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

2019-2020

Estyn

Contents

Guide to the report

This year's report is the 28th consecutive annual report published in Wales since the Education (Schools) Act 1992 required its production. The report consists of:

The Chief inspector's foreword

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Section 2: A thematic section focusing on education and training sectors' response to the COVID-19 pandemic between March and August 2020

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

Annex 2 sets out a series of charts showing Estyn's inspection outcomes for 2019-2020.

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This report is also available in Welsh

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Foreword

The last months of the 2019-2020 academic year brought challenges to Welsh education the like of which we have not seen in generations. The challenges were many, complex and unexpected. The COVID-19 pandemic changed people's lives, had a huge impact on economies, and caused major disruption to education systems worldwide and in Wales. This annual report reviews the standards and quality of education and training in Wales from September 2019 to March 2020, when schools and other education and training providers closed due to the pandemic (other than to provide care for vulnerable pupils and children of key workers). The report also offers an initial account of how schools and other education and training providers coped with the lockdown situation and strived to support pupils and students while providing continuity of learning for them remotely. This foreword sets the scene and reflects on what has been learnt from the crisis and on some implications for the future.

Prior to lockdown, we had inspected some three-fifths of the providers we had planned to visit during the year. The evidence from these inspections and other visits shows a similar pattern to recent years, with some modest improvements being consolidated and encouraging practice emerging in previously underperforming sectors. Standards are good in eight-in-ten primary schools and in a half of secondary schools. An increasingly common feature of our better schools is the way they support pupils to become resilient and independent learners who are given choices about how and what they learn, while other schools have not yet developed a shared understanding among their staff regarding what an independent learner means to them. Our recent thematic report on **Resilience** provides further detail and guidance on this matter. Successful schools also increasingly create a sense of community feeling and belonging, and develop citizenship and personal leadership skills in their pupils. Standards, provision and leadership are good across many post-16 providers too. Areas for improvement in these sectors relate to self-evaluation placing too much emphasis on learner outcome data and not taking enough account of other sources of information.

The lockdown period has been a difficult time for learners and their families, and schools and other education and training providers prioritised the safety and wellbeing of their learners, including their physical and mental health. Schools and other providers responded quickly and worked flexibly with support services to minimise risks to learners. They promoted public health guidance, shared advice with parents and learners, and included tasks relating to wellbeing in the learning activities they offered. They tried various ways to maintain relationships and a sense of community among learners by keeping in contact and in some cases by setting up opportunities for them to interact with each other. As a result of prioritising the wellbeing of learners, many schools and providers were pleased with learners' resilience and attitude to work when they returned briefly to school, college or training centre at the end of the year.

Meilyr Rowlands

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

Foreword

Schools including pupil referral units focused particularly on the wellbeing of vulnerable pupils. They identified those that required additional support and regular contact from external services, including those whose engagement with learning was especially low. They ensured that eligible pupils received free meals, or vouchers or payments. Some provided learning packs with items such as crayons, pencils, and resources to develop mathematical skills for children with few resources at home. Most special schools remained open for particularly vulnerable pupils throughout this period, and pupil referral units kept in close contact with their learners. Nearly all independent schools and colleges remained open to provide support for learners' wellbeing and learning on-site or through distance learning.

Schools generally developed a sharper awareness of how pupils' vulnerabilities can affect their motivation, engagement and learning during this time. For example, staff in special schools and pupil referral units quickly acknowledged that many pupils with autistic spectrum disorder do not recognise home as a learning environment, while online activities were largely inaccessible for other pupils with complex needs. Staff provided bespoke provision for different learners to meet their specific needs, for example by organising videos by a speech and language therapist to assist parents with communication routines at home. Most independent special schools that educate day pupils put in place measures to support their wellbeing and kept in touch with pupils and their families through phone calls, social media or home visits.

A particular feature of this period was the need to provide digital means of learning for the majority studying from home. Despite considerable effort by schools, local authorities and central government to provide additional equipment and support, a minority of learners were disadvantaged by lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity. In general however, this intense and prolonged period of using digital technology has meant that most learners and teachers have improved their own digital skills significantly. There was considerable variation in how knowledgeable and experienced individual schools and staff members were with digital technology before lockdown. Schools that had invested in professional development on digital learning for staff prior to lockdown were better placed than those who had not. Schools changed their patterns of provision as over time there was a drop in parental support and many schools concluded that uploading work every day was unmanageable and moved to providing longer-term tasks. Staff have learnt from this experience and from the available research. They now understand more about digital learning and are better placed to provide digital or blended learning when the need arises again. This greater understanding has also led to a better appreciation of how digital learning could complement traditional teaching and learning in future, for example to enhance the learning for more able learners, to support pupils with special educational needs, and to provide learning for those who miss school for whatever reason.

Foreword

Post-16-providers soon moved to implement distance learning across all programmes and trained staff in online delivery. They used various online learning platforms, and ran online skills courses. Providers reported good engagement from most learners, but were concerned about engagement levels among specific groups, such as independent living skills learners, English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) learners, and older and other vulnerable learners. Many of these learners did not have access to a suitable computer or broadband connection, or a suitable area to work at home. While providers lent out equipment or provided financial support, the challenge remains for all learners to access the resources they need.

Another feature of this period was the increased communication with learners, parents, carers and families. Many providers reviewed the ways they communicated with learners' parents/carers to see how they could be improved, and started using more of video messages from school leaders, newsletters, and apps to share important information. More than ever, schools wanted to build good relationships with parents who were directly engaged in their children's education and wanted to know as much as possible about what to do and what to expect in terms of content, teaching methods, assessment and feedback. As with digital matters, schools varied prior to lockdown in terms of how developed these relationships and communication channels were with families. Where relationships were less developed, there was limited time under the pressures of lockdown to build a common understanding regarding expectations, particularly around the advantages and disadvantages of different types of online teaching and learning, such as live streaming. Our recent thematic report on **Community schools** provides further detail and guidance on building relationships with families.

Teachers and practitioners have worked hard during this difficult time to ensure that all learners were cared for and received some continuity in their learning. The additional challenges presented by the pandemic placed considerable pressure on headteachers and other senior leaders to prioritise and make rapid decisions with limited time to consider options in depth, and this sometimes affected their wellbeing. Ensuring appropriate staffing levels to balance continuity of learning as well as operating their school as a childcare hub was a challenge for many leaders, particularly in smaller schools, where losing a few staff to shielding or illness made a big difference. The number of logistical decisions that had to be made by leaders meant that monitoring of pupils' work initially focused on checking the number of tasks offered and how many were completed, rather than on evaluating the quality of the teaching and learning. Many leaders increased the amount of planning, preparation and assessment time available for teachers in recognition of the added work needed for planning distance learning. They also sourced extra professional learning for staff, for example in using digital platforms or for dealing with pupil engagement or bereavements. Even so, there remains a need for further professional learning for most teachers in using digital and blended learning methods effectively.

Foreword

Leaders faced challenges in the post-16 sectors too, including delivering operations across multiple sites. These providers maintained good internal communication with staff and often made contact on a more regular basis than before lockdown. College leaders met together two or three times a week throughout the lockdown period to plan and share experiences and responses. College and work-based learning leaders worked closely with the Welsh Government and other key stakeholders to agree guidelines for revised ways of working as lockdown restrictions were eased. In the adult learning in the community sector, most chairs of partnerships also held responsibilities in local authorities. A benefit of this was that it enabled a co-ordinated approach to support the most deprived and socially isolated adult learners. Where employers were reopening, leaders in work-based learning providers considered how they could undertake visits and assessments in the workplace safely, while complying with social distancing regulations.

Local government education services worked proactively to support their learning communities. They provided advice, in many cases adapting Welsh Government guidance to reflect local needs and to provide much appreciated practical support. There are examples of local government officers working determinedly to support school leaders in meeting the challenges of keeping their school communities safe and well. Local authorities often used their staff creatively to provide additional support for schools in working with vulnerable learners and the families. For example, they visited homes, delivered food parcels, and supported childcare hubs. There were many examples of youth workers using digital technology to provide support and guidance for vulnerable young people. Where possible, local authority officers, schools and settings, and multi-agency partners continued special educational needs statutory assessment and annual review processes remotely. Regional consortia worked with the Welsh Government and other partners to support or lead continuity of learning programmes. They provided guidance for schools on distance and blended learning, and offered professional learning for teachers and leaders. In the best examples, they also developed repositories of resources that saved time for teachers.

It has been argued that lockdown affected younger pupils particularly because the period of disrupted education was proportionately longer for these learners. Some non-maintained nursery settings worked hard to support children and their families, though the national strategy for continuity of learning for this age group was less clear than for schools. This period has proved challenging for settings and has exposed the sector's financial fragility. While schools (maintained by local authorities) were able to continue to employ staff, including nursery staff, many non-maintained nursery settings furloughed some or all of their workforce. A proportion of settings have not yet reopened and there are fears about a possible reduction in take up of early education places, which will add to concerns about the viability of these settings.

Foreword

It has been an anxious time for older students too as they faced uncertainty about examinations and completing their studies without the usual end of course assessments. The challenge this summer of allocating grades to A level, GCSE and vocational learners without sitting examinations or undergoing final vocational assessments proved as difficult in Wales as elsewhere. Every year, examination grades are standardised and most commentators had agreed that maintaining broadly comparable grade outcomes for this cohort of learners would avoid grade inflation and avoid any suggestion that the process was less rigorous this year, which could disadvantage the cohort in the longer term. The 2020 summer events suggest that there is a need to review how we assess learners' knowledge, understanding and potential in the round. Examinations are an effective and efficient way of assessing certain categories of skills, but it is time to reconsider how other means of assessment, including standardised tests and tasks, moderated coursework and teacher assessment, or portfolios of student work, could also contribute to a rounded picture of student achievement.

In post-16 sectors, while staff worked flexibly to provide feedback to learners on the work they completed online, the main challenge was prioritising support for learners to complete practical assessments for vocational qualifications. Since the start of the pandemic, work-based learning apprentices have been furloughed or made redundant across most learning areas, but those most affected have been apprentices in small private sector companies in hair and beauty and in hospitality and catering. The pandemic provides an opportunity for a renewed focus on how providers in the post-compulsory sectors can work together to support learners aged 16-19 in the transitions between school, college, workplace and university.

Welsh-medium schools have worked actively to support children whose parents do not speak Welsh to sustain and extend their language skills during lockdown. In the best cases, they used online platforms, often through Hwb, to provide activities for pupils, to promote oracy skills in particular. For example, staff recorded themselves reading Welsh stories and singing nursery rhymes so that pupils would continue to hear spoken Welsh. Schools provided guidance to parents to encourage their children to use Welsh with friends, siblings and other Welsh-speakers. Mudiad Meithrin delivered online circle time daily in Welsh to support the youngest learners and they produced guidance to support parents with their child's Welsh language development at home. Even so, non-Welsh-speaking parents of children attending Welsh-medium schools have been anxious about their ability to support their children's learning. In terms of Welsh for Adults, the National Centre for Learning Welsh accelerated work to launch blended and online courses. For example, it streamed beginners' lessons daily, attracting 2,000 learners.

Foreword

Wales had some advantages in dealing with the crisis in terms of having a well-established national digital platform (Hwb) for schools, a growing tradition of collaborative working between education bodies, and an equitable education system with a focus on pupils' wellbeing. Nevertheless, as with other countries, the scale of the challenge meant that policies and practices had to be developed at speed and at short notice at school, authority, region and national level. That this was done in a collegiate way confirmed the growing strength of inter-relationships between education organisations.

The period of lockdown has implications for preparing for the Curriculum for Wales. On the one hand, there has been a delay in reform activity, especially for schools that were already actively preparing for it. On the other hand, the period of home learning has meant that all schools have had to think from first principles about what learners really need. They have thought afresh about how pupils learn and what can best be provided to help them while taking into account their home contexts. The three or four weeks of partial return to school at the end of the year obliged leaders to think how face–to-face teaching can best promote the learning-to-learn skills that pupils need to cope with distance learning. All this has led to a greater understanding of how to develop children and young people to be independent, autonomous learners, who are resilient and motivated to learn, which is a core ambition of the Curriculum for Wales. The pandemic has presented providers with the need and the opportunity to evolve and innovate. Networks have been established for practitioners to share resources and ideas, including in Welsh. The re-thinking that the lockdown required of schools, combined with deeper engagement with families and support services, has arguably put schools in a better place to co-create with these stakeholders a common vision for realising the Curriculum for Wales.

The challenges posed by the pandemic are various and complex, and include looking after the physical and mental wellbeing of learners, providing continuity of learning using digital means, communicating more with families, caring for the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, and dealing with examinations and qualifications. The pandemic also affected different groups of learners in different ways, including the youngest children, those with examinations, pupils moving from primary to secondary or undergoing other transitions, pupils with additional learning needs, the children of key workers, and Welsh and English medium learners. During this relatively short period, expectations and requirements also evolved and changed. The crisis went through different phases – from initial lockdown, to continuity of learning by digital means, to partial reopening and preparation for full reopening, while many schools were also serving as childcare hubs. These challenges have required staff across the Welsh education system to work in new ways. Strong leadership, with a clear insight into the developmental and wellbeing needs of staff, has been crucial. Where we saw innovation, it often built on previous programmes of professional learning for staff that providers had put in place for other purposes, but meant that they were now better placed to deal with the pandemic.

Foreword

Overall, individuals and the education and training system as a whole have risen well to these challenges, and there has been an increased appreciation of the work of the teaching profession and of the importance of schooling and lifelong learning. There is a lot to learn from this experience and this annual report is intended to contribute to identifying the good practice developed during these unusual times. There are considerable challenges remaining, as initial findings for this autumn term suggest that many pupils may have regressed in their literacy and numeracy skills for example. Helping learners, particularly the vulnerable and disadvantaged, to catch up will be a major task for the education and training system for the future. During the next academic year, we will continue to engage with providers and to publish our findings in a series of reports on our website.

Foreword

Estyn guidance and thematic reports relating to the COVID-19 pandemic

Guidance

- Advice for school and PRU leaders and governors on how to continue with school and PRU business during the Covid-19 pandemic

- Arrangements for September 2020 Planned approaches across maintained schools and PRUs

- Cameos and ideas for continuity of school business during Covid-19

- Cameos and ideas from schools and PRUs on continuing with school business

- Key principles to support the continuation of school and PRU business

- Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from adult learning in the community partnerships

- Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from further education colleges

- Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from primary schools

- Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from PRUs

- Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from secondary schools

- Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from special schools

- Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from work-based learning providers

- Engagement work: Primary sector update – autumn 2020

- Engagement work: Secondary sector update – autumn 2020

- Engagement work: All-age school sector update – autumn 2020

- Engagement work: Maintained special school and pupil referral unit (PRU) sector update – autumn 2020

- Engagement work: Post-16 sector update – autumn 2020

Foreword

Estyn guidance and thematic reports relating to the COVID-19 pandemic

Thematic reports

- [Community schools: families and communities at the heart of school life thematic report](#) and [training materials](#)

- [Insights into how independent schools and specialist colleges have responded during the COVID–19 pandemic](#)

- [Learner resilience - building resilience in primary schools, secondary schools and pupil referral units thematic report](#) and [training materials](#)

Blog posts

- [Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) - how can schools support children and young people who live in difficult circumstances?](#)

- [Is your school one that puts families and communities at the heart of its work?](#)

- [Now learners have returned to schools and colleges, what part have we played and how will our role change in the future?](#)

- [Our support for Welsh education and training in the current climate](#)

- [What can schools and PRUs do to strengthen pupils' resilience?](#)

- [Working together to support teaching and learning during COVID-19](#)

Publications to which Estyn has contributed

- In collaboration with Regional School Improvement Consortia, Central South Consortium, EAS, ERW, GWE [Developing integrated approaches to support blended learning for the phased opening of schools](#)

- In collaboration with Regional School Improvement Consortia, Central South Consortium, EAS, ERW, GWE [Models of Blended Learning](#)

Foreword

In 2019-2020, we recognised the excellence of those providers that achieved 'excellent' in the majority of their inspection judgements.

Cydnabod Rhagoriaeth
Recognising Excellence

Non-maintained nurseries	Meithrinfa Cae'r Ffair Ltd Alphabet Playgroup Puddle Ducks (South Wales) Limited Cylch Meithrin Penparc Cylch Meithrin Ynys Y Plant Felinfach Ysgol Feithrin Sant Aubin
Primary schools	Rogerstone Primary School Ysgol Gynradd Talsarnau Ysgol Tregarth Birchgrove Primary, Swansea Bedwas Infant School Nant Y Parc Primary School Oakfield Primary School Barry Island Primary Ysgol Gynradd Dyffryn Dulas Cogan Nursery School Puncheston C.P. School Glasllwch C.P. School Penllergaer Primary School Ysgol Bro Carmel St Philip Evans R.C. Primary School Woodlands Community Primary School Y.G. Cwm Gwyddon
Secondary schools	Ysgol Brynrefail
Independent schools	Teresa House Bryn Tirion Hall School
Independent specialist colleges	Coleg Elidyr Camphill Communities
Welsh for Adults	Dysgu Cymraeg Gogledd Ddwyrain / Learn Welsh North East
Special schools	Ysgol Bryn Derw Portfield School
Learning in the justice sector	YOI Parc

Section 1

Commentary on sector inspection outcomes – September 2019 to March 2020 Non-school settings for children under five

1

Context

All local authorities in Wales fund part-time early education for three-year-olds, and occasionally for four-year-olds. Nineteen out of the twenty-two local authorities provide early education, either in a maintained school or through non-maintained settings, which include full day care and sessional providers. Swansea and Neath Port Talbot local authorities provide early education in schools only, while Powys provides nursery education exclusively in non-maintained settings. Although local authorities who provide early education in non-maintained settings do not maintain the setting, they are responsible for funding early education entitlement and providing support to ensure that the settings provide good quality foundation phase education.

In January 2019, Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) began to inspect non-school education settings for children under five together, using a joint inspection framework. We are required to inspect early education, and CIW has the duty to inspect the quality of care at these settings. These joint inspections consider the quality of care provided for all children up to the age of 12 and the education of three and four-year-old children that do not receive education in a maintained setting. The inspection framework comprises six themes in three key areas: themes 1 and 2 consider children's outcomes, themes 3 and 4 consider how well practitioners contribute towards these, and themes 5 and 6 consider the quality of leadership in ensuring good outcomes for children.

Sector summaries:
Non-school settings for children under five

The number of settings offering part-time education has again reduced. In January 2020, there were around[1] 546 providers of education in non-school settings for three or four-year-olds. This number has been falling since 2010, when it was over 700. We inspected 52 settings during the autumn and spring terms. Around a third are small settings with fewer than six three or four-year-old children funded for education. In these settings, inspectors do not report on children's learning (theme 2), in order to avoid identifying individual children.

Wellbeing

As in previous years, standards of wellbeing continue to be at least good in nearly all settings and excellent in a few. Where standards of wellbeing are excellent, children show exceptional levels of independence, motivation and interest in their learning. They focus diligently on tasks and are extremely confident when choosing activities they want to do. These children make very good progress in developing their personal and social skills, including taking responsibilities for daily tasks and routines. For example, children put on their own aprons to help prepare fruit during snack time, pour drinks for their peers and dispose of food waste in the compost bin. They show respect towards each other and help their friends to develop their communication and team working skills.

Where wellbeing is good, nearly all children settle quickly when they arrive at the setting, and they manage their own behaviour well. Most show a good understanding of routines and demonstrate sound independent skills and respect for others, such as putting on their coats independently and playing co-operatively when making Gruffalo crumble in the mud kitchen. They develop a good range of social skills, share willingly, and take turns with friends during play activities.

In most settings, children understand the importance of good hygiene, and of how to stay fit and healthy. They select their own fruit during snack time and take part in purposeful physical activities and outdoor play. In many settings, children understand the importance of looking after their teeth by using a toothbrush independently to clean their teeth.

Learning

Learning is good or better in over nine-in-ten settings where we report a judgement for learning. This is higher than the percentage identified last year. In settings where learning is good or excellent, most children make strong progress from their starting points. They develop their literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills effectively.

In the few settings where learning is excellent, nearly all children make strong or very strong progress during their time at the setting. They often show particularly high levels of concentration and engagement. Most children develop a range of skills to a high standard and use them confidently across all areas of learning. They develop strong early literacy skills, discuss issues confidently in front of their peers and respond to each other maturely with an extended range of vocabulary.

[1] The number of non-maintained settings registered with local partnerships to provide education fluctuates, often according to whether children aged three and over attend the setting and on arrangements to fund the provision locally.

