidence. In a very few instances, tutors did not challenge learners well enough and, as a result, learners did not extend their answers, which in turn limited their progress.

Many tutors enriched learners' knowledge of Welsh history and culture during lessons, providing valuable context for their learning. They also encouraged learners successfully to use their Welsh language skills outside of the classroom.

During the year not all providers returned to offering some level of face-to-face learning for learners who were unable, often due to poor connectivity, or unwilling to continue their courses online.

## Care, support and guidance

The standard of care, support and guidance was an area of strength and was good or better in all providers inspected. Tutors created a supportive, positive, and motivating environment where nearly everyone felt safe and contributed to lessons without fear of making mistakes. Providers offer effective support and guidance to learners before and after enrolment, including appropriate provision for learners with additional learning needs. They operated established and effective arrangements to seek learners' views and act upon them beneficially.

## Leadership

Leaders in all providers had a clear vision and aims that aligned well with those of the National Centre for Learning Welsh and Welsh Government policy to increase the numbers of active Welsh speakers. Providers played a vital role in influencing the increasing use of the Welsh language within their host institutions and assisting them to strategically plan to achieve this. Two of the providers implemented innovative strategies to improve and extend provision for learners. For example, they used research to underpin teaching and learning strategies, implemented formal and informal learning methods that enabled learners to integrate into the Welsh language community and worked purposefully with other organisations to provide Welsh language training for the education workforce. This work links well with the new wider remit for the National Centre to collaborate with local authorities and regional consortia to support the teaching of Welsh in English-medium schools and provide a language learning pathway from school to post-compulsory education.

Providers offered valuable continuous professional development to their tutors, either themselves or through training provided by the National Centre for Learning Welsh. For example, beneficial training was provided to improve tutors' ability to teach online. This professional learning had a positive impact on the standards of teaching and learning.

In some instances, providers had overlapping responsibility for the same geographical area. However, national data systems did not allow providers to track the progress of learners who moved between providers. This prevented providers from making effective use of data to validate the standards and progress of learners who move between them.

Overall, providers evaluated their work honestly and effectively. However, in one provider self-evaluation did not identify strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning well enough. This affected the effectiveness of the teaching and the standards that learners attained.

# Sector report: Justice 2021-2022

## Prisons and young offender institutions

**5**

**Number of prisons in Wales**
One of which also manages an open prison

**1**

**Number of young offenders' institutions**

### Provision

In nearly all prisons in Wales, education and training was delivered by the prisons, rather than external agencies. In HMP Berwyn, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service contracts with Novus Cambria to deliver education.

### Inspections

Inspections are led by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons. This year, Estyn worked with partners to inspect the provision for young people in Young Offender Institution (YOI) Parc. We also participated in the inspections of HMP Berwyn and the adult provision of HMP Parc.

HMI Prisons' published inspection reports can be found here: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons

## Youth offending services (YOS)

**17**

**Number of youth offending services (YOS) in Wales**

### Provision

Youth offending services work with young people that get into trouble with the law and also try to support them stay away from crime. Education, training and employment support is one of the specialist services provided by a YOS.

### Inspections

Inspections are led by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.

This year we carried out inspection activities in Conwy and Denbighshire YOS as part of HMI Probation's joint thematic review of education, employment and training services in youth offending teams in England and Wales. We also joined the reinspection of Cardiff YOS.

HMI Probation's reports are published here: Her Majesty's inspectorate of Probation

## Secure children's homes

**1**

**Number of Secure Children's Homes in Wales**

### Provision

Secure children's homes provide secure placements for young people aged between 10 and 17 and include full residential care, educational facilities and healthcare provision.