Sector summaries:
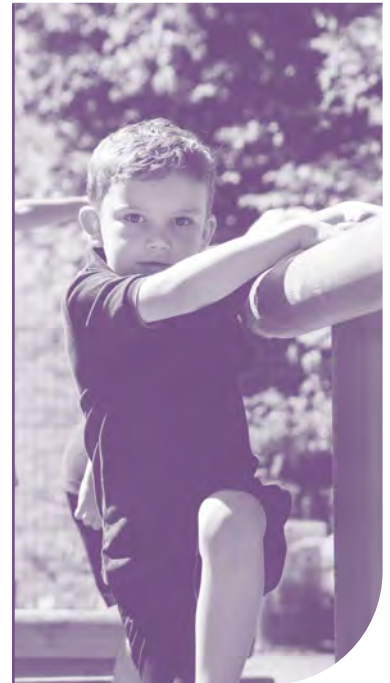# Non-school settings for children under five

A common feature among all settings where learning is excellent is that most children develop highly effective physical skills. They negotiate space exceptionally well when running outdoors and show strong balance and co-ordination skills, for example when throwing balls at targets and riding balance bikes. In addition, most children develop fine motor skills well, using tools such as scissors, brushes, tweezers and spatulas skilfully during everyday activities.

In settings where learning is good or better, most children develop their communication skills successfully. They chat confidently to others as they play and explain things with increasing confidence using previous learning well, for example when explaining that their heart is not in their tummy, it is in their chest. Most listen carefully to adults and to their peers, especially when discussing stories and when following dance routines and action songs.

In Welsh-medium settings, many children who do not speak Welsh at home make good progress in developing strong listening and speaking skills. These pupils use basic sentence structures, common phrases and an increasing range of vocabulary well to converse and join in with songs and nursery rhymes. In a very few Welsh-medium settings where learning is adequate, most children's progress in developing their Welsh speaking and listening skills is slow. They respond appropriately to basic questions with support, but their responses are very limited.

Most children in English and Welsh-medium settings develop strong early reading skills. They enjoy listening to stories and many are aware of how to hold a book the right way up, turn the pages and retell stories in their own words. Many recognise familiar letters of the alphabet, especially the initial letter of their names. Most children enjoy mark making and experiment confidently using a range of tools and equipment, for instance when creating pictures to illustrate ducklings hatching from eggs or when creating self-portraits with colouring pencils. They show a good understanding of the purpose of writing, and many show increasing control of writing tools and make good attempts to form letters from their name. More able children write recognisable letters clearly.

Standards of Welsh in English-medium settings continue to improve. In most of these settings, children develop a good grasp of the language through purposeful daily routines and learning experiences. They understand and follow simple instructions, such as hand washing and tidying up and they respond well to questions about how they feel. Most children use familiar greetings appropriately and enjoy singing Welsh songs and rhymes. They recite numbers to ten with support and name many colours. In a few settings, children use the Welsh language more spontaneously in their learning and play, for example by telling practitioners that they are going to paint a pilipala (butterfly) in the craft area and by asking for fruit in Welsh during snack time.

Sector summaries: Non-school settings for children under five

In settings where learning is good, most children develop their numeracy skills well. Most count accurately to at least five in different contexts, with more able children counting to ten and beyond. For example, children use their counting skills well to count chestnuts in the outdoor area when collecting natural objects for an autumn collage, or when collecting ingredients for the mud kitchen. More able children use a greater range of mathematical skills to solve more complex problems, such as adding two numbers together to count the number of legs on two mini-beasts. Most children use mathematical vocabulary appropriately across a range of learning experiences. Where learning is good, many children apply their numeracy skills in other learning areas, for example collecting the correct amount of natural items in the forest area and arranging them to create a repeated pattern. They also apply their problem solving skills effectively, when suggesting criteria to sort their items into leaves, seeds and twigs. In a very few settings, children do not develop their understanding of the full range of mathematical concepts, including shape and measure, well enough, and do not apply this understanding naturally or confidently in their play.

In most settings, children use information and communication technology (ICT) well to enhance their learning and to develop their communication skills. They confidently use digital cameras, electronic toys and tablet computers to develop their language and mathematical development. For example, children photograph a slug in the outdoor area and use the image to discuss its features with friends. Increasingly, more children enter commands for programmable toys with support from adults, which helps to reinforce their understanding of numbers, space, directions and sequences. In a few settings, children develop appropriate mouse-control skills for painting a picture on the computer.

In many settings, children develop their physical skills well using both the indoor and outdoor learning areas effectively. They demonstrate strong gross motor skills when balancing on planks, climbing over tyres and crawling through tunnels in the outdoor area. Most children develop sound fine motor skills, for example when placing pegs on cardboard hedgehogs to create spikes. In a few settings, children develop greater confidence and are beginning to take measured risks in their learning by using more complex tools such as a hand drill or hammer, for example to make holes in a pumpkin, with help from an adult.

Many settings provide a suitable range of activities and learning experiences to develop children's creative skills. As a result, children enjoy opportunities to express themselves through music, dance and other art. For example, children use seaside objects such as sand, seaweed and pebbles to make an attractive collage.

Cylch Meithrin Ynys Y Plant Felinfach

The interesting learning experiences in the local community that Cylch Meithrin Ynys y Plant provides enrich children's understanding of their local area and help them develop a wide range of skills successfully.

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

Cydnabod Rhagoriaeth
Recognising Excellence

Sector summaries:
Non-school settings for children under five

Teaching and assessment

Provision is good or better in just over nine-in-ten settings inspected this year, with around one-in-ten having excellent practice. In settings with excellent practice, practitioners plan an exciting range of highly stimulating learning activities that engage nearly all children extremely well. Nearly all involve children in the planning process to ensure that activities are relevant and of interest to them. A common feature of these settings is their extensive use of the local community to support learning. They visit places of interest and invite visitors to share experiences with the children. For example, when learning about the life of pirates, children from a rural setting enjoyed a range of exciting experiences on a trip to the local beach. They enjoyed the chance to travel on the local bus, dress up as pirates, collect shells and 'walk the plank'!

In settings where provision is good, practitioners plan a wide variety of purposeful learning experiences, which build on prior learning and stimulate children's interest. For example, practitioners plan a range of learning experiences based on children's fascination for spiders that include going on an insect and spider hunt in the forest school and creating interesting artwork based on spiders' webs. Most settings develop children's communication skills well, often using real-life experiences to stimulate children's role-play and encourage them to speak and engage in conversation with others. They also provide a range of exciting opportunities for children to develop their understanding of writing for different purposes, such as writing labels for daffodil bulbs they plant or recording their recipe for pumpkin pie in the mud kitchen.

In general, most Welsh-medium settings plan well for the development of children's Welsh language skills and support those who are new to the language effectively. In a very few settings, practitioners do not plan for the progressive development of children's language skills well enough, nor do they reinforce language patterns and vocabulary rigorously. We identify the importance of developing children's early language skills in a series of case studies within 'Language acquisition for learners aged three to eleven', to be published in the spring term 2021(Estyn, 2021).

Most settings plan well to develop children's numeracy skills through a range of interesting practical learning experiences. Many make effective use of outdoor learning areas to enhance children's mathematical development, for example by collecting different coloured leaves and placing them in groups according to colour and size. In settings where planning for numeracy is not as strong, practitioners do not plan well enough for the whole range of mathematical concepts and topics, such as measure and shape. In addition, in a very few settings, practitioners do not plan enough challenging opportunities for children to solve problems independently. As a result, children in these settings do not always build on prior learning effectively and have too few opportunities to reinforce their skills and knowledge.

Sector summaries:
Non-school settings for children under five

In English-medium settings, the development of children's Welsh language skills continues to improve. Many practitioners support children's Welsh language development successfully. In a very few settings, practitioners do not use the language consistently enough with the children or encourage them to use basic words and phrases in their daily routines.

Planning for the use of ICT to develop children's communication skills has improved this year. In most settings, practitioners plan purposeful activities for children to use ICT equipment across many areas of learning to enhance their experiences and to allow them to talk about their learning. For example, practitioners use a 'light table' to explore colour, pattern and texture, and then use a tablet computer to take photographs of their creations and discuss their work with others.

In general, many settings plan to develop children's creative skills through a suitable range of experiences. Practitioners make increasing use of the outdoors to encourage children to explore for themselves and to be creative, for example by drawing on old bedsheets using mud and paintbrushes. In a very few settings, practitioners enable children to experience music and art from around the world, such as when they listen to opera and look at the paintings of famous artists. This provides rich learning experiences for the children. However, in a few settings, practitioners tend to over-direct activities. This restricts children's opportunities to explore and experiment, and to make their own choices about the materials they want to use.

Many settings provide suitable opportunities to develop children's physical skills. In the best examples, settings have created outdoor learning areas to provide opportunities to develop children's co-ordination and confidence, such as swinging from tree branches, crawling through tunnels or jumping into the mud river. In a very few settings, practitioners do not plan sufficient opportunities to develop children's physical skills well enough. They do not always consider the different stages of children's development when planning physical activities.

In settings where teaching is most effective, practitioners have high expectations of children. They have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the foundation phase curriculum and how young children learn. Practitioners use their understanding of the children's abilities to plan for the next steps in their skills development. They question and challenge children's thinking, extending their learning and prompting them to make considered choices and decisions. In a minority of these settings, practitioners are beginning to link the planning of learning experiences with the four purposes of the new curriculum.

Where teaching is good, practitioners form positive relationships with children and understand the learning activities they enjoy most. Most are good language role-models and encourage children to develop a greater range of vocabulary during their learning. In these settings, practitioners understand when to allow children to learn for themselves and when to intervene to support or to extend their learning. In the best examples, practitioners model play and learning and encourage children to join in and share their ideas.

Sector summaries:
Non-school settings for children under five

They use effective assessment methods to assess children's development and progress, and plan the next steps in their learning. In around one-in-ten settings, practitioners over-direct the learning and do not allow children to discover for themselves or to develop their own ideas. On a very few occasions, practitioners do not always make the best use of information about children's progress or stage of development to inform the next steps in their learning. For example, children are encouraged to write in exercise books or on worksheets before they have developed the gross and fine motor skills needed to control a pencil.

Care and development

Many settings ensure good standards of care, support and guidance for their children. Practitioners support their independent and self-help skills well through a range of useful daily routines and activities, including snack time. Many settings promote a healthy diet and lifestyle through a range of activities including snack time and through learning how to care for their teeth. They provide a stimulating outdoor learning environment for their children that helps to develop children's physical skills well. This also allows practitioners to plan purposeful learning experiences and play opportunities to develop their skills across all areas of learning. Most settings ensure that children develop a good awareness of their own community, culture and beliefs as well as those of others from across the world. For example, children visit a nearby railway to learn about the history of the local slate quarry and to develop a better understanding of their local community.

Again, this year we identified important shortcomings relating to safeguarding in a few settings. In these settings, practitioners and leaders do not follow safeguarding policies and procedures well enough. Leaders in a few settings do not always ensure that appropriate risk assessments are in place to safeguard children and staff. In a very few settings, leaders do not always adhere to safe recruitment practices when employing staff.

Leadership and management

Standards of leadership and management are good or better in around eight-in-ten settings and excellent in just under one-in-ten of those inspected this year. In settings where leadership is good, leaders set a clear vision and direction, as well as high expectations for themselves and others. They value the contributions of all staff and ensure that everyone is fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. Leaders provide a clear strategic direction for the work of the setting and encourage staff to work as a team to meet their shared vision and objectives. A notable feature among the very few excellent settings inspected this year is the passion and enthusiasm leaders and practitioners bring to their work, striving to provide the very best learning environment in which the children can develop and flourish. As a result, all practitioners in these settings contribute fully to meeting children's needs, leading to high standards of wellbeing and learning throughout the setting.

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Sector summaries:
Non-school settings for children under five

In effective settings, leaders act well on the outcomes of their self-evaluation processes to improve provision and standards. They listen closely to the advice and opinions of others, including parents and advisory teachers, to help them identify what works well and what needs improving. Again, this year, in the very few settings where leadership and management are excellent, leaders focus sharply on monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning, and they encourage all practitioners to take responsibility for improving their own performance. However, self-evaluation and improvement processes are areas for improvement in a minority of settings inspected this year. In these settings, leaders do not use these processes effectively enough to identify their strengths and areas for development.

In nine-in-ten settings, leaders support practitioners to improve the performance of their staff well through appraisal and supervision policies and practices. In the very few settings where leadership and management are excellent, leaders use these processes highly effectively to identify training and professional development opportunities that meet the needs of practitioners. They link the professional needs of practitioners to the setting's priorities in order to develop the work of the team as a whole. For example, leaders provide Welsh language training for the whole staff, which encourages them to support each other and model effective practice during sessions. They measure the impact of the training on children's outcomes, and continue to make changes accordingly, leading to improvements in children's Welsh language skills. In less successful settings, leaders do not implement their performance management policies effectively enough. As a result, they do not identify targets for improvement for all staff or review their performance in a timely manner. These shortcomings impact negatively on the quality of support and training provided to staff and on the quality of provision at these settings.

Most settings communicate well with parents and guardians, and encourage them to get fully involved with their children's learning. Leaders in these settings work well with a range of partners, including local authority advisory teachers and representatives of umbrella organisations that support their work, such as the Cwlwm partnership[2]. They use this support and guidance well to help review the work of the setting and to help practitioners with their work. In most settings, leaders and practitioners use individuals and organisations within the local community to enhance children's learning experiences. This has a positive effect on the children's understanding of their local community and of the role of people living among them. For example, a link with a local farm saw the farmer bring a piglet to the setting so that children could observe and measure how much it grew over time. This developed children's language and mathematical understanding, as well as teaching them about the work of the farmer and about caring for animals. In the most effective settings, leaders ensure strong links with their local schools to help children when they move on to the next stage of their education. Children often visit the schools on several occasions to take part in events like music and movement sessions with the younger children, and to meet their new teacher during their last term in the setting. Staff from the schools visit the settings regularly, for example to read stories to the children and to discuss their needs with practitioners.

Tiny Tots Day Care Nursery – Malpas

Parental engagement sessions at Tiny Tots Day Care make the most of parents' skills and staff expertise to broaden children's aspirations and experiences, and create a strong nurturing ethos in the setting.

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

[2] Cwlwm is the partnership of the five leading childcare organisations in Wales: Early Years Wales, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs, Mudiad Meithrin, National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA Cymru) and PACEY Cymru.

Sector summaries:
Non-school settings for children under five

In many settings, leaders provide children with a wide range of resources to support their learning. Practitioners use resources in the outdoor areas increasingly well to allow children to explore and discover for themselves. However, practitioners in one-in-five settings do not always plan how best to use outdoor areas to develop children's knowledge and skills.

Most settings manage their finances well and are becoming more resourceful in how they fund their work, for example by applying for grants and organising events with parents and the local community. Most settings that are located on school sites make good use of the facilities on offer to enhance the children's learning, including taking part in joint physical development sessions with school pupils and planting vegetables and flowers in the school garden. When settings use the Early Years Pupil Development Grant (EYPDG) effectively, practitioners attend useful training and leaders purchase helpful resources to support children's learning and wellbeing. For example, a few settings attended training to identify and provide intervention for children with early speech and language difficulties. However, in settings where leaders do not use the EYPDG as effectively, they do not always use the funding to meet the needs of children who require extra support well enough. A few local authorities continue to retain the Early Years Development Grant to fund training and resources for their settings, but they do not always target this well enough to develop the needs of individual settings, including the professional and training needs of practitioners.

Follow-up activity

During the year, we gave excellent judgements in around a sixth of settings and identified highly effective practice in just over a quarter of settings inspected. In these settings, leaders value their staff and communicate with them effectively. This helps these settings to sustain high standards of learning and provision over many years.

Under our joint inspection framework with CIW, settings can require follow-up inspection activity after an inspection either by CIW, by us, or by both inspectorates. This is determined by the areas that need improvement. This year, we found that around one-in-five settings in total require either progress review or focused improvement follow-up activity following joint inspection.

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Our follow-up of non-maintained nursery settings

Of those requiring progress review

81% Not in follow-up

5% Focused improvement (monitored jointly)

14% Progress Review

6% Monitored by CIW

4% Monitored jointly

4% Monitored by Estyn
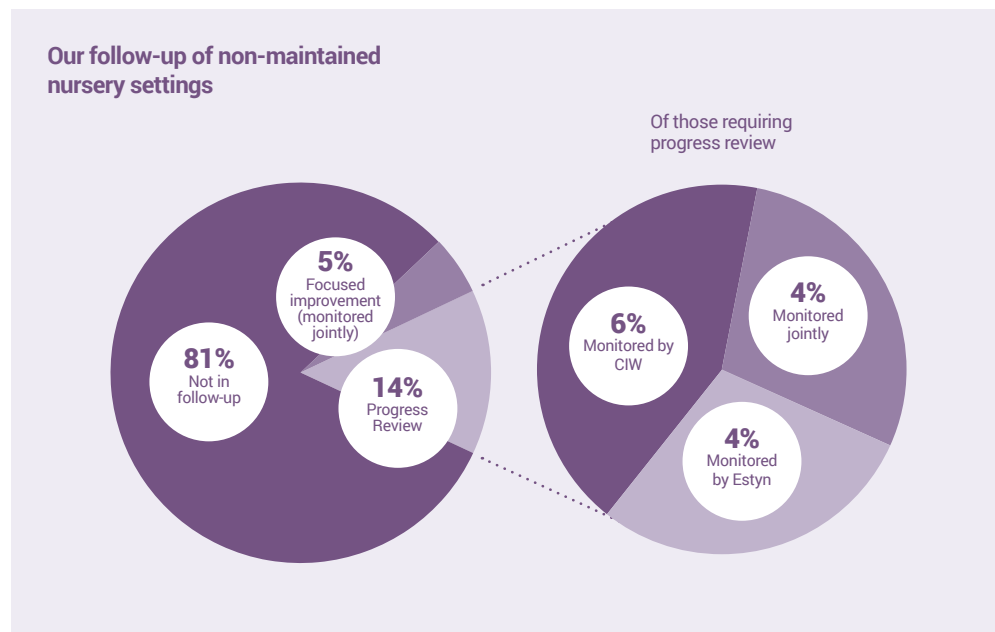
Around one-in-seven settings require progress review. Slightly below one-in-ten are in need of monitoring jointly or by us. In these settings, the quality of provision varies too much across different age groups and learning activities do not always match children's developmental needs well enough. In general, leaders do not evaluate the work of practitioners well enough to ensure that the provision meets the needs of all children, or to recognise important areas for improvement. In a very few Welsh-medium settings, leaders do not support the development of practitioners' Welsh language skills well enough to support children's language development effectively.

A very few settings require focused improvement this year and are being monitored by both inspectorates. In these settings, leaders do not ensure that important policies and procedures to keep children safe are in place and that all practitioners follow these consistently. In addition, they do not maintain their premises or resources to a high enough standard.

This year, we visited four settings that we identified as in need of either Estyn monitoring or focused improvement under the previous inspection framework. We found that all of these settings have made sufficient progress and no longer require monitoring.

Together with CIW, we visited two settings needing focused improvement under the new joint inspection framework. We found that both of these settings had improved and now comply with regulations to keep children safe. One of them had made very rapid progress in improving the environment and provision, and is no longer in need of focused improvement. The other requires further monitoring to ensure that it meets the needs of all children attending the setting.

Section 1

Sector summaries: Primary schools

1

Context

In January 2020, there were 1,234 primary schools in Wales. This is 13 fewer than in January 2019, when there were 1,247 (Welsh Government, 2019d). The number of primary schools working as federations increased again, with 96 schools now working within 48 federations. The number of primary school pupils has fallen from 275,478 in January 2019 to 272,006 in January 2020. This year we inspected 108 schools.

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Standards

As with last year, standards are good or better in around eight-in-ten primary schools. The proportion of schools with excellent standards also remains similar, at around one-in-ten schools.

In schools where standards are good or better, most pupils, including those with special educational needs and those eligible for free school meals, make at least good progress during their time at the school. In the few schools where standards are excellent, all groups of pupils make particularly strong progress in the development of their skills and in their ability to apply them in new contexts. In weaker schools, too many pupils, particularly those who are more able, do not make enough progress over time.

In most schools, pupils make good progress in the development of their speaking and listening skills. In schools that serve areas with high levels of social disadvantage, pupils' speaking skills are often much weaker than those of pupils from more advantaged backgrounds. With carefully targeted interventions, many of these pupils make rapid progress in improving their speaking skills. However, while this progress is welcome, the disparity remains throughout primary school years and beyond. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do not normally have as broad a range of vocabulary to draw upon as their peers, and this has long-term implications for their learning and progress. For example, when reading, these pupils may have the skills to decipher the letters and read a word aloud, but do not understand the meaning of that word or appreciate how it contributes to the sentence as a whole.

By the end of the foundation phase, pupils in most schools speak with developing confidence and respond appropriately to questions from their teachers and contributions from their peers. They build well on these skills as they move through key stage 2, speaking with increasing clarity and, in the best schools, with a widening and more precise vocabulary. By Year 6, they use these skills well to support their learning in all subjects, and contribute to presentations and performances.

Standards of reading are good in around eight-in-ten primary schools. At an early age, pupils develop an understanding that words convey meaning. They hold books correctly and use their knowledge of letter sounds and picture clues to read simple texts. They start to enjoy stories, the experience of reading, and having others read to them. Pupils begin to apply their reading skills to help them learn in subjects across the curriculum as they move into key stage 2, for instance skimming and scanning information text to identify relevant facts that will help their report writing. In a few schools, pupils do not acquire more advanced reading skills, such as the ability to infer meaning from the behaviour of a character in a text.

In those schools where standards of speaking and listening and reading are strong, pupils use these skills well to influence their writing. Through a rich and varied diet of reading and frequent opportunities to engage in discussions with their peers and adults, they acquire a strong vocabulary and knowledge of language patterns. They use this to create engaging and
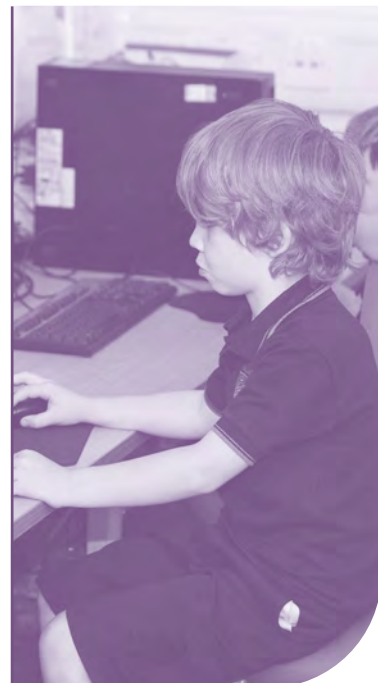
Sector summaries:
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imaginative non-fiction writing, such as persuasive adverts and detailed recounts. However, while most pupils gain a good understanding of the features of a range of non-fiction texts, too few develop the ability to write creatively and at length. In around eight-in-ten schools, standards of punctuation, spelling and grammar are generally good. However, even in the best schools, too many pupils make errors with these basic writing skills. A minority of pupils repeat errors in subsequent pieces of work. They do not routinely self-correct errors or respond to teachers' written comments to improve the quality of their work.

In many English medium primary schools, pupils develop a positive attitude towards learning the Welsh language. In the few strongest schools where leaders prioritise Welsh and ensure that it is valued as part of the school's ethos, pupils understand the importance of being bilingual or multilingual, and the importance of the Welsh language to our national identity. In these few cases, pupils make particularly good progress with the development of their Welsh language skills, using it regularly outside of specific Welsh lessons and as part of the daily life of the school. In most schools, pupils use their Welsh speaking skills appropriately, but the progress they make between the foundation phase and the end of key stage 2 is often limited. For example, they talk about what they like and do not like at the end of foundation phase and also at the upper end of key stage 2, but often without much additional detail or added sophistication in sentence structures. In around three-in-ten schools, pupils do not develop their independent use of Welsh to a high enough level and are over-reliant on language prompts provided by their teachers to scaffold their writing and conversations.

In around seven-in-ten schools, standards in mathematics are good or better. In the lower foundation phase, pupils begin to acquire a basic understanding of numbers and counting by joining in with songs and rhymes. They practise their skills when exploring activities independently in their learning environment, including in the outdoors. They begin to use this knowledge to solve simple problems, such as exploring how many different types of toy animals they can float on a raft before it sinks. By the end of the foundation phase, they use a range of strategies to make simple calculations, work with a range of measures using standard units, and begin to tell the time. In the strongest schools, pupils apply these skills independently to solve problems in real-life situations. In a minority of schools, pupils in the upper foundation phase do not apply their numeracy skills independently to a broad enough range of activities. In key stage 2, most pupils apply suitable calculation strategies using the four rules of number to solve problems and continue to develop a variety of wider mathematical skills. For example, they learn to measure angles accurately using a protractor and recognise the difference between right, obtuse and acute angles. They understand the relationship between percentages, decimals and fractions and calculate fractions correctly. This year, we have seen a slight improvement in the ability of pupils to apply their numeracy skills in different areas of the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 6 plan the journey evacuees made from London to Wales and work out the number of coaches and trains needed. In general, however, pupils' capacity to apply numeracy skills independently and competently across the curriculum

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remains an area for improvement.
Standards in ICT continue to improve and are strong in many schools. Pupils use ICT to support their learning in a range of areas across the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 2 use tablet computers confidently to make bar graphs to explore how they spend their pocket money. In the best schools, pupils combine a range of ICT skills to investigate and present information. For example, pupils in Year 4 research the causes and impact of bush fires, and write simple programs to demonstrate how robots could be used to help tackle them. In the few schools where ICT skills are weaker, pupils do not develop their skills consistently as they move through the school and do not gain a wide enough range of ICT skills, particularly in the use of spreadsheets and databases.

In many schools, foundation phase pupils develop appropriate creative skills as they engage with independent activities in the indoor and outdoor environments. For instance, they use natural materials to create pictures in the forest area or create musical patterns with cutlery and pots and pans. In a few schools, pupils build well on these early experiences to continue to develop their creativity in key stage 2. Often this is through engagement with external partners, such as local artists, with pupils learning about their techniques and visiting their studios.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Standards of pupils' wellbeing continue to be a strength of primary schools across Wales and are good or better in nearly all schools and excellent in around one-in-five schools.

Where standards of wellbeing are high, many pupils enjoy learning and approach their work with interest and enthusiasm. They are keen to learn new concepts and to solve problems, whether working as individuals or in groups. They share their opinions confidently and support these views with considered reasons, for example when suggesting how to overcome a particular challenge. Many pupils work conscientiously to complete tasks. They respond positively to feedback from adults and peers and take advantage of opportunities to learn from mistakes.

Where standards of wellbeing are excellent, pupils develop as independent learners from an early age. They transfer learning from previous experiences to overcome new problems and challenges. In these schools, pupils evaluate their own progress and the progress of their peers particularly well. They develop a broad range of strategies that enable them to improve their own learning and show resilience when encountering challenges. However, in around a half of primary schools, pupils' independent learning skills remain an area for development. In **Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning**, the Education Endowment Foundation (2018a) makes seven recommendations to help develop these skills.

In a majority of schools, pupils are beginning to influence the content of the curriculum but, in general, they are not given enough choice over how or what they learn. For example, they do not routinely select how they would like to present their work or solve a specific problem.

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Pupils' behaviour is a consistently good in most primary schools. These standards of behaviour, combined with positive relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults, ensure that most pupils feel happy and safe at school. Most pupils in primary schools treat others with courtesy and respect. They appreciate and respect diversity and understand the value of learning from and with those from other cultures or faiths. Increasingly, pupils in schools across Wales are developing a good understanding of the **United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child** (1989).

Most pupils attend school regularly. However, pupils eligible for free school meals have lower rates of attendance than other pupils, and the data shows a worsening trend over recent years. This group of pupils are also more likely than their peers to be persistently absent from school. Absence hinders progress and also establishes a pattern of non-attendance that may worsen during secondary education.

Nearly all schools have pupil voice groups, such as school councils and digital leaders, although the effectiveness of these groups varies widely. In a minority of schools, pupil voice groups gain a healthy influence over the life and work of the school and bring about improvements, for example to pupils' understanding of how to stay safe online. In schools where pupil voice groups are less effective, they lack autonomy and an understanding of their purpose. In these instances, pupils are over-reliant on adults to organise their meetings and changes that arise from their work make only a limited difference.

Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and most understand how to stay safe, including when using the internet.

Teaching and learning experiences

The overall quality of teaching and learning experiences is similar to last year. They are good or better in about three-quarters of primary schools and excellent in around one-in-ten. In around a quarter of schools, although there are some strengths, there are also areas that require improvement.

In nearly all primary schools, staff develop positive working relationships with pupils that encourage good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. As a result, most pupils feel that staff listen to them and value their views. In the very few cases where pupil behaviour is less than good, this is often the result of staff applying behaviour management techniques inconsistently or not having high enough expectations of how pupils should behave.

In around eight-in-ten primary schools, teachers plan and deliver a broad and stimulating curriculum that engages the interests of most pupils. In a majority of schools, teachers help to ensure this by consulting with pupils on what and how they would like to learn. In the best cases, this involves pupils working with teachers to identify the skills they can acquire and develop as part of a specific topic and planning the activities they will underatake In around a quarter of schools, teachers do not provide enough good quality opportunities for pupils to plan aspects of their own learning.

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Nearly all schools are beginning to consider the implications of Curriculum for Wales. Often, schools have started by adapting their approach to teaching and learning to reflect the four purposes.[3] Where senior leaders have a good understanding of the Curriculum for Wales, they take a measured approach to change and work with staff to develop their vision for what their curriculum should look like. A few schools have rushed into developing a response to the Curriculum for Wales and this has led to superficial changes that do not reflect the breadth and quality of learning experiences that pupils require. In some cases, schools have attempted to adapt existing subject planning and schemes of work to fit with the Curriculum for Wales rather than adopting a more rounded approach to developing and implementing changes over time.

In many schools, staff understand pupils' strengths and weaknesses in terms of skills. They use this knowledge to plan activities that challenge pupils at a suitable level and ensure that they make good progress during lessons and over time. They question pupils carefully to gauge their understanding and to decide whether they are ready to progress to the next step in their learning. In a few cases, teachers use their discussions with pupils skilfully to adjust the focus and level of challenge to reflect the progress pupils are making and to inspire continued engagement. For example, nursery pupils in the outdoor area on a cold morning are encouraged to think about where the 'white stuff' has come from and what will happen if they bring it inside.

In nearly all classes across Wales, teachers ensure that pupils have an appropriate understanding of what they will be learning and how this links to previous activities. In around eight-in-ten schools, they also help pupils to develop a good understanding of how to succeed in their learning, for instance by providing pupils with models of different types of writing. In a minority of schools, teachers apply assessment for learning techniques without reflecting on the quality of the approaches or the impact they have on pupil progress.

Nearly all schools have developed feedback policies to ensure consistency among staff and across classes. In around seven-in-ten schools, staff use verbal and written feedback well to ensure that pupils understand their strengths and how to improve. In a majority of cases, they provide pupils with worthwhile opportunities to respond to staff comments during activities, in subsequent lessons or, for instance, during a specific 'make a difference' (MAD) time. In schools where feedback is less effective, the feedback is not clear enough to help pupils understand how to improve, and teachers do not ensure that pupils respond to their feedback.

Model Church in Wales Primary School

Leaders at Model Church in Wales Primary School have developed a strategy to ensure a balanced approach to teaching that delivers a broad curriculum. Planning is driven by the pupils' own ideas, and they are encouraged successfully to work independently and to contribute to activities.

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

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[3] The purpose of the curriculum is to enable learners to develop as:
- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Welsh Government, 2020i)

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In around eight-in-ten schools, teachers plan well for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy, ICT and Welsh language skills. But arrangements for the application of these skills in other subject areas is variable. In most schools, teachers plan meaningful opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills across the curriculum. Often these are engaging activities that enable pupils to practise the skills they have learnt in literacy lessons, to the same standard. Schools that develop effective readers have a strategic approach to improving pupils' reading skills from an early age. They consistently promote the enjoyment and value of reading and ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to practise reading skills and to use these skills to support their learning across the curriculum. **Guidance** from the Education Endowment Foundation (2018b) outlines key approaches for the development of pupils' literacy skills in the early years.

In around seven-in-ten schools, teachers provide pupils with activities that allow them to apply their numeracy skills in a meaningful way in other subjects. For example, in response to the class book 'The Enormous Turnip', pupils in the foundation phase weigh vegetables accurately and find the heaviest. However, numeracy activities such as low level data handling tasks do not always challenge pupils to use their skills to the standard of which they are capable.

In around two-thirds of English medium schools, where the development of pupils' Welsh language skills is effective, most staff model its use regularly and have appropriate expectations of pupils using Welsh in activities other than in Welsh lessons. But in around a third of schools, teachers do not promote the use of Welsh. In these schools, it is often the case that pupils receive many opportunities to use Welsh in the foundation phase, but these opportunities reduce through key stage 2.

Most schools plan well for the development of pupils' ICT skills, incorporating a wide range of technologies imaginatively in many subject areas, such as the use of a podcast app and recording equipment to develop pupils' speaking skills. In around a quarter of schools, teachers do not develop the use of spreadsheets and databases to a high enough level.

The foundation phase has been statutory in Wales for ten years. Similarly to last year, in seven-in-ten schools, staff have a good understanding of foundation phase principles and practice. They recognise its importance in developing a range of pupil skills, such as creativity and collaboration, alongside key skills in literacy and numeracy. They plan imaginative and engaging activities for pupils to learn in the indoor and outdoor environments and ensure that pupils input into what and how they learn. In these cases, skilled practitioners respond flexibly to the needs and interests of pupils as they explore activities, by supporting their learning through effective questioning and prompts. In around three-in-ten schools, practice is weaker in the older foundation phase classes (Years 1 and 2). In these cases, activities are over-directed by the adults and focus too much on a narrow range of literacy and numeracy skills. This results in too few opportunities for pupils to develop key physical, creative, social and independent learning skills that they need for the rest of their education.

Woodlands Community Primary School

Pupils and staff at Woodlands Community Primary School seized an opportunity to raise Welsh language standards by incorporating the language into all areas of school life. They have forged strong links with a Welsh-medium primary school, with pupils taking part in webcam conversations to improve oral ability, and poetry workshops to develop writing skills.

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

Cydnabod
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Cogan Nursery School

Staff at Cogan Nursery School are constantly reviewing their practices to ensure that they provide the best possible learning activities for all pupils. Activities are developed primarily as a result of the children's interests. Through providing interesting learning opportunities, as well as discrete teaching, staff enable pupils to develop a comprehensive range of skills and knowledge as they play.

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

Cydnabod
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Sector summaries:
Primary schools

Care, support and guidance

The standard of care, support and guidance of pupils is good or better in more than nine-in-ten primary schools. It is excellent in one-in-five schools. The consistently high standards of care, support and guidance contribute greatly to the high standards of pupils' wellbeing evident in most primary schools in Wales.

In schools that secure high levels of wellbeing for pupils, care, support and guidance are a high priority. They are an explicit aspect of the school's vision, ethos and improvement processes planning. Leaders understand that focusing on wellbeing is fundamental to securing active participation in school life for all pupils, regardless of their backgrounds. In many cases where pupils' wellbeing is particularly strong, leaders deploy well-trained, skilled teaching assistants to support pupils' emotional wellbeing.

Most primary schools promote a sense of community and belonging. They create environments where pupils develop confidence and feel safe. Respectful relationships between adults and pupils contribute to a successful school ethos. Schools ensure that staff know their pupils, their families and their needs. These relationships and nurturing environments encourage pupils to develop positive attitudes towards school and learning. Well-understood expectations and consistent systems, combined with engaging learning experiences, foster high standards of pupil behaviour.

Arrangements to develop pupils as independent learners are inconsistent across schools and occasionally within individual schools. In around a half of schools, teachers nurture pupils' independence well through their foundation phase provision. On their journey through school, pupils are supported to develop a range of strategies that give them the skills and confidence to take on new activities independently or in small groups. However, in a minority of schools, staff do not develop pupils' independence or 'learning to learn' skills well enough. This limits pupils' capacity and enthusiasm to overcome new challenges that are within their reach, and leads to pupils being over-reliant on adult support. Often, this is because leaders and teachers have not developed a shared understanding of what constitutes independent learning.

Most primary schools track pupils' social, emotional and academic progress carefully. They use this information to identify and to provide for pupils with special educational needs and those that require additional help to learn. Most schools collaborate well with external agencies to access support or guidance that they cannot provide themselves. These include specialist services such as counselling or support for pupils with physical or learning disabilities. This collaboration helps to ensure that they have a comprehensive understanding of pupils' needs, as identified in our review of **'Pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools'** (Estyn, 2020o).

Ysgol Pen Rhos

Staff at Ysgol Pen Rhos have been trained well to support pupils who face challenging social issues. A range of wellbeing surveys identifies those in need of additional help, so that the school can tailor intervention from its own, trained staff to provide effective extra support for those pupils.

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

Sector summaries:
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In nearly all primary schools, partnership working is effective and supports the care, support and guidance of pupils. In particular, relationships with parents and carers are usually positive and further enhance pupils' attitudes to school life and learning. In around three-in-ten schools serving the most socially disadvantaged areas in Wales, the care, support and guidance provided for pupils and families are excellent. The extensive engagement between schools, families and communities is often a key component of this excellence and improves the lives of pupils and their families, for example by providing access to services, advice and resources that might otherwise be inaccessible when most needed.

Nearly all schools offer pupils the opportunity to contribute to 'pupil voice' groups. However, their level of influence varies considerably between schools. In the majority of schools that value and nurture pupil voice, these groups contribute to school improvement, for example by evaluating the effectiveness of aspects of the school's work and suggesting improvements. As in previous years, in a minority of schools these groups lack autonomy or influence.

Nearly all schools have appropriate arrangements for encouraging healthy eating and drinking habits. They support pupils to understand the value of a healthy lifestyle through the curriculum and additional activities beyond the school day. Pupils learn about the importance of exercise and a healthy diet, for example by participating in regular physical activity such as circuit training and by planning, making and eating healthy meals. A few schools do not use outdoor learning well enough to support pupils' physical, social and emotional development.

With very few exceptions, safeguarding arrangements in primary schools meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Leadership is good or better in just under three-quarters of primary schools and has important shortcomings that require improvement in slightly more than a quarter.

The characteristics of effective school leadership identified this year are broadly the same as in previous years. In many schools, leaders establish and communicate a clear, ambitious, strategic vision for the school. They relate this vision to the context of the community that the school serves, and promote an aspirational culture for pupil progress. They ensure that all members of the school community understand their role in achieving this common purpose, and allocate resources to facilitate the achievement of the school's goals. Effective leaders nurture confidence in staff, pupils and the wider community. This generates a sense of pride and belief in the school among staff and the wider community.
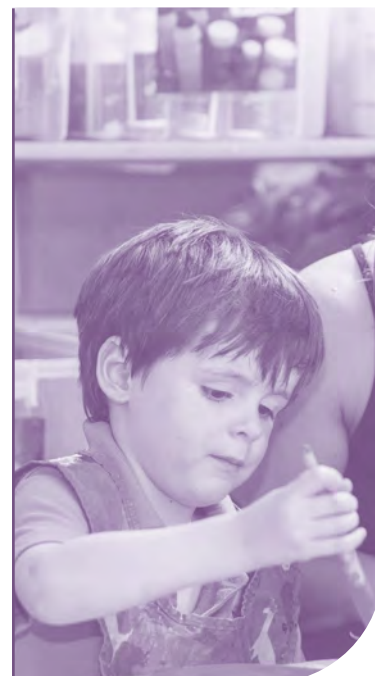
Sector summaries:
Primary schools

A common characteristic of the most effective leaders is their continued focus on improving the standards of teaching and learning experiences and on pupils' wellbeing. They keep the most important aspects of the school's work under constant review through a range of evaluation processes to identify the need for change or to share best practice. This work forms part of a continuous cycle of evaluation and improvement. Leaders plan change thoughtfully and use professional learning to support the introduction of new practices.

Effective leaders nurture future leaders by providing them with opportunities to lead on aspects of improvement work. They invest time and effort in developing staff to become better at what they do. In the best schools, leaders seek to develop leadership capacity at all levels, including among pupils and parents. In a few instances, leaders use their pool of leadership talent well to support the wider education system to improve, for example by releasing leaders, including lead teachers, to work with partner schools or clusters of schools.

In around a quarter of primary schools, leadership requires some degree of improvement. Common weaknesses include evaluation and improvement processes that lack focus and rigor. Nearly all schools undertake some form of self-evaluation and all create improvement plans. Where there are weaknesses, the arrangements to gather evidence do not focus enough on evaluating pupils' progress and wellbeing in lessons and over time. Often in these cases, evaluation processes focus too much on compliance with school policies rather than on the quality and impact of the work. This hinders schools from identifying shortcomings in important aspects of their work, such as the development of pupils' independent learning skills or teachers ensuring the appropriate level of challenge for pupils. In a few instances, schools identify appropriate priorities for improvement but do not plan strategically to secure the desired results. Other issues that limit the effectiveness of improvement work include addressing too many issues at the same time, and weaknesses in reviewing the impact of improvement work.

Where leadership is less effective, there is often a lack of clarity in staff roles and responsibilities. Arrangements to develop leaders and distribute leadership opportunities may be weak. Professional learning and performance management arrangements for staff at all levels are underdeveloped. In combination, these factors limit the capacity of staff to undertake their work successfully. In a very few instances where leadership is poor, relationships and communication between leaders and staff have broken down.