### Inspections

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) leads on inspections of the secure children's home but did not carry out any inspections this year.
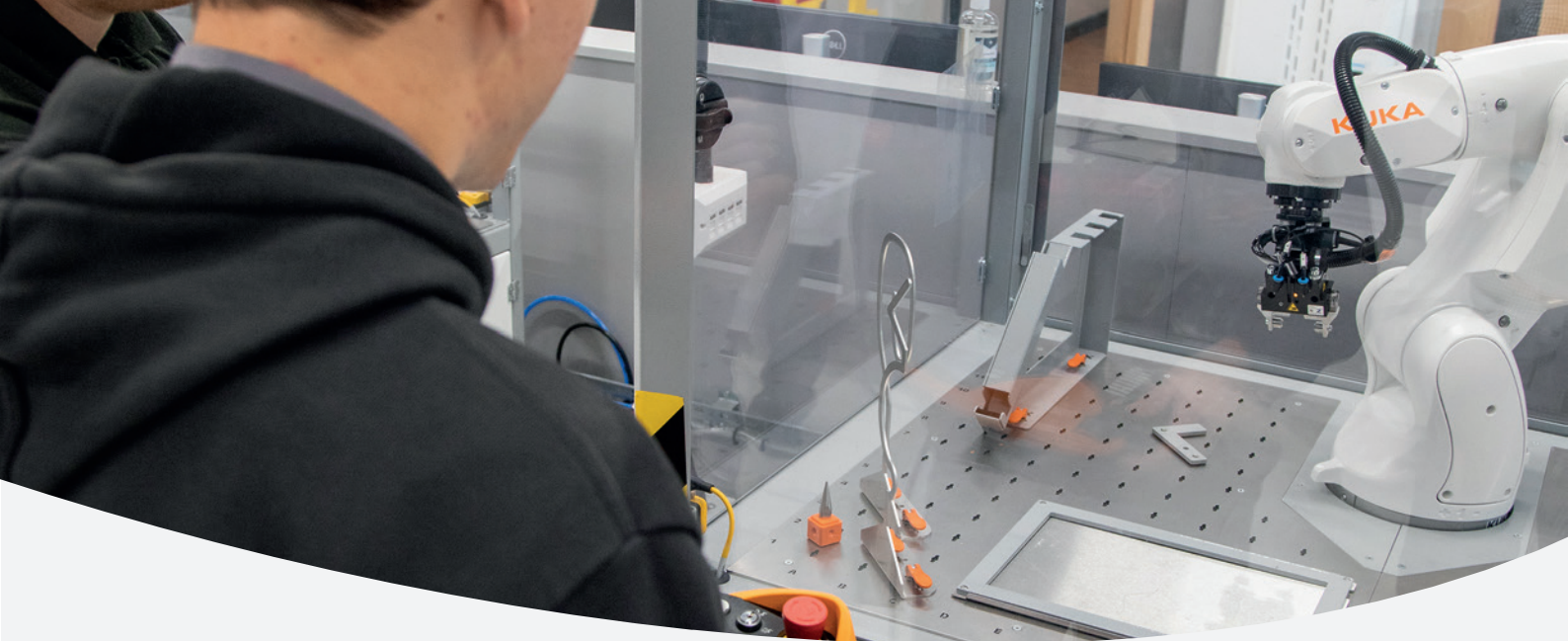
## Learning

During the pandemic restrictions in prisons, most adult prisoners were confined to their cells for up to 23 hours a day. The strong support that learners received from prison staff and peer mentors enabled many of those engaged in education to continue to access learning materials from their rooms. In HMP Berwyn, a minority of learners took advantage of in-cell telephony and IT to continue with their learning. In HMP Parc, staff and peer mentors helped learners by bringing them the materials they needed for their studies. This enabled those who participated in education to make good progress in learning, with most completing their learning targets and qualifications.

Since its last inspection, Cardiff YOS had improved young people's access to education. However, it was still too early to see the impact of changes at individual learner level.

In the HMI Probation thematic inspection visit to Conwy and Denbighshire YOS, we found that many young people of school age engaged well with the service and improved their engagement in education. However, there were several examples of young people whose post16 progression had been stalled because their literacy skills were not sufficiently advanced to enable them take on higher levels of training.

## Well-being

In all prisons, prisoners were given activity packs and art equipment, which many found to be a helpful distraction, and which helped them to cope with their confinement. In YOI Parc, careful planning enabled young people to access workshops or class-based sessions throughout the period of restrictions, while minimising their risks of exposure to infection. This continued provision occupied them in a purposeful manner and supported their well-being.

When COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, prisons moved quickly to fully reopen education and work provision, enabling learners to return to learning quickly. While most learners were pleased to be taking part in sessions again, a minority in HMP Berwyn found it more difficult to get used to going to sessions, and their attendance was poor.

## Teaching and learning experiences

Overall, standards of teaching in prisons were good. Nearly all teachers knew their learners well and planned teaching effectively to ensure that sessions met individual learners' needs. Both adult prisons made very effective use of peer mentors. These mentors supported learners well, enabling them to overcome barriers to their learning and to make better progress in the sessions they attended. Education and training staff paid good attention to strengthening prisoners' literacy and numeracy skills and nearly all prisoners improved these skills by at least one level. In the prisons we inspected, the breadth of the curriculum offer was excellent, and the range of available subjects took good account of the skills that employers need. Nearly all vocational workshops gave learners a learning environment that was realistic and that prepared them for the world of work.

Probation staff in each YOS were clear about the importance of literacy and numeracy skills to enable young people to make effective progress and transition successfully into education, employment or training. However, neither of the services we inspected had a clear strategy to ensure appropriate, targeted support for those young people who most needed to develop these skills. Nearly all YOS case workers aimed to develop clients' wider skills, such as confidence, social skills and selfesteem, in which many learners needed to make progress. However, services did not have clear systems to track the progress young people made in developing these skills.

## Care, support and guidance

In prisons, staff provided learners with a useful induction where they explained what education, vocational learning and work opportunities were available to them. They assessed their literacy and numeracy skills and signposted learners to courses at appropriate levels. This helped new arrivals to plan how they could best spend their time in prison. There were appropriate tracking systems to monitor learners' progress and, in Parc YOI, staff met weekly to discuss how all learners were progressing, enabling staff to ensure that they were offering individually tailored support.

Staff in both adult prisons had received training to improve their awareness of learners' additional learning needs (ALN). However, staff understanding of how they could ensure that their teaching strategies were best tailored to more complex ALN was still too variable.

# Leadership

Throughout the pandemic, leaders in prisons worked effectively with a team of dedicated staff to maximise the opportunities that prisoners had to access learning resources and to ensure that work activities, where possible, could continue. They gave a high priority to restoring full access to education, skills and employment, enabling prisoners to resume their involvement in activities at the earliest opportunity. Strategic planning reflected the high regard that prison leaders have for the value of education in reducing learners' offending behaviour. When planning to strengthen provision, leaders took good account of labour market information and developed strong links with local employers in order to improve employment prospects for prisoners. However, in HMP Berwyn, staff across the prison did not do enough to challenge prisoners who chose not to participate in education, training or work.

In both YOSs we visited, staff had developed good links with the local authorities and opportunity providers to support young people in progressing into work-based learning and employment. However, not enough had been done at a strategic level to evaluate the impact of interventions or to develop strategies that ensured that all learners developed the skills they needed to make the best progress they could.

# Thematics on a page

# All-age schools in Wales

## A report on the challenges and successes of establishing all age schools

In January 2022, we published our thematic report on the challenges and successes of establishing all-age schools in Wales. The report draws upon evidence gathered through visits to all the all-age schools that are open in Wales. Local authorities were contacted for their views through a combination of phone calls and visits. Prior to the start of the pandemic in March 2020, during visits to providers, the team interviewed leaders and teachers. They met with governors and carried out learning walks. Pupils' views were gathered through interviews during these visits.

After activity resumed in April 2021, interviews with staff and pupils were limited due to COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, instead, inspectors analysed existing information about all-age schools to establish the context and background. They also considered inspection evidence available.