In schools where leadership is not strong, governance is often ineffective and the school's governing body does not undertake its role as a critical friend well enough, relying too heavily on information presented by the headteacher, and arrangements to challenge the validity of this information are weak.

Nant Y Parc Primary School

Senior leaders at Nant Y Parc Primary School encourage staff to conduct research to further professional development, and to enhance educational experiences and improve outcomes. By establishing a culture that nurtures research initiatives, teaching is consistently of high quality, with pupils making very good progress.

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

Cydnabod
Rhagoriaeth
Recognising
Excellence

Sector summaries:
Primary schools

Follow-up activity

Just over a quarter of the primary schools inspected between September 2019 and March 2020 require monitoring. Of these, twenty-four are in need of Estyn review, two in need of significant improvement, and three need special measures.

Around one-in-five primary schools inspected require Estyn review. This is higher than last year. In just under two-thirds of these schools, pupils achieve adequate standards and, in the remainder, pupils' standards are good. While in most of these schools, pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good, in around eight-in-ten teaching and learning experiences are adequate and need improvement. In many, the care, support and guidance provided for pupils are good. All schools that require Estyn review have adequate leadership and management. In these cases, there is no common understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and learning, particularly in relation to the development of pupils' skills. Teachers do not always have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve, nor do they adapt the level of challenge to meet individual needs. Reviews by leaders are not always specific or detailed enough to help teachers understand how to improve their teaching.

This year, we placed five primary schools in a statutory category following their core inspection. In schools requiring significant improvement, there has generally been instability in staffing over an extended period and a reliance on continued support from the regional consortium. Arrangements to manage the performance of staff have not been robust enough to bring about the required improvements. In schools in special measures, pupils achieve adequate standards at best and leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Relationships between staff and leaders are often fractured, and staff do not support each other well enough to bring about improvement. There is a lack of a shared vision to take the school forward and staff roles and lines of accountability are unclear. Where these schools identify appropriate areas for improvement, leaders do not revisit these aspects regularly enough to ensure that staff carry out agreed actions or to assess their impact on standards.

In September 2019, eight primary schools were in special measures and five in significant improvement following core inspections in previous years. Following monitoring visits, we removed two schools from special measures and three from significant improvement.

We continue to monitor all schools placed in Estyn review through a desk-based review. We visit a sample of these schools, including schools where the evidence suggests that progress in addressing the recommendations is not urgent enough. This year, 15 of the 17 schools we reviewed made enough progress and did not require continued follow-up activity. Following visits, we found that two schools had not made sufficient progress against their recommendations and identified these as requiring significant improvement.

Section 1

Sector summaries: Secondary schools

1 | Context

In January 2020, there were 183 secondary schools in Wales. This was four fewer than in January 2019, due mostly to schools amalgamating to form a new secondary school or a new all-age school. In 2019-2020, we inspected 25 schools.

Sector summaries:
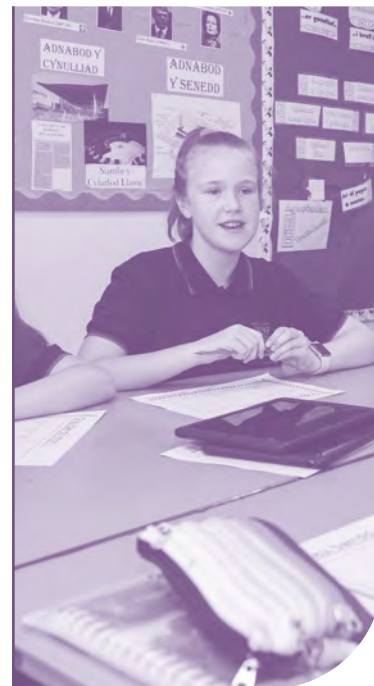# Secondary schools

Standards

Standards are good in just over half of secondary schools. In these schools, many pupils make secure progress and develop their understanding, knowledge and skills well. Where pupils make the strongest progress, they welcome challenge and show enthusiasm for learning. They make skilful use of existing knowledge to consolidate and then extend their ideas in familiar and unfamiliar contexts. By the end of key stage 4, many pupils in these schools perform as or better than expected in external examinations.

The majority of sixth form pupils make strong progress. They deepen their understanding as they apply their knowledge in different situations, although a few, usually those with lower prior attainment, make less progress. Around one-in-five pupils do not progress from AS to A levels and often choose to follow a different and possibly more appropriate route, such as a vocational course, training or employment.

In just over half of schools, pupils eligible for free school meals make good progress in relation to their ability, although the overall performance of this group of pupils continues to be lower than that of other pupils.

The majority of pupils listen with attention to their teachers and peers. Those who do not miss important information and instructions that would benefit their learning. A few pupils make thoughtful and considered responses during group discussions on topics ranging, for example, from the impact of palm oil production on the habitat and wildlife of rainforests to the reasons for the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II. A majority respond well to their teachers' questions and are confident in their use of subject-specific vocabulary. However, the general vocabulary of a minority of pupils is underdeveloped. This limits their ability to extend their verbal contributions and communicate their ideas and opinions.

In many schools, pupils skim and scan to obtain a general understanding of texts and to find specific details. In a few schools, pupils use a broad range of technology to locate information. In the best examples, pupils use the information gained purposefully, for example to improve their understanding of anaerobic respiration to help explain the concept of oxygen debt following physical activity. A minority of pupils use inference and deduction well, when, for example, studying the British government's use of propaganda and censorship during World War 2. More commonly, pupils demonstrate their use of these skills when discussing texts they are already familiar with, such as those studied for literature examinations. A minority of pupils evaluate and synthesise a number of texts well, for example comparing the poetry of Duffy, Larkin and Pugh, or discussing the impact of hunger marches in Jarrow and the Rhondda Valley. In a minority of schools, pupils do not use a range of reading strategies to support their learning. In addition, a few pupils do not have a wide enough vocabulary to enable them to understand what they read, and this limits their attainment as explored in **'Why Closing the Word Gap Matters'** Oxford Language Report (Quigley, 2018).

Sector summaries:
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In the majority of schools, pupils write for an appropriate range of purposes and audiences, such as preparing a speech to persuade their peers to make healthy life choices, or a letter to the American government petitioning them for changes to gun laws. A few pupils use a wide and sophisticated vocabulary in carefully crafted writing that engages the reader. The majority of pupils, girls in particular, produce writing that is generally technically correct and well organised. These pupils usually understand the purpose of their writing, but their sense of audience is not as secure. As a result, these pupils, including those whose vocabulary is limited, make poor language choices and their writing lacks a suitable tone. A similar proportion of pupils does not proof read or take enough responsibility for improving the quality of their work before they hand it in. This contributes to them continuing to make too many basic errors in their writing.

Many pupils make appropriate use of their numeracy skills in different subjects and contexts. The best examples include pupils demonstrating their understanding of percentages and numbers expressed in standard form to calculate the thickness of the earth's crust, or when plotting and interpreting graphs to compare the gross domestic product and infant mortality rates in European countries. While pupils generally complete to a good standard graph work, such as that showing how the rate of a reaction changes with temperature, a minority of graphs are drawn inaccurately, with inappropriate scales, presented carelessly or not interpreted correctly. In a minority of schools, pupils do not use their numerical problem-solving skills often or well enough in worthwhile contexts across the curriculum. Too often, the exercises they complete do not allow them to develop their subject understanding or numeracy skills.

In a few English-medium schools, pupils make good progress in their Welsh language skills. They develop a wide vocabulary, their pronunciation is secure, and they use a variety of sentence patterns confidently. However, in many schools, despite acquiring the ability to answer examination questions, pupils make slow progress in developing their spoken language and often have difficulty understanding or replying to even simple questions. They struggle with pronunciation, lack basic vocabulary, and do not have the confidence to answer in full sentences. They also struggle to read basic Welsh.

In Welsh-medium schools, most pupils become fluent Welsh speakers. Although a few occasionally mix Welsh and English or converse in English in informal situations, the majority make confident use of idioms and humour in their verbal communication, and their reading skills enable them to evaluate for example the reliability of historical sources, such as those about Owain Glyndwr. Their wide vocabulary and natural Welsh syntax allow them to write well in different forms such as short stories, although a few continue to make basic errors. In bilingual schools, communication is most often in English, particularly outside of lessons, and this limits pupils' fluency in Welsh.

In a few schools, pupils develop their ICT skills well across the curriculum. Examples of this include the successful use of digital technologies to design and create advertising apps and talking animations, and the use of algorithms to code programs to move virtual characters. In many schools, pupils' development of their ICT skills is more modest. When given the opportunity, pupils can compose confidently with music technology or use software to create scale drawings of designs. More commonly however, their use of ICT is limited to unthinking online research, and basic slide presentations and spreadsheet work.

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In the majority of schools, pupils of all abilities develop their creativity skills suitably. Those who make the strongest progress involve themselves enthusiastically in activities such as artwork, creative writing and participating in the school Eisteddfod. A very few involve themselves in community work such as designing a school garden for the benefit of others.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In close to three-in-ten schools, pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning are excellent. Pupils develop a strong sense of citizenship, treating each other with respect and consideration, and develop personal leadership skills. In these schools, pupils show a keen interest and enthusiasm for learning. Attendance rates are high and many pupils are confident, resilient learners who work well independently and with others. In these schools, pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning impact positively on the standards they achieve.

In around seven-in-ten schools, pupils recognise the importance of good attendance and commitment to their learning. They usually behave well in lessons, although a few younger pupils need support in developing effective learning routines and are too reliant on their teachers. Many pupils listen respectfully to their teachers and maintain concentration. They are confident about where to go if they need support and know how to keep safe online.

In most schools, pupils understand the importance of making healthy life choices, although they do not always do so in practice, and they do not always take advantage of the sports, fitness and extra-curricular opportunities the school provides, or make suitable food choices.

In a minority of schools, low-level disruption and the poor behaviour of a few pupils impede learning. In a few schools, pupils' poor attendance and punctuality to lessons also impact negatively on their progress.

Many sixth form pupils behave maturely and apply themselves enthusiastically to their studies and wider aspects of school life. They frequently provide good role models for younger pupils, supporting them in various ways such as through paired reading, and develop leadership skills through ambassador and school council roles.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teaching and learning experiences are good in just over half of secondary schools. In a few particularly effective examples, teachers demonstrate passion for their subject, and have particularly high ambitions for and expectations of what pupils can achieve. They know their pupils well and plan to ensure that tasks and resources meet pupils' needs and abilities. These teachers do not always follow a particular approach simply to comply with school policy, but ensure their planning provides a suitably advanced level of challenge for all pupils. They ask incisive questions that stimulate pupils to think deeply and challenge them to develop their responses. This creates high levels of pupil engagement and curiosity and a brisk pace to learning, and supports pupils in making strong progress.

Ysgol Dyffryn Aman

Ysgol Dyffryn Aman fosters strong relationships with its partner primary schools, promoting the wellbeing and resilience of new pupils. Many pupils develop their personal and social skills exceptionally by shouldering different responsibilities within the school community. For example, older pupils act effectively as 'buddies' for vulnerable pupils and contribute beneficially towards supporting pupils' wellbeing in the "Cwtsh" provision.

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

Sector summaries:
Secondary schools

Where teaching is secure, most teachers have high expectations of their pupils and foster purposeful working relationships with them. These teachers have good subject knowledge and plan carefully to engage and challenge pupils of different abilities. They employ an effective blend of teaching approaches, including direct teaching, based on a strong understanding of pupils' prior learning and what they need to do to improve. For a guide to effective teaching approaches, see Chapter 5 of **'Successful Futures: Independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales'**, (Donaldson, 2015).

In schools where teaching needs improvement, this is often the result of low expectations and poor planning. Shortcomings include teachers not building well enough on pupils' prior learning, nor providing an appropriate level of challenge for pupils of all abilities including the more able and those with special educational needs. Tasks keep pupils busy, but do not challenge them to extend their knowledge and understanding, or allow them to develop their skills in worthwhile contexts. In these schools, teachers often over-direct learning, and limit opportunities for pupils to think or work independently. They persist with lesson structures that comply with school policy, but that do not help pupils to progress. They check pupils' recall, but do not probe their understanding.

In many lessons, teachers provide pupils with valuable, verbal feedback and monitor their progress carefully. In the very best examples, teachers question pupils skilfully to ensure that they understand concepts, and to correct any misconceptions. In a few cases, teachers do not consolidate pupils' learning and pupils do not develop the knowledge and skills required to make progress. The quality and consequent usefulness of written feedback remain too variable. Where it is strongest, teachers review key pieces of pupils' work thoroughly, and identify clearly the aspects that need to improve. They provide opportunities for pupils to reflect, and ensure that they provide a suitable, extended response to that feedback. Where teachers' written feedback is ineffectual, it is usually because the assessment of pupils' work lacks rigour, comments do not include helpful advice on how to improve, and they fail to review pupils' responses to their initial feedback.

The majority of schools have well-established and useful provision to help pupils transition from primary to secondary schools. A minority of schools liaise and plan with primary partner schools to provide a curriculum for key stage 3 that builds strongly on pupils' previous learning experiences. In the majority of schools, this level of co-operation does not take place. Teachers do not check the progress pupils have made and set work below previous expectations. As a result, pupils in Year 7 often repeat work they have done previously, and do not make the progress they should.

Many schools have discussed the challenges and opportunities presented by the Curriculum for Wales, and a majority have begun to try out a few approaches to it, although these are usually limited to a single year group or a smaller number of pupils. For example, 'quality improvement' schools[4] have worked with partner primary schools to support a continuum of

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[4] Formally known as Pioneers Schools, Quality improvement schools are working with the Welsh Government to co-construct the curriculum.

Sector summaries:
Secondary schools

learning through joint planning and observation of lessons. They have also explored different pedagogies including, for instance, those intended to improve pupils' mathematical fluency. Other schools have introduced provision for pupils in Year 7 designed to help them make connections between different areas of learning and to promote independent learning.

As reported last year, a few schools continue to shorten curriculum time for key stage 3 to two years, in order to start teaching GCSE in Year 9. This approach reduces the time for a curriculum that develops the broad skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils need as a foundation for their further studies and that employers value.

Most schools consider pupils' aspirations when planning the curriculum for key stage 4 and the sixth form, and adapt it to meet the needs of individuals and groups of pupils. This includes extending and enhancing the learning experiences of more able pupils, for example through links with the Seren network supporting the most academically able students and helping them gain entry to leading universities, including overseas. It also includes supporting the progress and wellbeing of vulnerable pupils, through external partnerships that offer relevant learning experiences and opportunities to gain formal qualifications. The vocational pathways available to pupils continue to be limited.

Many schools have identified opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. In the majority of cases, pupils do so in worthwhile contexts, and improve both their skills and subject knowledge. A minority do not monitor this provision carefully enough to ensure progression, and do not distinguish between simply requiring pupils to use certain skills and supporting them to develop those skills.

Most schools provide appropriate interventions for pupils who need extra support to develop their skills, although very few of these programmes focus on writing. Most schools have increased the expectation for pupils to produce extended writing. However, other than in English and Welsh lessons, pupils rarely receive guidance from teachers on how to improve important aspects of their writing other than on basic spelling and punctuation.

Around half of schools do not place enough emphasis on improving reading. They do not develop pupils' reading skills well enough or encourage them to read for pleasure. The importance and benefits of pupils reading for pleasure are explicit in the 'Curriculum for Wales guidance' (Welsh Government, 2020i). Concerns regarding this are a key message in the latest National Literacy Trust report (2020) and reflected in the last PISA outcomes (Sizmur *et al*., 2019). A minority do not develop pupils' verbal skills, including their general vocabulary.

The majority of schools plan for pupils to have enough opportunities to apply their number skills across the curriculum. Most pupils have opportunities to carry out graph work, although the expectations surrounding the presentation, accuracy and interpretation of those graphs vary even within schools.
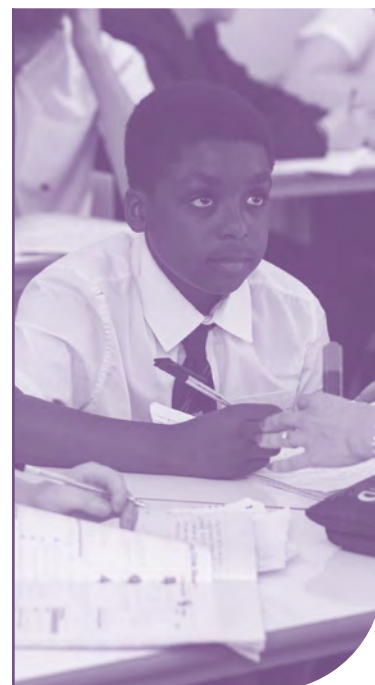
Sector summaries:
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In only a minority of schools is there a clear strategic approach to developing pupils' ICT skills across the curriculum. This is partly due to limited equipment and internet access, and to teachers' limited understanding of what the suitable levels of ICT skills are for pupils.

Most pupils in English-medium schools follow an appropriate course in Welsh. However, there are very limited opportunities, other than for listening and responding to greetings and basic instructions from their teachers, for them to practise the language other than in Welsh lessons. This contributes to pupils becoming more adept at answering examination questions using grammatically accurate expression, rather than being able to understand and involve themselves in conversations in a natural context. Nearly all pupils in Welsh-medium schools complete the GCSE first language qualification and develop their ability to communicate orally and in writing well.

Care, support and guidance

In nearly three-in-ten schools, the quality of care, support and guidance of pupils is excellent. In around three-quarters of schools, it is at least good. In the best cases, schools are committed fully to developing responsible, confident and well-rounded citizens. Irrespective of language medium or faith, these schools have a very strong sense of community and enrich pupils' lives. The thematic report **'Healthy and happy: School impact on pupils' health and wellbeing'** (Estyn, 2019a) identifies the characteristics of these schools including:

- policies and practices to help pupils make good progress
- leaders who 'walk the talk' about supporting pupils' health and wellbeing
- a nurturing culture, where positive relationships enable pupils to thrive
- detailed knowledge about pupils' health and wellbeing that influences policies and actions and policy
- discrete, evidence-based learning experiences that promote health and wellbeing
- supportive pastoral care and targeted interventions for pupils that need additional support
- effective links with external agencies and close partnerships with parents and carers
- continuing professional learning for all staff that enables them to support pupils' health and wellbeing

In many schools, staff know their pupils well and foster sympathetic relationships with them. These schools have systems to track and monitor pupils' academic progress and wellbeing that enable potential problems or underperformance to be recognised and for suitable interventions to be put in place. As a result, pupils in these schools often have strong attendance, behave well and make good progress in their learning. In a few schools, staff do not make rigorous or effective use of the information they hold. In a minority, systems are not robust enough, are not applied consistently or are recent developments. These schools frequently encounter issues with pupils' behaviour, attendance and achievement.

Pentrehafod School Swansea

Leaders at Pentrehafod School have developed a tracking system that aligns attainment and wellbeing to provide a more rounded overview of every child's progress. This allows teachers to identify the most effective intervention at the earliest opportunity to support the child. The system draws upon a wide range of information to ensure targeted support to raise individuals' aspirations. The holistic tracking has contributed to an improvement in academic outcomes and increased sense of wellbeing for pupils.

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

Sector summaries:
Secondary schools

Many schools have a behaviour policy that all pupils understand and staff apply consistently. In the best cases, schools concentrate on promoting the benefits of behaving well rather than simply employing rewards and sanctions. Most schools have a designated room or discrete area to support those pupils who display particularly challenging behaviour in lessons or around the school. In the best examples, schools work well with these pupils, engaging external agencies if required, to enable a timely return to mainstream classes. In a few cases, the approach is more punitive, provides little support, and rarely leads to improved behaviour.

Many schools promote regular attendance well. They work closely with parents and pupils to foster an understanding of the importance of attendance and its direct influence on academic achievement. A very few schools, where attendance is well below expectation, lack a co-ordinated approach to engage effectively with pupils and their parents.

In many schools, pupils have opportunities to reflect on spiritual, social and moral issues and values. The personal and social education (PSE) programmes in many schools now consider mental health as well as other relevant themes such as citizenship, radicalisation and healthy relationships. However, the quality of learning experiences within these programmes is often too variable and, in a few schools, poor. Nearly all schools have broadly suitable arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. These include offering a range of healthy meal options at lunch and providing useful information on nutrition. For example, schools provide helpful guidance on healthy eating during PSE sessions and invite in speakers to discuss issues, such as the impact of food on mood and the effect of energy drinks on the body. In many schools, pupils benefit from suitable careers advice and guidance, although in the few where this is not the case pupils do not always follow suitable courses.