### Our recommendations include:

The Welsh Government should:

**R1** Consider introducing national all-age schools guidance to support all-age schools, their leaders, governors and local authorities

Local authorities / regional consortia should:

**R2** Ensure that consultation on establishing an all-age school is meaningful, transparent and helpful in engaging the local community to support change to improve the provision for their children

**R3** Appoint leaders for new all-age schools early to provide enough planning and preparation time

**R4** Provide better focused, sector-specific training and support, for example to improve classroom practice across all phases of the school

Schools should:

**R5** Continue to plan and provide a rich curriculum that naturally progresses across the full age range

**R6** Collaborate further with other schools to develop all-age school policies and procedures, and share good practice

## What did our thematic survey say?

### The rationale for establishing an all-age school

Despite support for the establishment of all-age schools, there is no national guidance available for local authorities and school leaders. Therefore, local authorities have their own, diverse plans to suit their unique circumstances. These are nearly always part of that authority's wider school organisation plans.

Welsh Government guidance is usually separate for primary and secondary schools, which makes it difficult for all-age schools to consider and navigate in order to establish their own position statements. As a result, the all-age schools sector is not currently recognised as a discrete sector well enough.

The national network of all-age schools brings a worthwhile sense of belonging to a newly emerging, separate sector. Due to a lack of national guidance, this group has provided support for each other, brokered grants from external sources and worked to highlight the pitfalls and best practice. Most local authorities anticipate that the benefits of an all-age school will outweigh the disadvantages. Over time, local authorities have learnt from each other's experiences, as well as making use of the research into successful all-age models.

## Setting up all-age schools

Where new all-age schools have been most successful, leaders and the local authority have engaged well with the local community. Leaders have taken time to outline the benefits for pupils and the community, to ease concerns and provide reassurances. Parents, staff and governors have valued being kept informed of the process and procedures.

Local authorities generally have provided appropriate support for governing bodies during the process of establishing an all-age school. In particular, support from human resources and legal departments has ensured that, normally, correct procedures are followed. However, support for headteachers has varied across Wales.

Most schools adopted a leadership structure where leaders have whole school responsibilities that span all phases. In the few instances where this was not established from the beginning, schools have quickly realised its advantage and adapted their leadership responsibilities accordingly.

## The impact of an all-age school model

In nearly all all-age schools, a significant proportion of pupils transition from partner primary schools into Year 7. This could be as many as 94% of the cohort down to 20%. On transfer from Year 6 to Year 7, schools report that pupils from within an all-age school settle well in Year 7 and make better progress in their first year than those who transition from separate primary schools.

Pastoral care and support for pupil wellbeing are a strength in most all-age schools, having been a priority since schools opened. This means that provision and interventions in many schools are often seamless and build to bring about improvements to outcomes during the child's time at the school.

Most teachers work together to plan and implement a curriculum that considers progression across all phases. Most schools have developed their vision for the Curriculum for Wales and began trialling resources and approaches. This includes realising the need for a coherent curriculum that considers progress appropriately.

Professional learning arrangements in all-age schools are particularly useful, including the sharing of good practice in teaching internally or between schools. However, external professional learning is often not specific enough for the all-age sector.

When establishing and developing leadership teams for all-age schools, governors realise that schools require skills from primary and secondary sector backgrounds. Overall, successful all-age leadership teams normally comprise of a mix of leaders with different sector backgrounds.

The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement across the sector is variable. However, in the best examples, schools evaluate provision and standards across and between phases.

# "We don't tell our teachers"

## Peer-on-peer sexual harassment in secondary schools in Wales

In December 2021, we published our thematic report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment in secondary schools in Wales, following a request from the Education Minister in June of that year. In autumn 2021, we visited 35 secondary and independent schools across Wales. We discussed peer-on-peer sexual harassment with around 1,300 young people and used the feedback to write our report.

### Our recommendations:

Schools should:

**R1** Recognise that peer-on-peer sexual harassment is highly prevalent in the lives of young pupils and adopt a whole-school preventative and proactive approach to dealing with it

**R2** Provide sufficient, cumulative and beneficial learning opportunities for pupils across the whole age range about healthy relationships, sex and sexuality education

**R3** Improve the way they record, categorise and analyse incidences of harassment and bullying

**R4** Ensure all school staff receive regular and purposeful professional learning opportunities on personal and social education matters, including relationships, sexuality, diversity and gender transitioning

Local authorities (LA) and regional consortia (RC) should:

**R5** Work with schools to collect and categorise and analyse all bullying and harassment data correctly and comprehensively

**R6** Plan suitable intervention and support on gender issues at both school and local authority level, evaluating regularly their impact on pupil well-being.

**R7** Provide school staff with the necessary professional learning to adopt a proactive approach to peer-on-peer sexual harassment, including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and harassment

The Welsh Government should:

**R8** Work with local authorities to improve the way they collect bullying and harassment information from schools and ensure that local authorities identify and respond to patterns and trends in behaviour

## What did our thematic survey say?

Around half of all pupils and a majority of girls say they have personal experience of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and three quarters of all pupils report seeing other pupils experiencing this. This happens more online and outside school than in school. The most common forms of peer-on-peer sexual harassment during the school day are pupils catcalling and making hurtful comments, making homophobic comments (mainly towards boys), and comments about appearance.

Many pupils don't tell teachers or other adults about the harassment because they feel that it happens so often, and that it has become 'normal' behaviour. Over half of all pupils feel more comfortable telling a friend about sexual harassment than telling a responsible adult. A few said that they are too scared to tell anyone at all.

Not all schools in Wales deal with sexual harassment well enough. Staff in schools usually respond appropriately to incidents of pupil sexual harassment that are reported to them, but most schools are not doing enough to prevent those incidents from happening in the first place.

Schools value outside speakers, such as the police and youth workers, as they help to teach many topics in personal and social education. Schools say that parents also play an important role in preparing young people to handle relationships successfully and feel that they need to work closely with parents on this. More peer-on-peer sexual harassment takes place outside school than inside, but it often carries on into school. Schools say that parents need to monitor how their children are using social media.

We found that the best schools make sure that respect is a top priority and that differences between people are celebrated. When sexual harassment does occur, staff know how to deal with this type of harassment quickly and effectively.

The way that all forms of harassment and bullying are recorded in schools needs to be more detailed to allow staff to respond to incidents properly. When schools record incidents of bullying and harassment they do not always note the type of bullying or harassment that has taken place. Having more detailed and specific information means that schools could consider the extent of the problem and how well they deal with peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

Overall, schools do not provide enough time for young people to learn about and discuss healthy relationships, sex and sexuality in a safe, comfortable and open way

In addition to the report, we have also produced:

- A pack of resources for providers to use to find out about this issue in their setting, along with the detailed findings from our listening to learners sessions here

- A learner version of the report, including questions for pupils to consider here

# Welsh immersion education

## Strategies and approaches to support 3 to 11-year-old learners

In February 2022, we published our thematic report on Welsh immersion education. Our report draws on visits to a sample of non-maintained settings, primary schools, and language immersion centres. We also spoke to pupils, teachers, local authority and regional consortium officers, and gained the views of parents via a questionnaire. We considered two forms of Welsh language immersion: early immersion and late immersion.

**Early immersion** means introducing and using the Welsh language as the only language of teaching (with very few exceptions) in the foundation phase in Welsh-medium and bilingual non-maintained settings and schools. In the best practice, this means that the Welsh language is introduced purposefully to learners in specific language sessions, in addition to providing frequent opportunities for them to acquire and apply their Welsh language skills through rich experiences both inside and outside the classroom.

**Late immersion** means provision for learners who join Welsh-medium schools or Welsh streams in bilingual schools who have not experienced a full period of early immersion in the Welsh language. These learners can be complete newcomers to the Welsh language or be re-engaging with Welsh-medium provision. In the strongest cases, late immersion provision is an intensive and structured programme.