Many schools support pupils with special educational needs well. These schools foster strong, purposeful relationships with pupils and parents to develop learning plans that support suitably high expectations. Teachers and support staff use these plans effectively to ensure the best approaches to learning and to monitor pupils' progress. In the best examples, pupils often follow alternative learning pathways as part of a range of personalised support programmes that the school reviews to ensure that they continue to meet individual needs. Where support for this group is less effective and pupils do not make enough progress, this is often because individual action plans are not precise enough and do not include clear, helpful teaching strategies, or because teachers do not refer to them. In a few cases, it is because adults do not guide pupils towards the correct learning pathway. The thematic report **'Pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools – A good practice report'** (Estyn, 2020o) includes helpful information on effective support for this group of pupils.

Birchgrove Comprehensive School Swansea

With a high number of pupils moved from other schools being accepted by Birchgrove Comprehensive School, leaders considered how they could better address the needs of their vulnerable learners. They introduced a simplified behaviour management system based on mutual respect and placed strong teacher-pupil working relationships at the heart of this process. The school's focus on inclusion has resulted in a large reduction in exclusion rates and an increase in attendance and punctuality.

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

Sector summaries:
Secondary schools

Leadership and management

Leadership is good or better in just over half of secondary schools. In the best examples, leaders have established a common ambition for excellence that has led to real improvements in important areas such as in quality of teaching, in pupils' wellbeing or in the standards they achieve.

In the schools where leadership is successful, senior leaders communicate and work together well. They foster a culture of continuous improvement, particularly in relation to teaching and learning. They consult with all stakeholders and establish a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They also understand and fulfil their responsibilities, including supporting others to provide a high quality education and caring environment. In these schools, leaders demonstrate ambition, and care for pupils and colleagues. Frequently, this approach leads to high staff morale. Systems to manage the performance of staff are robust, transparent, and linked to providing professional learning opportunities. Governors possess a strong understanding of the school and play an important role in strategic planning. The recent thematic report **'Leadership development – case studies of professional learning for school leadership'** (Estyn, 2020k) provides examples of how professional learning can support successful leadership.

In schools where leadership is not strong enough, leaders do not communicate a clearly understood strategic vision. They do not identify the school's strengths and areas for development precisely enough. These leaders interpret standards too narrowly and focus disproportionately on examination outcomes. Often, senior managers do not have equitable or appropriate responsibilities.

A minority of schools are working well to develop a clear vision for how their school's curriculum will develop over time and to consider what effective learning will look like for their pupils in the context of the Curriculum for Wales. Where leaders think through and introduce new systems sensitively and in a considered manner, curriculum reform is progressing well. In these schools, leaders are planning for reform carefully and it aligns well with improvement priorities identified by the school. This approach ensures that staff understand the reasons for education reform and are developing their thinking around curriculum reform in particular.

Where leaders do not fully consider the underpinning aims of the new curriculum, they do not plan strategically enough when developing a vision for the curriculum, or for learning and teaching in their schools. A few schools focus too much on developing thematic approaches to learning without first establishing their vision for the curriculum as a whole, or how they will improve the quality of learning and teaching. In these cases, schools focus too much on the content they will teach and on largely inconsequential links between themes or subject areas, rather than on how they will improve and adapt their approaches to teaching and learning.

St John Baptist Church in Wales High School Aberdare

Leaders at St John Baptist Church in Wales High School Aberdare recognise well the need to involve parents in all aspects of school life. Through a regular programme of support meetings, mentoring and detailed communication, the school keeps all parents informed of their child's progress and wellbeing. These relationships help the school to have a good understanding of the needs of pupils and parents, and enable staff to plan and structure individual support programmes effectively. As a result, the school is able to react swiftly to any concerns that parents may have.

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

Sector summaries:
Secondary schools

The majority of schools have appropriate improvement processes in place to identify specific areas needing improvement and to plan those improvements. Most often, the areas in need of improvement relate to the quality of teaching. The majority of schools ensure that their programme of professional learning for teachers addresses the identified shortcomings, as well as national priorities and individual staff needs. In a minority of schools, improvement processes are not robust or precise enough. In these cases, processes record whether school policies are followed rather than evaluating the impact they have on pupils' learning or wellbeing. In a few schools, leaders do not have a clear understanding of how pupils or groups of pupils perform compared to those in similar schools. These factors contribute to schools having an overly positive view of the quality of teaching in particular, and being unable to devise a suitable programme of professional learning to address this shortcoming.

In the few schools with weak leadership, leaders often focus too much on ensuring that teachers adhere rigidly to a particular approach to planning and delivering lessons rather than on helping them to improve their pedagogy.

Nearly all secondary schools inspected this year had to deal with challenges around funding, despite the majority taking forward reserves from 2018-2019. Nearly three-in-ten of the schools are operating a deficit budget (under licensed agreement with the local authority), and for most of the secondary schools inspected over the last few years the number of full time equivalent teachers has declined.

Follow-up activity

Eleven of the 25 secondary schools inspected this year required follow-up. We placed seven schools in Estyn review, two are in need of significant improvement, and two require special measures. This is a smaller proportion overall than last year, although the proportion of schools placed in a statutory category, around one-in-six, is almost the same.

At the end of the academic year 2018-2019, there were nine schools in special measures. One made good progress against its recommendations and was removed from the category. The other eight schools did not make sufficient progress for us to remove them from the category. In these schools, leadership does not have enough impact on important aspects of the school's work, such as teaching. When evaluating teaching, these leaders often focus too much on compliance with school policies rather than the impact teaching has on pupil progress.

Sector summaries:
Secondary schools

There were nine schools requiring significant improvement at the beginning of this academic year. Four of these schools received a monitoring visit during the autumn term. One had made enough progress and we removed it from the category. Two schools had made some progress, but not enough for us to remove them from the category. The pace of progress of the fourth was too slow, and we placed it in special measures.

At the beginning of the academic year, there were 23 schools in Estyn review. In November, we reviewed the progress of ten placed in this category in 2017-2018. We based this review on reports written by the school and local authority, as well as considering pupil outcomes. Seven of the schools showed enough progress for us to remove them from Estyn review. Two other schools had recently undergone significant changes in leadership and will remain in Estyn review for a further year. We carried out one monitoring visit following the review. The school had made insufficient progress and we judged the school to require special measures.

At the end of the academic year 2019-2020, there are 12 schools in special measures, nine requiring significant improvement, and 22 in Estyn review.

Section 1

Sector summaries:
Maintained all-age schools

1

Context

All-age schools provide education for pupils from age three or four up to 16 or 18 years old. In January 2020, there were 22 all age schools in Wales, which is an increase of three on the previous year. In September 2020, another two opened. In total, all-age schools educate about 20,000 pupils, which is around 4% of pupils in maintained schools in Wales. This is more than double the number of pupils that were educated in all-age schools in 2017.

This year, we inspected two all-age schools. One school educates around 600 pupils and the other around 950 pupils. Both provide education for pupils aged 3 to 16 years. One school is on six sites several miles apart, while the other is located on one site. One school is mainly Welsh-medium and the other English-medium. These differences reflect the diversity of schools within the sector.

Due to the small number of schools inspected each year and the diversity in the sector, it is difficult to determine trends or make useful comparisons with inspection outcomes from previous years.

Sector summaries:
Maintained all-age schools

Standards

Standards in one school are adequate and need improvement and in the other unsatisfactory and need urgent improvement.

In the school where standards are adequate, pupils develop their skills well between the foundation phase and the end of key stage 2, but in the secondary phase they do not develop the literacy, numeracy or ICT skills expected for their age and ability. In the school where standards are unsatisfactory, the majority of pupils do not develop their skills well enough and make slow progress during their time at school in both the primary and secondary phases. In both schools, the performance of pupils at the end of key stage 4 is generally weak.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Standards of wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good in one school and adequate and needing improvement in the other.

A strong feature in both schools is the way that most pupils in the primary phase and many pupils in the secondary phase behave well and treat each other in a caring, respectful and supportive manner. Many pupils are ready to learn at the beginning of lessons. They apply themselves to tasks quickly, persevere diligently and show a positive attitude to learning. In the best cases, they show resilience when facing challenges in their work and concentrate for extended periods of time. Many pupils work purposefully with a partner and in groups, for example when evaluating each other's work.

Low rates of attendance in one school are having a negative impact on pupil progress and standards across the school. In general, pupil leadership groups have limited influence on school policy or on teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning experiences

In both schools, there are strengths and areas that require improvement in the quality of teaching and learning experiences. Many teachers form effective working relationships with pupils and the majority of teachers plan experiences that engage pupils' interest and stimulate learning. They provide pupils with support and encouragement. A majority of teachers have high expectations in terms of pupil participation. They plan activities that support the learning of most less able pupils and ensure progress in their areas of learning. They use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding and ensure good participation.

The shortcomings identified are that, in many cases, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. They do not provide pupils with a suitable degree of challenge and do not intervene effectively when pupils are off task. The majority of teachers' feedback does not help pupils to improve their knowledge or skills well enough. Many teachers do not monitor closely enough how well pupils have improved their work in response to their feedback.
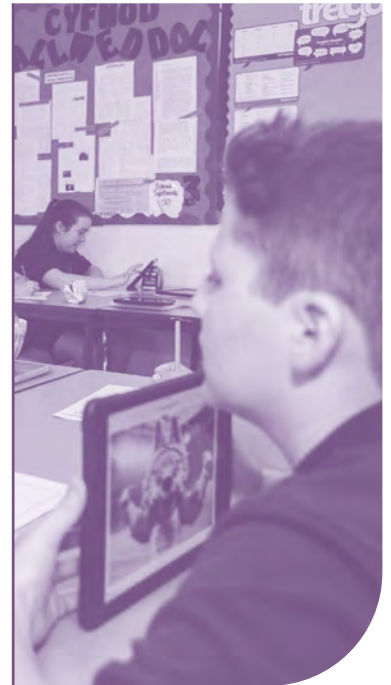
Sector summaries:
Maintained all-age schools

One of the schools inspected has embedded the principles of the foundation phase firmly, and provides a good balance of valuable experiences for these pupils. The curriculum builds from the foundation phase to key stage 2, and is beginning to take account of the principles of the Curriculum for Wales. However, the other school does not provide younger pupils with enough opportunities to improve their learning through enhanced and continuous provision[5] or make effective use of the outdoors to encourage independent learning.

In both schools, the provision for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the school is underdeveloped.

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance are adequate and in need of improvement in both schools inspected.

In general, the schools are inclusive and welcoming communities that place pupils' wellbeing at the heart of their work. Leaders focus effectively on promoting good behaviour and establishing a positive ethos during the early days of establishing the school.

Both schools provide valuable support for pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Pupils' individual educational plans are purposeful and produced in consultation with parents, pupils and staff. However, teachers do not use information about pupils' needs well enough to plan learning and support pupils during lessons. As a result, they does not meet pupils' needs in full.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management in both schools are adequate and in need of improvement. Leaders have a clear vision and, in the relatively short time both schools have been in existence, they have built a team ethos and created a sense of shared ambition.

Leaders generally have an accurate overview of their strengths and areas that need developing further. They reflect regularly on their work and learn lessons from actions that have not been successful. Overall, the impact of leaders' improvement planning is too variable. Self-evaluation and improvement planning procedures do not focus well enough on improving the quality of teaching.

Both schools provide teachers at all levels with regular opportunities to come together to share good practice. Leaders link professional learning activities to the school's improvement priorities and individual staff needs. However, this has not had a positive enough impact on the quality of teaching or the progress that pupils make.

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[5] Continuous provision refers to the use of resources that are continuously available in the indoor or outdoor classroom for pupils to use independently. Enhanced provision describes additions to the continuous provision to provoke children to think more deeply, practise new skills, or learn new ways of working.

Sector summaries:
Maintained all-age schools

Case studies

Care, support and guidance are a particular strength in all-age schools. In thematic reports published this year, case studies from all-age schools featured in the following:

'Effective school support for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils' (Estyn, 2020g) – at Tonyrefail Community School, we highlight support for young carers. The school provides a range of ways to support their young carers on a day-to-day basis. This includes counselling, opportunities to contact relatives during the day and an alternative curriculum room. The impact of this work is that most young carers at the school feel safe and well supported by the school. Most young carers attend school regularly and most make at least expected progress.

'Knowing your children – supporting pupils with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)' (Estyn, 2020j) – Ebbw Fawr Learning Community formed a working party to develop strategies and school systems to support vulnerable pupils and others identified as being at risk of poor wellbeing. The school created a detailed tracking system that identifies the adverse childhood experiences that individual students are coping with. The school tailors support for pupils depending on their level of risk. This can involve intense multi-agency work. The implementation of a tiered approach to support has resulted in a positive impact on standards of wellbeing. Exclusions have fallen for the identified students and their attendance has risen.

'Pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools' (Estyn, 2020o) – at Ysgol Bae Baglan, senior leaders have established a strongly inclusive vision for the school. Given the high proportion of pupils who require extra support, and the wide range of pupils' special educational needs, senior leaders have prioritised establishing robust approaches to promote the inclusion and wellbeing of all pupils, including those with SEN. Tailored interventions address the needs of individual pupils successfully and with great sensitivity. This helps them to engage positively in their learning. Across the school, many pupils with SEN make strong progress against their targets and, by the end of key stage 4, many of these pupils make exceptional progress.

Section 1 Sector summaries: Maintained special schools

1

Context

In January 2020, there were 41 maintained special schools in Wales, the same as in January 2019 (Welsh Government, 2020nn). These schools provide for pupils with a range of needs, including profound and multiple learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The number of pupils attending maintained special schools is approximately 5,153 pupils. This is around 1% of pupils in maintained schools in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020nn).

This year, we inspected six maintained special schools. One is a residential school for pupils aged from 7 to 16 years, two schools provide education for pupils aged 4 to 11 years, and the other three are all-age schools educating pupils aged 3 to 19 years.

Sector summaries:
Maintained special schools

Standards

Standards in two of the maintained special schools inspected this year are excellent, good in one, and adequate in the other three.

Where standards are excellent, nearly all pupils make particularly effective progress in the development of their communication skills. Their consistent and routine use of signing, symbols and technology assists greatly in increasing their ability to communicate and enjoy learning such as joining in songs. In one school, pupils' use of their individual communication aids is an outstanding feature. For example, pupils use their aids to help them to develop a sense of order and routine, which contributes to exceptionally high levels of engagement in different activities throughout the school day.

In schools where standards are good or better, nearly all pupils develop worthwhile independence and life skills. For example, older pupils learn valuable housekeeping skills that promote their ability to live independently. They learn how to use kitchen equipment safely, shop within a budget, and prepare healthy food. Younger pupils and those with more complex needs make equally strong progress. They develop their cooking skills by stirring and mixing ingredients and kneading dough to make bread, fetch the equipment they need, and clear up after activities.

In all schools, nearly all pupils make strong progress from their individual starting points in relation to their learning targets. Most listen carefully in class and respond enthusiastically to the guidance they receive from staff. Many pupils enter school with difficulties in reading. Over time, and in relation to their identified needs, they develop their skills and read texts and instructions independently. They gain increasing enjoyment in reading a range of books. Many pupils develop secure basic numeracy skills, which they use confidently in different contexts. For example, in science, pupils use their measuring and data handling skills accurately to explore whether pupils with longer legs can jump further.

However, in half of schools inspected, standards are adequate with important aspects of pupils' skills development requiring improvement. In most cases, this is because pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop and apply their communication, numeracy, ICT and other skills in different subjects across the curriculum. This lack of consistency significantly hinders their progress in developing their abilities in these areas.

Nearly all older pupils gain a good range of accreditation appropriate to their abilities and many move on to further education or training.

Ysgol Bryn Derw

Nearly all pupils at Ysgol Bryn Derw use well-established and highly personalised communication systems to make their needs and wants known well. This includes using symbols, gesture, electronic tablets and speech. Pupils' effective use of these systems enables them to engage in worthwhile and meaningful learning and in social situations, such as confidently ordering items in the local café. These experiences prepare them well for living independently.

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

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Sector summaries:
Maintained special schools

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In the schools inspected this year, pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning are excellent in two, good in three and adequate in one.

Nearly all pupils enjoy taking part in a range of learning experiences. They show strong motivation and interest in what they are learning and focus well in lessons. Many pupils develop important personal skills such as tolerance and co operation, as well as physical skills, and they have fun taking part enthusiastically in team activities. In one school, pupils with mobility difficulties do not have enough opportunities to develop their mobility skills.

Nearly all pupils develop extremely positive relationships with each other and with staff. They demonstrate care and concern for their peers and respect for adults. This supports their behaviour, which is almost always very good. In one school where pupils have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, a very few pupils have difficulty in sustaining concentration, become restless and disrupt the learning of others.

Teaching and learning experiences

The quality of teaching and learning experiences is good in half the schools inspected and adequate in the remainder.

Most teachers use their detailed knowledge of individual pupils well to provide rich and engaging tasks that help to develop pupils' life skills and independence. In the best examples, teachers and support staff skilfully and consistently use helpful communication strategies and resources, such as schedules and visual and auditory cues, to support pupils' learning. They also make use of a range of activities to extend pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. As a result, nearly all pupils sustain interest as they apply themselves fully to their work. In schools where the quality of teaching and learning experiences is adequate, teachers do not provide well enough for pupils' different needs or plan suitably stimulating activities and resources.

All schools inspected largely offer a broad, coherent curriculum that teachers use flexibly to plan learning experiences to build on pupils' prior learning. They provide pupils with valuable opportunities to develop their learning, and make extensive use of experiences outside the classroom. For example, through involvement in the Shakespeare in Schools Festival, pupils improve their literacy and communication skills, as well as building their confidence in front of a live audience.

In nearly all the schools, staff are reviewing and beginning to amend their approach to the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of all learners in line with the Curriculum for Wales. For example, one school has reviewed its curriculum provision and is beginning to plan learning that focuses on individual pupil progress in the different areas of learning and experience, and towards the four purposes[6].

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[6] The purpose of the curriculum is to enable learners to develop as:
- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Welsh Government, 2020i)

Sector summaries:
Maintained special schools

In all schools, a strong focus on developing pupils' independence provides older pupils with suitable opportunities to participate in work-related education and work experience. These opportunities enable these pupils to develop their skills in a variety of real-life contexts, promoting their independence, supporting transition and gaining worthwhile accreditation to support lifelong learning. In one school, provision for pupils whose first language is Welsh is underdeveloped.

Care, support and guidance

The quality of care, support and guidance is excellent in two schools inspected, good in one and adequate in the other three.

Where provision is exceptional, there is a robust and cohesive strategic approach to tracking and monitoring pupils' progress. Detailed assessments ensure that staff understand pupils' needs thoroughly. There are strong links between the objectives in individual pupils' statements of special educational needs, individual education plans and teachers' planning.

Schools with adequate care, support and guidance lack a consistent strategic approach and do not make good enough use of their systems for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress.

All schools inspected have strong working relationships with parents. They make regular use of home-school notebooks, online apps, and face-to-face meetings to keep parents well informed. Two thirds of the schools offer an effective training programme for parents to share learning strategies between home and school. Parents value these strategies greatly. Productive partnerships with professionals, such as those from health and social care, provide two-thirds of the schools with targeted support to meet pupils' health and care needs extremely well. The restorative approach[7] of one school is particularly helpful to pupils who find developing positive relationships a challenge. In a third of schools, the availability of these additional services to the school and families is limited.

Nearly all schools have effective, well-considered arrangements to encourage pupils to develop healthy food and drink choices. Where necessary, they make sensible arrangements for pupils whose sensory needs make eating and socialising in larger groups challenging.

In half the schools inspected, traffic management of the individual school's site is a cause for concern. We wrote to these schools outlining the issues and we are monitoring their responses.

Portfield School

Staff at Portfield School have well-established processes that enable staff to track and monitor pupil progress highly effectively. There is a range of assessments that they match well to pupils' needs and abilities. Leaders and teaching staff use the outcomes of these assessments expertly to ensure that their planning of the curriculum provides valuable learning experiences for pupils.

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7 An approach to resolving conflict and preventing harm. Restorative approaches enable those who have been harmed to convey the impact of the harm to those responsible, and for those responsible to acknowledge this impact and take steps to make it right.

Sector summaries:
Maintained special schools

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are excellent in one school inspected this year, good in two, and adequate in three.

Where leadership is excellent, shared responsibility is a strength. A common sense of purpose motivates staff and pervades all of the school's work, including robust quality assurance activities. This shared approach helps to build staff skills and confidence in evaluating accurately their own work and that of colleagues, and drives improvement.

Where there are shortcomings in leadership, although leaders have established a positive vision for their schools, they do not have a clear strategic view of the school's strengths or areas for development. In these schools, staff roles and responsibilities often lack clarity. This means that important aspects of provision, such as developing pupils' skills and strengthening curriculum planning, have not received enough attention and are underdeveloped.

In the best examples, self-evaluation and improvement planning set the scene for continuous reflection at all levels across the school. Leaders focus on raising the standards that pupils achieve through developing motivational teaching and learning experiences. They support staff to improve their performance through regular, high quality professional development to support the school's priorities. Where leadership and management are weaker, the schools have been slow in developing processes to evaluate the quality of teaching and they do not reflect well enough on the impact of their provision on pupils' progress.