### Our recommendations

Non-maintained settings and schools should:

R1   Build on effective practice and plan a range of consistent activities that provide opportunities for learners to acquire vocabulary and syntactical patterns purposefully and coherently

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

R2   Plan purposefully to ensure equal opportunities for all learners to access early and late immersion provision

R3   Evaluate immersion provision thoroughly, including tracking latecomers' progress consistently over time

R4   Strengthen and ensure consistency in the professional learning offer on the principles and methods of immersion education for all practitioners

The Welsh Government should:

R5   Develop national guidelines on early immersion and late immersion, and commission a range of suitable resources for learners of all ages to support immersion education that celebrate the diversity of Wales

R6   Establish a national forum to promote the most effective immersion education practices, including promoting local arrangements to introduce vocabulary and syntactical patterns

# What did our thematic survey say?

Immersion education is the primary method used by nearly all local authorities to create new Welsh speakers and develop learners' Welsh language skills. We found that leaders in non-maintained settings, Welsh-medium primary schools, bilingual schools, and language immersion centres prioritise immersion education effectively. They provide rich experiences for learners in an inclusive and Welsh learning environment.

We found that most leaders in local authorities plan suitable strategies to enable practitioners to use early immersion methods as an integral part of foundation phase provision. Around half of the local authorities support latecomers into Welsh-medium education in language immersion centres that deliver late immersion provision. The most effective late immersion provision is offered through intensive programmes. This means that practitioners nurture learners' Welsh language skills in small groups for most of the time for an extended period. Most practitioners in language immersion centres provide highly successful immersion programmes that stimulate learners effectively. As provision for latecomers is so inconsistent across Wales, not all learners are given the same opportunities to access Welsh-medium education at an early enough stage.

In the best practice, authorities and consortia provide valuable opportunities for practitioners to develop their understanding of immersion principles and approaches and share effective practice. However, professional learning opportunities do not have a consistent enough impact on improving provision to support learners to acquire Welsh language skills through the immersion process.

Nearly all practitioners support learners effectively by creating a supportive learning environment. Practitioners support learners to feel increasingly confident in trying to speak Welsh without fear of failure. In the strongest cases, they provide a variety of experiences that envelop learners in the Welsh language. However, a minority of practitioners do not introduce vocabulary and syntactical patterns purposefully enough to ensure continuity and progression when supporting learners to develop their speaking skills.

Nearly all learners demonstrate positive attitudes to learning Welsh during the immersion education process. As a result of early immersion in the foundation phase, most learners develop their Welsh language skills well, and this supports them to make further progress across the areas of learning in Key Stage 2. Most learners who complete intensive late immersion programmes attain a suitable level of proficiency to succeed in Welsh-medium education.

# The teaching of Welsh history including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history, identity and culture

In October 2021, we published our thematic on the teaching of Welsh history including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history, identity and culture. Our report draws on findings from inspections undertaken before March 2020, virtual meetings and a small number of on-site visits to primary and secondary schools. We also consulted with parents, representatives from higher education institutions, academics and regional consortia staff.

**Full report**
[Click here to view the report in full.](#)

## Our recommendations include:

Schools should:

**R1**  Ensure that pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of their local area and Wales while considering different perspectives and making connections to the history and culture of the wider world

**R2**  Ensure that pupils develop an understanding of antiracism and diversity and how they can become ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world

**R3**  Ensure that pupils develop an understaning of how Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals and communities contribute to the history and culture of Wales and the wider world

Local authorities (LA) and regional consortia (RC) should provide suitable professional learning for teachers:

**R6**  To develop their knowledge of local and Welsh history and share good practice

**R7**  To develop their knowledge and understanding of teaching diversity, antiracism and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history and culture within Wales and the wider world

The Welsh Government should:

**R10**  Work with local authorities and regional consortia to ensure that the national professional learning offer places high priority on the development of training and resources to support these areas

## What did our thematic survey say?

When given the opportunity pupils enjoy learning about local and Welsh history, identity and culture and making links to the history of the wider world. They also enjoy studying the contribution of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and individuals.

In a majority of schools, pupils have little knowledge of the historical events that shaped their local area and can name few significant Welsh people from history.

In most schools, pupils have a limited knowledge and understanding of the histories of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic peoples and communities.

A majority of primary schools plan appropriate opportunities for pupils to learn about their local area and Wales. In a minority of schools, local and Welsh history is viewed as a 'bolt-on element' of the curriculum.