There are shortcomings in the school site across half of the schools inspected, with limited space and accommodation available to meet fully the complex needs of pupils.

Follow-up activity

This year, areas of good practice were identified in three schools, and the schools were invited to provide a case study. We also identified three schools requiring Estyn review.

At the beginning of this year, one school was in Estyn review from the previous academic year. It made good progress against recommendations at the time of the core inspection, and we removed it from follow-up.

Section 1

Sector summaries: Independent special schools

1

Context

In January 2020, there were 36 independent special schools in Wales. This figure is the same as in January 2019. Independent special schools educate pupils from 3 to 19 who have a wide range of needs, including autistic spectrum disorder, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many of the schools are small and pupils usually live in children's homes attached to the schools. A minority of these schools also educate day pupils or pupils who reside in children's homes not attached to the school. Local authorities fund nearly all pupil placements at independent special schools.

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 17 schools. The findings from all inspections and visits have informed this report.

Sector summaries:
Independent special schools

In one of the schools we inspected this year, we did not report or make a judgement on standards or on wellbeing and attitudes to learning because the number of pupils was too small to report on without identifying individual pupils.

Compliance with Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003

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

Four of the five independent special schools inspected complied with all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, and two-thirds of schools visited as part of the monitoring process complied with the regulations inspected on that visit. The shortcomings in compliance with regulations relate mostly to the quality of education the schools provide, the welfare, health and safety of pupils and the suitability of the premises and accommodation. All schools that do not meet the regulations are required to submit a plan to the Welsh Government to show how they will make the required improvements. We monitor compliance with the regulations at our next monitoring visit.

Standards

Standards are good in three of the five schools inspected this year. In these schools, and in around three-quarters of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process, many pupils make secure progress in their learning in relation to their starting points, abilities and needs. They respond well to the support of staff and make strong progress towards the targets in their personal plans.

Many pupils make particularly strong progress in developing their social and communication skills. They listen carefully in lessons, respond positively to staff and peers, and take turns appropriately. Many develop a wide range of valuable skills that support their ability to live more independently, in areas such as housekeeping, travel and managing their personal wellbeing.

Many pupils improve their literacy and numeracy skills and apply them successfully to their learning across the curriculum. For example, they make steady progress in developing their reading and writing skills and strengthen their understanding of key mathematical concepts. Many use a range of ICT programmes confidently to support their learning.

The progress that pupils make in these areas helps them to achieve worthwhile qualifications and prepares them well to move onto further education, employment or training, or into supported living settings.

In one school inspected this year, pupils do not make enough progress in their learning because they do not listen well enough to instructions or respond positively to what adults ask them to do. In addition, in this school many pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop and apply their writing, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum.

Sector summaries:
Independent special schools

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good or better in all of the schools inspected this year and in around eight-in-ten of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process.

In these schools, most pupils make significant progress in improving their wellbeing because of the well co-ordinated and sensitive support provided by staff. Despite having experienced significant disruption in their education before joining the school, most pupils build trusting relationships with staff and become increasingly tolerant and supportive of each other. Over time, the support that pupils receive helps many to understand their emotions and develop strategies to manage their behaviour.

Many pupils learn to feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they feel anxious. They take on worthwhile responsibilities within the school, including valuable leadership roles. They develop a secure understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and exercise, and of their role as responsible citizens.

Many pupils develop positive attitudes to learning. In lessons, they settle quickly and respond well to the support and challenge provided by staff. They apply themselves enthusiastically to activities and are eager to achieve. They work together constructively, concentrate well and sustain their engagement. Many improve their attendance and build their confidence and belief in themselves as successful and resilient learners.

Where there are shortcomings, this is because pupils do not respond well enough to the behaviour management strategies of staff and do not engage well in activities. In addition, the poor attendance of a few pupils limits the progress they make in their learning and wellbeing.

Teresa House School

At Teresa House School, the multi-disciplinary team works together closely with teaching staff to implement the school's 'wellbeing for life' programme. This programme provides useful assessments on pupils' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Staff use this information to support pupils' learning across all areas of the curriculum. As pupils progress through the three phases of the programme, multi-disciplinary meetings ensure pupils are engaging and achieving. This creates an effective working relationship across education, therapy, and care staff and supports each pupil's specific needs.

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

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Sector summaries:
Independent special schools

Teaching and learning experiences

Teaching and learning experiences are good or better in four out of the five schools inspected, and have strong features in around half of the schools visited as part of the monitoring process.

In these schools, teachers and support staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and potential for learning. They have a strong understanding of the learning needs of individual pupils and use this information thoughtfully to plan activities that engage pupils' interests successfully. Teaching staff build supportive working relationships and establish consistent classroom routines that provide structure and help to reduce pupils' anxieties. They give encouraging verbal feedback that ensures pupils know what they are doing well and how they can improve.

All of these schools provide a broad and balanced curriculum that builds effectively on pupils' previous learning and promotes their progress and wellbeing. Teachers and leaders plan strategically and develop innovative learning experiences that meet individual pupils' therapeutic needs, stimulate their curiosity and improve their social skills and independence. Flexible learning pathways provide good opportunities for pupils to gain a range of relevant qualifications.

In the schools where teaching and learning experiences require improvement, this is generally because planning does not include enough opportunities for pupils to practise and develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum. In a few schools, there is too much variation in the quality of teaching and assessment, including in the contribution that classroom assistants make to learning.

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance are excellent in three of the five schools inspected this year, good in one, and adequate in the other. They are a strong feature in two-thirds of schools visited as part of the monitoring process.

Where standards of care, support and guidance are good or better, schools have robust processes to assess pupils' needs and starting points when they join the school. Leaders track and monitor pupils' progress in learning carefully, and use this information to plan thoughtful interventions and modify the curriculum to meet pupils' needs and interests.

These schools provide a caring and supportive environment that helps pupils to improve their confidence and engagement in learning. Pupils benefit exceptionally from the close working between education, care and therapy staff. This carefully co-ordinated approach ensures that all staff understand the needs of their pupils and that they have high expectations for their wellbeing and learning.

Staff plan particularly effectively for pupils to develop their understanding of healthy lifestyle choices, for example through provision of a wide range of

St. David's College

St David's College has pioneered teaching that focuses on the whole person, allowing all pupils, whether they have specific learning needs or not, to thrive and excel. Alongside this, the school aims to develop each individual's character, enabling each pupil to gain a range of transferable life skills.

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

Sector summaries:
Independent special schools

outdoor learning opportunities that build pupils' physical skills and self-esteem. They also provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the wider world and influence how and what they learn.

Where there are shortcomings, this is generally because whole-school tracking systems are underdeveloped and do not identify pupils' starting points well enough when they join the school. In a few schools, there are shortcomings in the provision for personal and social education, and there are not enough opportunities for pupils to contribute to decision-making across the school.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are excellent in two of the five schools inspected, good in two, and adequate in the other. They are strong features in about two thirds of schools visited as part of the annual monitoring process.

Where leadership is good or better, leaders communicate a clear strategic vision for the school as an inclusive, nurturing community that promotes a broad range of high quality learning experiences for all pupils. Leaders have extremely high expectations of staff and pupils, and ensure that all members of the school community work together harmoniously to reinforce the school's vision and purpose.

In these schools, there are robust and well-established processes to monitor and evaluate the quality of their work. Leaders and managers consider carefully a wide range of evidence, including information on pupil progress, lesson observations and the views of pupils, parents and carers. These effective processes ensure that leaders have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They use this information to plan professional learning activities that support the school's key priorities and align well with the development needs of staff.

Where leadership and management require improvement, this is because schools do not identify precise areas for improvement well enough, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching and learning. In these schools, leaders do not plan well for professional learning, including for teaching assistants.

St David's College

St David's College has an outdoor education and activities programme that lies at the heart of the school's life and mission to foster pupils' spiritual, intellectual and physical wellbeing. This programme includes a range of cultural, recreational and sporting opportunities as well as specific 'compassion' projects to enhance and extend pupils' learning experiences.

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

Bryn Tirion Hall School

Bryn Tirion Hall School has recently introduced a course entitled Therapeutic Counselling in Education (TCiE): Educating the Mind and the Heart. During this course, staff explore a range of themes and are trained to use the arts and forms of non-verbal communication to help learners safely externalise, explore and process their experiences.

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

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Section 1

Sector summaries: Independent mainstream schools

1

Context

In January 2020, there were 38 independent mainstream schools in Wales. This figure is the same as in January 2019. This year, we inspected three independent mainstream schools. One of these schools is an all-age school, one educates pupils aged 11 to 18 years, and one provides education for pupils aged 8 to 16 years. This sample reflects the diversity of schools within the sector, with some catering for pre-statutory school age children and others extending into post-16 provision.

Sector summaries:
Independent mainstream schools

Compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003

In independent schools, we inspect the extent to which the school complies with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. This year, all of the schools inspected met all of the regulations. The one school that failed to meet the regulations for registration last year has since closed.

The Welsh Government formally requested Estyn 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 of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, which relates to the welfare, health and safety of pupils.

At the time of the focused inspection, the school did not fully meet the regulatory requirements for this standard. In order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school is implementing an action plan to:

• Safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school, complying with Welsh Assembly Government guidance (2008) Safeguarding Children in Education: The role of local authorities and governing bodies under the Education Act 2002.

We will monitor and support this school to ensure that it makes the required improvements to maintain registration.

Standards

Standards are good in all the independent mainstream schools inspected this year. While weaker than last year, the sample size is too small to draw definite conclusions about the sector as a whole.

In all schools inspected this year, pupils are prepared well for their future educational opportunities and employment. Most pupils recall their prior learning swiftly and are particularly adept at applying their knowledge confidently in unfamiliar situations. They listen carefully and with respect to their teachers and their peers and speak clearly and confidently. Many pupils offer thoughtful, informed and coherent arguments to justify their opinions. Most pupils develop their reading skills through their time at school and develop higher order skills such as deduction. In addition, these pupils develop a firm understanding of different types of writing, and use language and tone accurately for different purposes. In the secondary phase, pupils apply the strong numeracy skills that they develop in their mathematics lessons in different contexts, particularly in science. A few pupils offer only brief oral responses and do not always develop their written accounts well enough.

Sector summaries:
Independent mainstream schools

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In all schools inspected this year, pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good. These high levels of wellbeing and positive attitudes to learning contribute well to the overall progress that pupils make.

Most pupils demonstrate strong social skills and encourage each other to do their best. They have a strong sense of the needs of others within their own school community and further afield. Pupils are attentive, and engage and participate enthusiastically in learning activities. This approach helps them to develop as curious, confident and resilient learners.

Most pupils respond eagerly and diligently to opportunities to take on responsibility, developing valuable leadership skills. In addition, pupils enjoy participating in a broad range of extra-curricular clubs and activities and engage enthusiastically in a range of physical activities.

A few pupils lack independence and are too reliant on the teacher for support.

Teaching and learning experiences

In two of the schools inspected, teaching and learning experiences are good. In these schools, teachers often provide a bespoke curriculum that is well matched to pupils' needs. In addition, the formal curriculum is supported by a wide range of interesting educational experiences beyond the classroom.

Overall, the supportive and constructive working relationships between teachers and pupils contribute notably to pupils' progress and the standards they achieve. Teachers plan a broad range of engaging tasks that build on prior learning and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. They also use questioning effectively to test pupils' recall and explore new topics.

Where teaching is less effective, teachers do not always ensure that activities challenge and support pupils of different abilities well enough. Also, teachers do not always give pupils enough opportunities to direct their own learning or develop their independent learning skills effectively.

In all three schools inspected, there was a recommendation relating to improving teaching. Most commonly, this related to the need to enhance the quality of teachers' feedback to pupils and the impact this has on improving the quality of pupils' work.

Care, support and guidance

In all schools inspected, the quality of care, support and guidance is good. A strong sense of community pervades each school. Staff and pupils work together well in a supportive atmosphere that helps pupils to thrive in their personal, social and emotional development. Further detail about the impact schools have on the development of pupils' health and wellbeing can be found in the **'Healthy and happy'** thematic report (Estyn, 2019a), published in June 2019.

Sector summaries:
Independent mainstream schools

There are worthwhile opportunities for pupils to take an active role in the life of the school. In addition, pupils perform frequently at external events and participate in a range of competitions. These opportunities develop pupils' communication skills and their confidence assuredly. The work that pupils do to support local charities provides opportunities to be active citizens and to develop an understanding that they have a responsibility to support people less fortunate than themselves.

Leadership and management

In two of the schools inspected, leadership and management are good. In these schools, leaders have a clear vision that is well understood and shared by the whole school community. Leaders promote and model high expectations of both staff and pupils. Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development across the school, and implement and monitor development plans effectively. Together, these leaders provide strong support and challenge to improve classroom practice.

Where there are shortcomings in leadership, this most often relates to the lack of focus in improvement priorities and robustness in the processes to monitor and evaluate the impact of improvement strategies.

Ummul Mumineen

Ummul Mumineen Academy has established a highly effective approach to increasing pupils' confidence and aspirations, and removing perceived barriers to girls' education. The school fosters a holistic approach to wellbeing, placing a strong emphasis on nurturing positive working relationships within a strong Islamic culture. This approach results in a family learning environment, strongly trusted by parents, where each individual and their educational success is valued.

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

Section 1

Sector summaries: Independent specialist colleges

1

Context

In January 2020, there were seven registered independent specialist colleges in Wales. This is the same as in January 2019. These colleges educate around 200 learners aged 16 and over. The colleges provide for a diverse range of learners' needs, including autistic spectrum disorder, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and profound and multiple learning difficulties. In four of the colleges, many learners live in residential homes attached to the college.

In addition to full inspections, we carry out regular monitoring visits of independent specialist colleges. These visits consider the progress made by the colleges against specific recommendations from core inspections and previous monitoring visits. This year, we carried out one full inspection and three monitoring visits.

The Welsh Government formally requested us to undertake one unannounced focused inspection this year. The inspection had a particular focus on tutors' planning, staffing levels and the recording of learners' progress. The findings from all these inspections and visits have informed this report.

Sector summaries:
Independent specialist colleges

Standards

In the one college inspected this year, standards are excellent. This is because nearly all learners make outstanding progress in relation to their individual starting points and personal targets. In particular, the exceptional progress they make in developing their communication skills enables nearly all learners to become more independent in their learning. They develop their thinking and problem-solving skills well and learn to apply them confidently in their everyday lives, for example when moving around the college site without support or learning how to read maps to follow directions.

In this college, nearly all learners make strong progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Most learners improve their fine and gross motor skills in a range of useful contexts, for example when participating in fitness sessions or in activities such as felting and weaving. A few learners develop their vocational skills extremely well using the facilities on the college site and supported work opportunities in the community.

In the three colleges visited as part of the monitoring process, most learners make strong progress over time. In sessions, they recall previous learning and apply their problem-solving skills well. More able learners develop their higher level thinking skills in project-based work and practical contexts, and achieve worthwhile accreditation that prepares them well for their future destinations.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning are excellent in the one college inspected this year. In this college, nearly all learners feel safe and know whom to approach for support when they need it. They develop close working relationships with staff and trust them to guide their learning and ensure their safety and wellbeing. Nearly all learners make significant progress in improving their personal wellbeing. For example, they enjoy a balanced diet and choose healthy snacks at break times. They make good use of the gym on site, and take part regularly in outdoor activities and extra-curricular activities provided by the college. Over time, these factors help learners to build their ability to manage risk successfully, for example when cycling or taking part in walking expeditions in the mountains.

In all the colleges visited this year, learners engage extremely well in their learning due to the sensitive support provided by staff. Learners develop their confidence to try out new activities and explore new experiences. Most learners work together constructively, are courteous and polite to their peers and staff, and enjoy meeting new people, for example at social events in the community or when they represent the college at public events. This is especially good progress for learners for whom social situations have previously been a major challenge.

Sector summaries:
Independent specialist colleges

Teaching and learning experiences

In the one college inspected this year, teaching and learning experiences are excellent. This is because teaching provides learners with highly stimulating experiences that help them to engage fully in their learning and make exceptional progress against their goals. Tutors are adept at identifying purposeful opportunities to extend learners' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills and include these effectively in sessions. Schemes of work identify opportunities to develop learners' social and independence skills through practical and relevant activities such as caring for the college's small animals and in the preparation of healthy food. This well co-ordinated and strategic approach equips learners with valuable skills and understanding that prepare them well for their future lives.

In all the colleges inspected this year, tutors and support staff build productive working relationships with learners and have a thorough understanding of their needs. They use this information skilfully to plan stimulating and challenging activities that motivate learners and build on their interests and motivations. In all colleges, tutors and support staff work together effectively to respond consistently to learners. They provide positive and reassuring feedback that helps learners to feel safe and confident to take risks and develop new skills.

In one of the colleges visited this year as part of the monitoring process, the available space on site limits opportunities for learners to access a curriculum that meets their needs fully.

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance are excellent in the one college inspected this year and are a strong feature of all the colleges visited as part of the annual monitoring process.

A particularly strong feature of the college where care, support and guidance are excellent is its highly effective approach to total communication across the college. Supported by the college's multi-disciplinary team, all staff work together to improve their knowledge and understanding of communication strategies, which they adapt skilfully according to learners' preferred methods of communication. This consistent practice ensures that all learners can access the curriculum successfully and contributes greatly to the strong progress learners make in their achievements and wellbeing.

In all colleges visited this year, there are robust arrangements to monitor and track learners' progress against a wide range of outcomes. Staff use this information carefully to ensure that learning experiences and support arrangements meet learners' needs. As a result, all colleges provide calm and supportive environments that help learners to feel safe and promote learning and wellbeing very successfully.
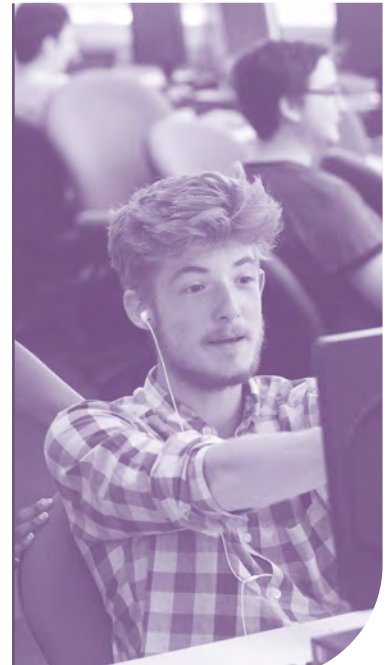
Coleg Elidyr

Coleg Elidyr has developed a highly effective approach to total communication across the college. This well co-ordinated and consistent approach ensures that nearly all learners access their learning successfully and can participate fully in all aspects of college life.

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

Cydnabod Rhagoriaeth
Recognising Excellence

Sector summaries:
Independent specialist colleges

In one of the colleges visited this year as part of the monitoring process, the college does not do enough to support learners to make healthy choices about what they eat and drink.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are excellent in the one college inspected this year. Throughout the college, there is a powerful sense of purpose and commitment to the college's values and to meeting its aims and objectives. College leaders are highly successful in establishing and promoting a clear vision for the college based on providing high quality personalised education that maximises learners' independence and life chances after college.

Senior leaders and staff have developed a strong culture of professional learning that provides an extensive range of opportunities for all staff to develop their understanding and skills. Leaders ensure that this programme links closely to the outcomes of self-evaluation and performance management processes, and reflects clearly the college's priorities for improvement and the support needs of learners. For example, recent training has focused on developing strategies to support learners experiencing sensory overload.

All of the colleges visited this year gather a wide range of information to inform the self-evaluation of their provision. In two of the colleges, this provides leaders with a clear sense of the college's strengths and what they need to do to improve. However, in two of the colleges visited as part of the monitoring process, leaders do not use this information well enough to identify precise areas for improvement.

Coleg Elidyr

The college provides learners with exceptionally high levels of care, support and guidance. Its highly effective multi-disciplinary approach to assessing learners' needs and monitoring their progress ensures that nearly all learners make outstanding progress in their learning and wellbeing during their time at the college.

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

Cydnabod
Rhagoriaeth
Recognising
Excellence

1

Context

In January 2020, there were 22 registered pupil referral units (PRUs) in Wales. This is one fewer than in January 2019, when there were 23. (Welsh Government, 2020nn). There is no PRU provision in two local authorities.

This year we inspected two PRUs. The context and size of these PRUs differ greatly. At the time of the inspection, one PRU catered for almost 50 pupils aged 11 to 16 years on a single campus. The other PRU had 20 full-time pupils across multiple sites within the local authority and 30 outreach pupils aged 8 to 16 years. Both of the PRUs we inspected are for pupils experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Sector summaries:
Pupil referral units

Standards

Of the two PRUs inspected, standards are good in one and unsatisfactory in the other.