In many secondary schools, lessons include only cursory references to local and Welsh history

A minority of schools include Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic histories in their curriculum. Very few schools teach pupils about the contributions of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

individuals and communities to the history of Wales.

How much Welsh and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history studied by pupils at GCSE and A Level is dependent on the subjects chosen by pupils and the topics chosen from the range offered by the examination board.

Most leaders in school identify that the Curriculum for Wales provides a significant opportunity to enhance and improve the teaching of local and Welsh history. Many recognise the importance of diversity and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history and culture. However, this is not always reflected in their curriculum and professional learning offer for staff.

In most schools, subject leaders' knowledge, understanding and passion for local, Welsh and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history influences what is offered in the history curriculum.

Of those teachers who undertook their initial teachers education in Wales only a few report that they received training on Welsh history. Very few report they received training on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history and culture. Current ITE partnerships are developing their provision in these areas.

In most schools, teachers have limited access to professional learning on local, Welsh and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history and culture. Local authorities and regional consortia offer little specialist professional learning on these specific areas.

Most schools refer to a lack of suitable resources for the teaching of local, Welsh and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history.

# Impartial careers advice and guidance to young people aged 14-16 years provided by Careers Wales advisers

In May 2022, we published our thematic on the careers advice provided by Careers Wales advisers. Our report draws on visits to a sample of secondary schools, special schools, pupil referral units (PRU) and education other than at school (EOTAS) across Wales to observe one-to-one guidance sessions between Careers Wales advisers and young people. We also spoke to young people, teachers, careers advisers and Careers Wales leaders and managers.

**Full report**
Click here to view the report in full.

## Our recommendations

Careers Wales should:

**R1**  Develop systems and appropriate criteria to evaluate the impact that services have on the effectiveness and resilience of young people's career planning and decision-making

**R2**  Ensure that effective evaluation, based on accurate, comprehensive and relevant evidence, informs strategic planning and quality improvement

**R3**  Strengthen links with other careers companies to improve opportunities for professional learning and developing good practice

**R4**  Continue to ensure that analysis from quality assurance activities is fed back to individual schools to strengthen careers and work-related education

**R5**  Ensure that all staff promote young people's awareness of the value of the Welsh language as an employment skill

**R6**  Ensure that all staff understand the company's arrangements and procedures for the safeguarding of young people

## What did our thematic survey say?

We found most of the young people eligible for a guidance session at the schools and settings we visited make good progress from their differing starting points when creating their plans for the future. They discuss their ideas and respond well to questions and challenges posed when a plan may seem risky. Where young people begin their guidance session with unrealistic plans and ideas, this usually stems from a lack of support from their school or setting. Following guidance, these young people make very good progress towards understanding the post-16 routes available to them.

We saw most careers advisers were well-prepared for their guidance sessions, particularly where they have well established relationships with providers, and they share key information. Advisers are effective and provide clear and appropriate advice for next steps for young people to carry out. Specialist additional learning needs (ALN) advisers support young people with ALN in their transition planning and have a comprehensive understanding of education, employment and training opportunities. However, the Welsh Government has not yet identified how Careers Wales will work with local authorities to provide this support under the reformed ALN system. While careers advisers understand schools' protocols for safeguarding and can name their school's designated safeguarding person (DSP), a minority are less clear about the company's protocols and DSP.

Careers Wales' Brighter Futures vision (Careers Wales, 2021) aims to target the young people most in need of independent advice and guidance to make informed choices. However, we found it is not always clear how leaders and managers plan to measure impact and effectiveness of their services and overall strategy. For example, they do not analyse the proportion of young people who drop out of their post-16 progression

option before completing their goal, nor is there a clear strategy to improve young people's levels of engagement. Overall, the company's processes for evaluating the impact of its services are underdeveloped with too much focus on client satisfaction and no analysis of what impact the service has on improving young peoples' career planning and decision-making. This impedes the company's ability to base improvement planning on a reliable or rigorous analysis of its service strengths and areas for improvement.

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