Where standards are good, many pupils make strong progress in developing their learning, social, emotional and behavioural skills during their time at the PRU. As a result, nearly all pupils receiving outreach provision at key stage 2 and most key stage 3 pupils attending the PRU site return to mainstream education successfully. This is a strong outcome.

In the PRU where standards are good, many pupils make secure progress in developing their literacy skills and use these skills well to support their learning across the curriculum. For example, in class discussions they are confident and willing to share their views and give meaningful oral and written responses to topics. Most pupils develop their numeracy skills effectively. They are particularly adept at using their number skills confidently to solve everyday problems, such as calculating the increased cost of paying for a television through monthly payments compared with one full payment.

In the PRU where standards are unsatisfactory, many pupils do not make suitable progress in their learning in relation to their ability. This is largely because the disruptive behaviours of many pupils during lessons interrupt their own learning and that of others. Only a minority of pupils make appropriate progress in developing their literacy skills, and only a very few develop their Welsh language skills. Pupils do not apply their numeracy skills well enough across the curriculum and their skills in ICT are generally weak.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good in one PRU inspected this year and unsatisfactory in the other.

In the PRU where pupils have high levels of wellbeing and positive attitudes to their learning, most pupils develop their resilience and social skills. Nearly all learn to trust staff and develop valuable working relationships with adults in the PRU. Pupils' success in these important life skills helps them to develop as confident and sociable individuals. As a result, these pupils either return successfully to their mainstream school or stay at the PRU and gain suitable qualifications for progressing to further education, training or employment.

Where wellbeing and attitudes to learning are unsatisfactory, pupils' attitudes to learning and engagement in lessons vary significantly. In a minority of cases, pupils engage constructively with their teachers, show interest in their learning, behave well, and make appropriate progress. However, in a majority of cases, pupils do not engage well, behave properly or act respectfully to their peers and adults. In a very few cases, the behaviour of a few pupils poses a risk of harm to themselves or others. These negative attitudes and disruptive behaviours hinder the learning and progress of many pupils. This situation contrasts with the overall picture for the sector as a whole, such as that we provided to the Children and Young People Education Committee

Sector summaries:
Pupil referral units

Inquiry about Education Other Than at School (EOTAS)[8]. Our overall evidence from inspections and thematic reports is that EOTAS provision such as PRUs gives many pupils a second chance to succeed. They improve their attendance and behaviour over time and are motivated to learn in a smaller more nurturing environment.

Teaching and learning experiences

In one PRU inspected, the overall teaching and learning experiences are good, with staff forging exceptionally strong working relationships with pupils in their care. They know their pupils and their families well, including pupils' backgrounds, difficulties, what motivates them and the challenges that they face. Most staff use this information skilfully to create a highly caring learning environment, valuable structured routines and appropriate plans that help many pupils to participate actively and persevere in their lessons. A particularly strong feature of the staff's work is the sensitive way they balance providing support with offering pupils authentic opportunities to develop their self-reliance. This approach prepares most pupils well to cope independently outside of the PRU or when they return to mainstream education.

The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory in the other PRU inspected this year. In a very few cases, teachers create a purposeful learning atmosphere that engages many pupils. However, many do not use the PRU's behaviour management strategies consistently and allow poor behaviour to escalate. In these cases, teacher expectations are low and they do not plan motivating activities matched to pupils' needs, interests and abilities. As a result, many pupils spend too much time on undemanding work and often their behaviour becomes worse and disrupts learning.

There is considerable variation between the two PRUs inspected and the progress that they are making towards preparing and planning for changes for the Curriculum for Wales. One PRU is making assured progress towards preparing pupils for the new curriculum and fulfilling its four purposes, with a strong emphasis on life skills, health and wellbeing. The other PRU has piloted a thematic approach, which broadly follows the areas of learning and experience. However, the planning of these areas does not align well across the curriculum and there is discontinuity in the learning experiences of pupils, including when progressing from key stage 3 to key stage 4.

In both PRUs inspected this year, teachers do not plan well enough to develop pupils' ICT skills.

Sector summaries:
Pupil referral units

Care, support and guidance

The care, support and guidance provided by one PRU are good and unsatisfactory in the other.

The PRU where care, support and guidance are good is a highly caring community that provides valuable support and guidance for its pupils. It also provides an effective advice service to staff at mainstream schools across the local authority on how to support pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. This PRU maintains valuable and useful relationships with external agencies to offer pupils support. It has effective strategies and procedures to track, monitor and promote pupils' attendance, wellbeing and behaviour.

Where care, support and guidance are unsatisfactory, the PRU's provision for supporting pupils' personal development and safeguarding is weak. In particular, the provision to help pupils make healthy life-style choices has generally been unsuccessful. For example, the curriculum explores pupil choices in relation to healthy eating and drinking, smoking, staying safe online and behaviour. However, while on-site, many pupils continue to make inappropriate choices in these areas and consistently break the PRU's rules. As a result of inconsistent approaches to supporting positive pupil behaviour, only a very few pupils understand the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Further, at times, many staff lack confidence in managing the volatile, unpredictable and dangerous behaviours of a minority of pupils.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good in one PRU inspected and unsatisfactory in the other.

Where leadership and management are strong, the senior leader, with the support of the management committee, sets high expectations and an ambitious vision for all aspects of the PRU's work. High quality communication and a strong spirit of co-operation between all staff are notable features of the PRU's work. Together with appropriate arrangements to share leadership and responsibilities across the PRU, these features enable staff to work effectively at all sites to ensure that pupils enjoy the same opportunities and quality of learning experience. Leaders and the management committee know the PRU's strengths and allocate resources wisely to support further improvement. Nearly all members of the PRU's staff use professional learning opportunities purposefully to improve their own practice. A strong feature of this work is sharing ideas and promoting effective practices to ensure consistency in how staff manage and promote good behaviour among pupils.

Swansea PRU

In Swansea PRU, the management committee contributes to the self-evaluation process through regular visits to the PRU. The visits have strengthened the members' understanding of the evidence base for the self-evaluation process. For example, pupil outcomes, attendance rates across the PRU and pupil reintegration information provide members with comparative figures and allow informed discussion on the progress the PRU is making across such aspects. This in-depth understanding enables members to provide better support and challenge to senior leaders to help improvement.

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Ceredigion PRU

Over the past few years, Ceredigion Pupil Referral Unit has strengthened pupils' performance and improved wellbeing. A management committee monitors standards, curriculum and policies and challenges the PRU on performance. Self-evaluation is robust and a strong system is in place to track progress and monitor actions.

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

Sector summaries:
Pupil referral units

In the PRU where leadership and management are unsatisfactory, over the last few years, there have been several changes to senior leadership positions. This situation has led to uncertainty, an overall lack of direction, and a distribution of leadership responsibilities that is ineffective for the strategic and day-to-day management of the PRU. Over time, the management committee and local authority officers responsible for quality and effectiveness have failed to address significant issues at the PRU. In particular, they have not met their responsibilities to provide pupils with a suitable education in a safe environment. The PRU's arrangements for evaluating the quality of its work, planning for improvement and creating a culture and ethos to support the professional learning of all staff are at an early stage.

This year, we undertook a **thematic survey** to evaluate how well PRU management committees carry out their roles and responsibilities (Estyn, 2020n). In particular, the survey considered how management committees have responded to the Welsh Government's 'A Handbook for Management Committees of Pupil Referral Units' to support improvement (2018a). In the best cases, members of the management committee make good use of the handbook. They are clear about their roles and responsibilities and make a valuable contribution to strategic leadership, for example through self-evaluation processes that identify areas for further development. These committees provide effective challenge and support to the delivery and monitoring of improvement planning.

Follow-up activity
2019-2020

This year we identified one PRU as requiring follow-up through special measures.

During the year, we removed a PRU inspected in the previous academic year from Estyn review.

One PRUs inspected in the previous academic year remains in special measures.

Our thematic survey, **'Pupil Referral Unit Management Committees'** (Estyn, 2020n), provides more information about this aspect.

Section 1

Sector summaries: Local government education services

1

Context

Local government education services include those provided or commissioned by a single local authority as well as those provided in partnership with other local authorities. School improvement services are provided largely in conjunction with four regional consortia on behalf of local authorities, though the model for how this works varies around Wales.

Between September 2019 and March 2020, we carried out three inspections, in Wrexham, Pembrokeshire and Monmouthshire. We judged that Wrexham and Pembrokeshire cause significant concern and require follow-up activity to support them to improve their education services.

When we judge that a local government education service is causing significant concern, we hold a post-inspection improvement conference around three months after the core inspection. Senior leaders from the local authority and other stakeholders attend the conference, which focuses on the authority's plans to address shortcomings. This year we held a post-inspection improvement conference with Powys County Council following the inspection of their education services in July 2019. The conference ensured that officers and elected members have a shared understanding of the challenges facing the council and are in agreement about how they will address these issues. Following the conference, we continue to work closely with the local authority to support improvement until we are satisfied with progress against the recommendations in the inspection report. We did not hold improvement conferences in Pembrokeshire or Wrexham because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sector summaries:
Local government education services

We visit all local authorities and regional consortia as part of our link inspector arrangements. During these visits, we discuss the strengths and issues facing each authority or consortium as well as following up on key priorities for the sector at a national and local level. We also review progress against the recommendations of previous inspections and thematic reviews.

This year our link inspectors worked with Audit Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales to carry out risk workshops with all councils across Wales. Senior officers from the local authorities attend the workshops and in many instances designated members of the council also. The workshops focus on the assurances and risks that each of the regulatory and inspection bodies identify during their work with each local authority. The sessions provide an opportunity for officers and elected members to hear these views and to consider them in the wider context of the authority's work.

This year, we found a few common assurances and risks in the education services of local authorities. Across Wales, local authorities generally have stronger outcomes from inspections in primary schools than in secondary schools. In around half of local authorities, pupil attendance levels and rates of exclusion are a concern, particularly in secondary schools.

The findings from all these inspections and visits have informed this report.

Outcomes

In the local authorities inspected this year, pupils generally make good progress in primary schools. However, in Pembrokeshire in particular, standards vary too much between schools. Overall, standards are weaker in secondary schools than they are in primary schools. In key stage 4, pupils in two of the local authorities, Wrexham and Pembrokeshire, perform less well than their counterparts in Wales. In Monmouthshire, standards are generally in line with or above expectations when pupils complete their statutory education.

In two of the local authorities, pupils with special educational needs make good progress from their starting points. In Wrexham, this group of pupils perform well below the average for their peers across Wales. In all three local authorities, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals does not compare well with the performance of this group of pupils across Wales. All three local authorities inspected this year have a recommendation to improve pupils' standards.

Over the last three years, the proportion of Year 11 leavers known not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) in Pembrokeshire has fallen and the proportion in both Wrexham and Monmouthshire has remained low and is generally in line with the average for Wales (Careers Wales, 2019).

Pupils' attendance levels in two of the three local authorities are strong and compare well with levels in similar local authorities. In Wrexham, pupils' attendance in primary schools is satisfactory, and in secondary schools attendance levels have remained below expectations in a majority of schools for the last four years.

Sector summaries:
Local government
education services

The rate of permanent exclusions is low in both Monmouthshire and Pembrokeshire. However, in both local authorities the rates of fixed-term exclusions for five days or less have been higher than the national average for the past three years. In Wrexham, the rate of permanent exclusions has been above the Wales average and fixed-term exclusions have almost doubled in the last three years.

In all three local authorities, children and young people have worthwhile opportunities to contribute to decisions about issues that affect them. For example, in Pembrokeshire members of the Youth Bank run a grant scheme for community groups. Young people have made good use of the funds provided through this project to share important messages about safeguarding and child sexual exploitation with their peers.

Pupils who require support to improve their mental and emotional wellbeing benefit from the valuable strategies for support that the authorities provide. These include targeted youth work and counselling services. For example, in Wrexham, young people obtain helpful support on a range of issues, including housing and sexual health, through the 'Infoshop' located in the town centre.

Education services

In this second inspection area, we report on each local authority's priorities for education at the time of the inspection rather than on every aspect of work. Each authority will have a different set of education priorities depending on its local context. Prior to inspection, we work with the local authority to identify a set of relevant local inspection questions about education services and we evaluate these during the inspection. In all three inspections this year, we evaluated local inspection questions about how well local authorities support schools to improve and how well they support vulnerable learners.

In Monmouthshire and Pembrokeshire, there are sound processes in place to identify schools causing concern. In Wrexham, these processes have improved recently and the local authority is now better able to identify strengths and areas for development in its schools. All three authorities have a range of strategies and interventions in place to challenge and support their schools. Examples include the use of warning notices and other statutory powers to address specific issues around school performance and the use of improvement boards to monitor and track progress against school priorities. All three local authorities have aspects of their school improvement work that need to improve. For example, in Monmouthshire, the impact of the support provided has been greater in primary schools than in secondary schools, and in Pembrokeshire the authority's work to improve teaching and school leadership has not had enough impact.

In all three local authorities, officers work well in partnership with their regional school improvement service to provide support to schools. This work includes producing bespoke support plans for schools, and monitoring the progress made with these. In Pembrokeshire, officers from the local authority and the regional consortium have clarified their respective roles in school improvement and this helps schools know where they can obtain support.
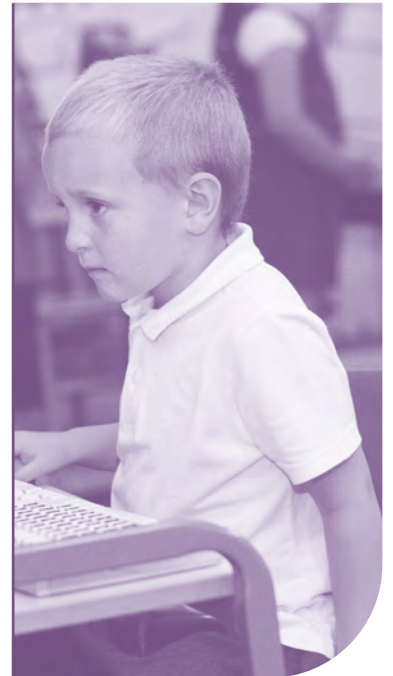
Sector summaries:
Local government
education services

Pembrokeshire is part of the ERW region, which has experienced a year of instability. Neath Port Talbot local authority left the region in March 2020 and three other local authorities have indicated their intention to leave in April 2021. The level of support the consortium is able to provide has diminished during the recent period with fewer central staff available to lead aspects of ERW's work across the region. The uncertainty about the future configuration of school improvement services in the ERW region is a matter of concern, particularly in view of the challenges facing secondary schools in Pembrokeshire and Powys. The ongoing debate about reorganisation has also taken valuable leadership time away from directly providing and improving services.

There have also been changes to the leadership of the Central South Consortium. The recent appointment of a new managing director has contributed to developing a greater degree of stability to the work of this region and has strengthened the political commitment to regional working across the consortium.

The local authorities inspected this year provide a range of effective services to support vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs and those needing extra support. Officers provide clear guidance to schools about how to identify individual pupils' needs early to ensure that they get the support that they need as soon as possible. They work well with partner agencies to help schools to meet the wide range of needs of pupils and to strengthen teachers' understanding of how best to support these pupils. For example, in Wrexham, officers work well with the local health board to ensure that children with speech and language difficulties and those with a visual or hearing impairment are able to access specialist advice, support and guidance. We talk about the importance of partnership working and the impact on pupils in our thematic survey **'Pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools'** (Estyn, 2020o).

In Pembrokeshire and Monmouthshire, we evaluated local inspection questions about how well officers supported pupils who are eligible for free school meals. In both local authorities, there are valuable strategies to support this group of learners. In Pembrokeshire, there are 'free school meal champions' in all school clusters to support schools in selecting and developing the most appropriate approaches to tackle poverty and disadvantage. Pupils benefit from taking part in a range of music and sport activities. In Monmouthshire, challenge advisers provide helpful advice and guidance to schools about the most effective ways of using the pupil development grant and they monitor how well schools apply this funding. However, much of this work is at an early stage and has not had an impact on the standards that this group of pupils achieve.

In Monmouthshire, we inspected how well the youth service supports young people, particularly those who are vulnerable. We found that youth workers engage effectively with a wide range of partners to develop their provision and support young people who are vulnerable. This work includes services targeted at specific groups of young people, for example those at risk of becoming not being in education, employment or training (NEET) and services that are available to all young people such as youth clubs. The Equality Street group, initially a helpful support group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender young people, and those questioning their sexuality

Sector summaries:
Local government education services

or gender, has expanded to promote equality and diversity more widely with significant success, winning a National Youth Work Excellence Award in 2019. However, services tend to prioritise work with young people in school and during the immediate period after they leave school, and there is limited provision to meet the needs of young people aged 16 to 25.

In Pembrokeshire, we considered the approaches that the council had taken around school re-organisation. Most of the proposals over the last five years have focused well on expanding the local authority's provision for Welsh medium education, and on amalgamating or federating smaller primary schools, as well as on re-organising primary and secondary education in Pembroke, Haverfordwest and the St David's peninsula. In addition, a few proposals have expanded the age range of schools to provide more opportunities for nursery age pupils to access early education. We found that the authority's work to expand Welsh medium provision across the whole of the county is a strong feature and links well with targets in its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). The school re-organisation proposals have increased demand for Welsh-medium education in new locations.

In Wrexham, we inspected the provision that the local authority makes to support post-16 learners. We found that the council works well with its partners to ensure that all learners have access to helpful advice and guidance when considering their options. Officers work with the local further education college and maintained special school to ensure that learners in key stage 4 access valuable enrichment and engagement experiences. This comprehensive range of vocational programmes enables pupils, including those with special educational needs or who require extra support, to prepare for the transition to post-16 programmes, as well as raising aspirations and preventing young people becoming NEET.

Leadership and management

Officers and elected members in the three local authorities inspected this year have a clear vision for education and set a strong strategic direction for education services. They show commitment to securing high quality provision and good outcomes for pupils' attainment and wellbeing. In Monmouthshire, officers and elected members have worked well together to help ensure that they provide children with the best possible start in life. They have a strong sense of ownership and accountability for the delivery of the education services. In Wrexham and Pembrokeshire, officers' ambitions for improving important aspects of their work have been less successful, for example in raising standards in secondary schools.

Our findings about local authorities' self-evaluation processes are similar this year to those of last year. Senior leaders and elected members have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in education services. They identify accurately the aspects of their work that need to improve. However, evaluation processes at service area levels are less effective. All three local authorities inspected this year have a recommendation to improve the quality of self-evaluation across education service areas and to use the information from evaluations more effectively to inform their priorities for improvement. Over time, all three local authorities have secured improvements in the education services they provide.

Sector summaries:
Local government education services

For example, in Wrexham, the work to improve the support that young people receive through the youth service has been effective. However, the pace of improvement in other aspects of the education service's work has been too slow and has not had enough impact on improving the wellbeing of pupils or the outcomes they achieve.

We found that all three local authorities make funding for schools and education services a high priority in their financial planning. Officers and elected members have taking decisions to protect education budgets wherever possible at a time of budget reductions across other services. They provide effective support for schools about finance, including helping them to manage their budgets and providing affordable services through service level agreements. However, in two of the three local authorities, budget pressures have led to overspending on education services this year.

In all three authorities, we found effective approaches to safeguarding children and young people. In Wrexham, officers support schools and education providers well by providing guidance and training on how to keep learners safe. In Pembrokeshire, officers provide clear guidance for education providers about the key part they play in safeguarding young people from potentially radicalising influences. They highlight the importance of the contribution of the curriculum to building resilience among pupils as recommended in our thematic survey **'Prevent – how well maintained schools implement their duties under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015'** (Estyn, 2020m). In Monmouthshire, we found that the council's approach to its corporate responsibilities around safeguarding is particularly effective. There is a strong working relationship between education and social services, and the whole authority safeguarding group provides an effective forum within which safeguarding is monitored, managed and evaluated.

Monmouthshire County Council

Monmouthshire County Council has worked on improving its safeguarding arrangements. Through evaluation, the council can identify who needs training and at what level. This ensures that every individual receives appropriate safeguarding training. As a result, roles, relationships and responsibility within the safeguarding process are clearly understood by staff and supported corporately.

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

Sector summaries:
Local government
education services

This year, we participated in a **joint inspectorate review** of child protection arrangements provided by a local authority and its partners. This was a pilot review with an inspection team that included representatives from Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales, and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation. The joint inspection evaluated how local services in Newport City Council respond to allegations of abuse and neglect, with a particular focus on those children at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation. The team identified areas of good practice, aspects requiring improvement and priority actions for the partnership as a whole and for specific agencies. We found that, despite the challenges of working in complex circumstances, agencies are not deterred from identifying interventions, offering services and working to achieve positive outcomes. We saw evidence of effective multi-agency working across partner agencies with professionals displaying a commitment and drive to improve outcomes for children.

Regional consortia

Improving secondary schools with long-standing concerns has been a challenge for all four consortia and their partner local authorities. The Welsh Government's pilot to support schools causing concern recognises that school improvement is complex and is dependent on a range of partners working together to help improve aspects of leadership, management, teaching and provision. Although this model is at an early stage, it is already beginning to influence approaches to how consortia and local authorities work to improve schools causing concern.

The regional consortia have a key role in helping to deliver the Welsh Government's education priorities. They have continued to provide support for curriculum reform through professional learning events and by identifying lead schools to work on specific aspects of the reform agenda. The focus of this work has been to support schools to engage with the Curriculum for Wales and to consider how they will plan for curriculum change. The four regions have worked with the Welsh Government to plan engagement events to provide common messages. Each region has adapted the delivery of these events to suit their local contexts and needs. All four regions have focused suitably on improving the quality of teaching in schools to support preparedness for curriculum reform.

Section 1

Sector summaries: Further education

1

Context

In January 2020, there were 12 colleges providing further education courses in Wales. Many of the further education colleges are large multi-sited institutions that cover a wide geographical area. A minority of colleges, such as Grwp Llandrillo Menai, NPTC Group, and Coleg Cambria, have a group structure with multiple sites operating under separate college names under the overall control of one further education institution. A few colleges, including The College Merthyr Tydfil and Coleg Sir Gar (incorporating Coleg Ceredigion), operate as wholly-owned subsidiaries of higher education institutions.

The latest published information shows that, in 2018-2019, 102,160 learners undertook further education learning programmes (Welsh Government, 2020qq). Of these, 45,875 studied on full-time programmes and 56,290 studied part-time.

This year, we inspected one further education college and had planned to inspect one other at the time of suspending inspection activities due to the COVID-19 crisis.

In addition to full inspections, we carry out link inspector visits to further education colleges. Each college has a link inspector who meets annually with senior leaders to discuss topical issues related to education and training, as well as college progress. The link inspector visits result in oral feedback and dialogue during the visit. This year, we carried out 10 link inspector visits in the autumn term and completed two thematic reports with a focus on aspects of further education. There were two further thematic surveys, which we were not able to complete due to the COVID-19 situation.

Sector summaries:
Further education

Inspection findings

In March 2020, we carried out **an inspection in NPTC Group of colleges**. The group provides further education courses across eight sites spread over a wide area of Powys, Neath, Port Talbot and Swansea. The four main college sites are at Afan, Brecon, Neath and Newtown. We judged all inspection areas as good.

The college has a keen sense of responsibility towards the diverse communities it serves. It offers a wide range of provision, which meets the needs of its learners across a large and challenging geographical area.

Overall, learners produce a strong standard of work in their lessons and practical sessions. They build their knowledge and understanding and develop their vocational, academic and practical skills at an appropriate rate. In vocational programmes, many learners develop and apply sound practical and vocational competencies. Many A level learners develop helpful learning and revision strategies. In entry level courses, nearly all learners make useful progress in developing their basic vocational and independent skills.

Most learners feel safe in college and know where to access support if needed and many feel that the college listens to them well. Most learners report that their learning experiences help them understand and respect people with different backgrounds and that the college provides an inclusive environment. For example, an LGBTQ learner group meets weekly, allowing members to enjoy the opportunity to socialise in a safe and mutually supportive environment. Most learners display positive attitudes to learning. A few learners develop higher level vocational skills and enhance their personal confidence through participation in skills competitions. A few level 3 hairdressing and beauty therapy learners benefit from a well-established international work experience programme. These learners develop greater independence, experience different cultures, develop their language skills and explore employment opportunities.

Teachers are well qualified and experienced, with useful industrial, commercial and business experience, which they apply well to their roles. Many develop positive working relationships with learners. The majority plan well-structured lessons and encourage learners to develop wider subject interests. The college's curriculum planning processes are thorough and detailed. They take account of the regional skills partnership's priorities and the demand from employers and learners. The college's learning support team and wellbeing team provide a helpful range of support to help learners overcome barriers to learning. As found in our thematic report on support for LGBT learners in schools and colleges, **'Celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion'** (Estyn,2020e), leaders across colleges promote inclusion and celebrate diversity, establishing an ethos that champions individuality, tolerance and respect. This impacts positively on the wellbeing of all learners.

Sector summaries:
Further education

The college leadership team is well established and cohesive and there is a clear and ambitious direction to the work of the college. The college supports the professional learning of tutors and leaders at all levels, including an aspiring leaders' programme. Teaching and learning development mentors support teachers to develop their skills and improve their practice well. Through our link inspector visits, we found that most colleges plan worthwhile opportunities to develop the teaching and assessment skills of their staff. In general, colleges make good use of their internal resources, such as teaching and learning mentors, to support staff and departments.

Senior leaders evaluate the performance of the college appropriately, although evaluation processes result in an overly positive picture of aspects of the college's performance. This is in line with findings from the link inspector visits across colleges, where, for example, a minority place too much emphasis on learner outcomes data when evaluating standards and identifying areas for improvement and do not take full account of standards from observations and from scrutiny of learners' work.

In August 2020, we also published a thematic report on **'Business and social studies subjects at A level'** (Estyn, 2020c). We found that many learners make strong progress in their studies compared with their starting points. However, a minority of learners do not progress from AS to complete A level studies, or do not achieve as well as they could. These learners often begin to study business and social studies subjects for the first time when they enter sixth form or college.

A few schools and colleges work in partnership with other providers to extend the range of subject choices. However, in many of these partnerships, arrangements for quality assurance are not robust enough to identify accurately areas for improvement. The majority of teachers in business and social studies subjects are the only A level teacher of the subject in their school or college. As well as restricting opportunities for collaborative working, this can lead to difficulties in covering classes when teachers are absent.

A key recommendation in the report for schools and colleges is to work collaboratively to share learning resources, particularly Welsh-medium resources, and to increase professional learning opportunities for teachers of A level business and social studies subjects. This chimes with the vision from the **Commission on the College of the Future** (2020), which is calling for greater collaboration across the education and skills system.
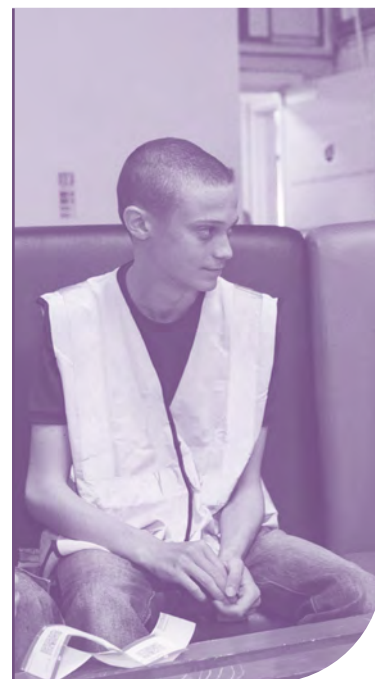
Section 1

Sector summaries: Work-based learning

1

Context

In January 2020, there were 18 contract holders commissioned by the Welsh Government to deliver work based learning in Wales. By June 2020, this has reduced to 17 contract holders. The majority of these providers work in consortia or use sub-contracted training providers. Approximately 100 sub-contracted providers deliver work-based learning. This is similar to January 2019. The latest published information shows that, in 2018-2019, 61,290 learners undertook work-based learning programmes. Of these, 19,870 enrolled on level 2 foundation apprenticeships and 34,920 on level 3 apprenticeships or level 4 higher apprenticeships. Around 6,500 learners undertook other training, including level 1 traineeship and employability programmes (Welsh Government, 2020qq).

This year, we inspected two work based learning providers prior to the suspension of inspection activities due to COVID-19.

Sector summaries:
Work-based learning

Standards

Standards are good in one of the providers inspected and adequate in the other. Most foundation and apprenticeship learners perform their job roles well and develop at least sound vocational skills. The majority apply theory knowledge to their work environments well to solve problems and to overcome challenges in their job roles. A very few learners exhibit exemplary specialist knowledge and skills, such as when competing in national and international skills competitions. Most traineeship learners develop useful work-related skills and understanding of how they can contribute effectively in a work place. In their report, **Evaluation of the Traineeships Programme: Final Report 2015-2019**, the Welsh Government (2019b, p.100) identify a wide range of benefits associated with the Traineeships programme, including improved social engagement of participants and the development of soft and employment-related skills.

Where standards are good, many higher apprenticeship learners produce detailed written work of a high standard. In their written work, many learners identify how theory and legislation relate to their job roles. For example, in health care settings, apprentices know the relevant legislation and how it applies to their settings, the patients and the residents in their care.

Many learners know what they need to do to improve, make progress and complete their programme. A few reflect deeply on their job roles and provide detailed analyses of their working practices, for example when discussing environmental sustainability in hotels or the wellbeing of dementia patients in care settings. Where standards require improvement, only a few apprenticeship learners apply thinking or problem solving skills to new situations or stretch their understanding beyond that required by the framework.

Where standards are good, many learners are well motivated and are keen to achieve their frameworks on time or early. Many learners make appropriate progress on their training programmes and a few make strong progress and finish earlier than expected. Learners progress to higher-level apprenticeships, where appropriate. However, where standards require improvement, too many apprentices do not develop their practical skills and theory knowledge well enough and take longer to complete their apprenticeship than expected.

Most learners make at least sound progress in developing their literacy and digital skills, with a majority applying these improved skills well within their job roles. Learners who have English as an additional language produce valuable written guides in English for their co-workers on the use of equipment at a food production facility and on how to undertake night desk services at a hotel. A few learners do not practise or develop their numeracy skills well enough.

Sector summaries:
Work-based learning

A few apprentices achieve literacy and numeracy qualifications at a level above the requirements of their frameworks. However, where standards require improvement, many apprenticeship learners are unaware of the outcomes of their initial skills assessments and do not have clear targets for development of their literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills. As a result, they do not make enough progress.

A majority of learners have a positive attitude towards Welsh language and culture. A few learners actively use or develop their Welsh language skills as part of their work. For example, in hospitality settings, learners greet and thank customers in Welsh. A minority of learners engage with online resources to help them learn basic Welsh. However, overall, too few learners develop their Welsh language as a workplace skill or appreciate the potential benefits of doing so. **Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers – Annual report 2018-2019** (Welsh Government, 2019a) identifies that, between 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, there had been a slight decline in the proportion of work-based learning activities held in Welsh or bilingually.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good in both of the providers inspected. Most learners demonstrate a positive attitude towards their learning. They attend regularly, are punctual and show a genuine interest in their work. In off-the-job training sessions, most learners interact well with their peers and tutors. They listen to the views of their colleagues, and support each other well.

Most learners concentrate well in sessions and prepare work and assignments conscientiously within given timescales. They are proud of their achievements and can explain how their work is enhancing their employability skills.

Many learners are self-motivated, enthusiastic and keen to progress to the next level of training. In busy working environments, many prioritise tasks so that they can concentrate on their learning. Most traineeship learners attend training sessions regularly and gain valuable experience at their work placements.

In learner progress review meetings, most apprenticeship learners focus effectively on their work, and many play an active role in discussions with their assessors. In a few instances, learners sit passively waiting for extended periods during review meetings while their assessors complete documentation.

Many learners are resilient and self-aware, and have good problem solving skills. They enjoy their learning, are eager to progress to higher levels of programmes and are keen to achieve promotion in their workplace. A few do not take ownership of their learning and rely too much on their assessors to manage and organise their work.

Sector summaries:
Work-based learning

A few learners reach particularly high professional standards of technical skills in their area of work, which boosts their self-esteem. Others gain life-skills by participating in community events and charitable activities, such as volunteering at food banks, clearing nearby beaches or raising money for charities through sponsored activities. These activities help learners appreciate their communities and environment and recognise how they can support them. A majority of learners gain additional skills or qualifications that further improve their employability, such as First Aid, Institute of Occupational Safety and Health or Certificate in Dementia.

Nearly all learners feel safe in their workplace and with their training provider and most are aware of the wellbeing support available to them. They have at least a basic understanding about whom they can go to if they have concerns about safeguarding or radicalisation.

Many understand the importance of both mental and physical health. They also understand important practical issues such as how to manage their money. Most learners know how to keep healthy and fit. For example, learners in hospitality and care settings discuss how they deal with stress and how to maintain a good work-life balance.

Many traineeship learners with barriers to learning engage positively with additional support to overcome these barriers and most complete their training programme successfully.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teaching and learning experiences are good in one provider inspected and adequate in the other. Most teachers and assessors plan their sessions well and deliver effective activities that develop learners' vocational, employability and life skills. Many plan on-the-job assessment activities well and use their detailed knowledge of learners' work patterns to suggest evidence to meet the qualification outcomes. As a result, most learners understand what teachers and assessors expect of them, and how they will assess them.

Most teachers and assessors have a wide range of high-level practical skills, subject and vocational knowledge. They are skilled in supporting and encouraging learners to make progress in their practical assessments and theory knowledge.

Most teachers and assessors are flexible in their approach to meet employer and learner needs, such as when supporting learners on variable shift patterns. Most use an appropriate range of approaches, resources and practical activities to engage and motivate learners. Many teachers and assessors who deliver apprenticeship programmes develop learners' vocational skills well. They provide extensive personal support for learners to achieve their qualification frameworks.

Where teaching is good, most teachers and assessors use a wide range of questioning techniques, for example teaching the subject matter, and questioning and re-questioning to aid reflection and enable the learner to think about their answers in more depth. However, where teaching requires improvement, a majority of teachers do not use these questioning techniques
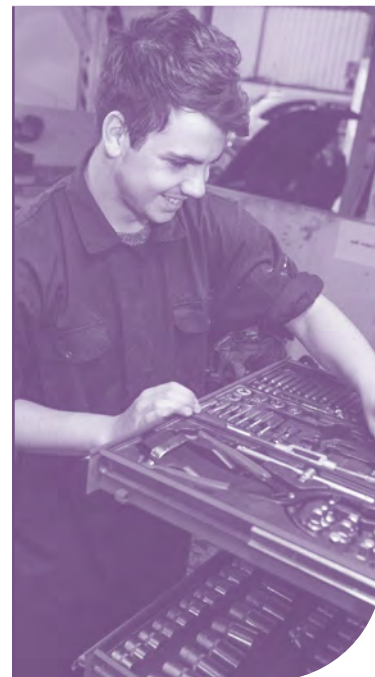
Sector summaries:
Work-based learning

effectively enough to extend learners' knowledge and skills or to probe and deepen their understanding. As a result, in these sessions teachers do not challenge learners enough to reach their full potential.

Most teachers and assessors develop productive working relationships with their learners. Where teaching is good, teachers and assessors have high expectations of learners and a good understanding of their individual needs, and support them well to achieve their potential. Assessors carry out regular progress reviews with their learners and use well-established relationships with employers to support learners' progress. For example, they work with employers to identify training and assessment opportunities in the workplace and enable learners to benefit from effective coaching from workplace supervisors.

Where improvement is required, most individual learning plans and progress reviews on apprenticeship programmes focus narrowly on generic unit completion targets. They do not address and support the development of wider skills, encourage learners to review their own progress, or specify appropriate personalised short-term milestones. As a result, a minority of learners rely heavily on direction from their teachers and assessors and take longer than scheduled to complete their training frameworks.

Where teaching is good, teachers and assessors work well together with essential skills tutors to provide dedicated support for learners to enable them to complete the necessary essential skills requirements for the qualification framework in a timely manner.

A majority of teachers and assessors use an appropriate range of resources, including online materials, to help learners to develop their awareness of Welsh culture and their ability to use basic Welsh language phrases. However, teachers and assessors do not promote the value and use of the Welsh language as an employment skill consistently enough and a few learners who are Welsh first language speakers do not have enough opportunities to improve their Welsh literacy skills.

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance are good in one of the providers inspected and adequate in the other. Providers undertake detailed initial assessments with nearly all learners. These help identify the needs of all learners appropriately and enable relevant support at or near the start of training programmes. For example, providers arrange tailored support for specific needs such as English language development, mental health issues and travel arrangements. This arrangement helps address potential barriers to learning and enables learners to make progress.

However, the effectiveness of systems for tracking and monitoring of learners' progress and support needs is variable. Where these work well, target-setting and progress reviews include specific short-term targets for learning. Where they are less useful, targets and progress reviews are generic and not personalised enough. Well-established partnerships between providers, sub-contractors and employers enable most learners,

Sector summaries:
Work-based learning

including those on traineeship programmes, to benefit from high quality work environments. These provide appropriate opportunities for learners apply and develop the skills they learn on their training programme.

Many teachers and assessors use their up-to-date vocational knowledge to provide helpful advice and guidance to learners. This helps many traineeship learners to identify activities that match their interests and helps them to develop longer-term goals. It also enables many apprenticeship learners to identify options within their framework that best match their work roles and career aspirations.

One provider holds regular focus groups with traineeship learners to gather their views and it uses this information well to extend the range of opportunities it provides, including working on community projects such as food banks or school renovation projects.

Most teachers and assessors promote health and safety in the workplace well. They discuss related issues with learners regularly to ensure that learners take steps to maintain a safe work environment.

Most assessors discuss topics such as mental health awareness, safeguarding and preventing radicalisation appropriately during review sessions, for example by using relevant news items to help explore and extend learners' awareness. Most tutors challenge learners' stereotypical views robustly and encourage them to respect equality and diversity in training and in the workplace. A minority of staff miss opportunities to discuss this issue routinely during apprenticeship reviews.

Nearly all staff undertake helpful training on safeguarding and preventing radicalisation and nearly all are clear about whom they need to report to if they have any concerns. However, a few are unable to recall the detail of this training or confuse safeguarding with wellbeing matters. Where arrangements require improvement, the provider does not have clear procedures to ensure that it monitors safeguarding and Prevent-related matters within its sub contractors rigorously enough.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good in one of the providers inspected and adequate in the other.

Senior leaders provide clear corporate direction. In one provider, they establish a healthy organisational culture with a strong identity, rooted in the provider's locality and its specialist core provision. In the other, leaders recently strengthened their focus on setting clear expectations for staff at all levels.

Both providers have well-established partnership arrangements with a range of sub-contractors. Where leadership is effective, there is sound communication throughout the organisation. Where it is adequate, although leaders update staff on key contractual developments, communication between this provider and its sub-contractors is underdeveloped, with a lack of regular, formal meetings involving all partners. This means that important

Sector summaries:
Work-based learning

information, such as learner performance data, best practice and key areas for improvement, is not shared across all sub-contractors.

One provider has strong arrangements for monitoring the performance of sub-contractors and its own delivery teams. This involves regular contract management meetings with useful standing agendas and data sharing arrangements that ensure that all partners are aware of their performance. The regularity and level of monitoring are appropriate, depending on the risk associated with each sub-contractor or delivery team. As a result of these meetings and other actions, the provider maintains a helpful balance of challenge and support with sub-contractors and its own delivery teams. Where they identify underperformance, the provider is quick to put in place corrective action.

Self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes take into account a suitable range of information, including self-evaluations from sub-contractors and the provider's own delivery teams, and from the regular contract management meetings. For example, self-evaluation processes make sound use of high-level learner performance data to identify trends, and sub-contractors play a useful role in self evaluation by attending an annual self-assessment development day. However, in both providers, sub-contractors and delivery teams do not plan in enough detail how to address their specific areas for improvement. Where leadership and management are adequate, the overall management of sub-contractors is not robust enough and focuses too much on monitoring compliance rather than driving improvement.

Providers arrange a useful range of professional learning opportunities. One provider shares these effectively with sub-contractors and there is a positive culture that supports staff development across the main provider and sub-contractors. In the other provider, leaders have not identified key professional learning priorities specific to delivery staff in Wales.

Follow-up activity

One of the providers inspected this year requires Estyn review. This year, we have undertaken no follow-up activities with other providers.

Section 1

Sector summaries:
Adult learning in the community

1

Context

Adult learning is delivered by 15 partnerships across Wales and 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 organisations. The latest published information shows that, in 2018-2019, 13,050 learners enrolled in adult learning programmes (Welsh Government, 2020qq). This represents an increase of 3% compared with the previous year.

The sector is in the process of reconfiguration, with the Welsh Government revising historic funding arrangements to focus better on tackling poverty and deprivation. This process is taking place over two funding years. The new arrangements require partnerships to focus on the provision of literacy, numeracy, digital skills, English for speakers of other languages and Welsh language courses for adults.

This year, we inspected two adult learning partnerships.

Sector summaries:
Adult learning in the community

Standards

Standards are good in both of the partnerships inspected. Most learners produce written or practical work of at least a sound standard and make at least appropriate progress in their learning. Many learn, develop and apply new skills and a minority of learners make strong progress. A few learners make slow progress.

Nearly all learners in parenting and family learning classes in one partnership, including a specific group for young fathers, acquire new knowledge about how to improve their parenting and caring skills. They try out parenting techniques with their families, reflect carefully on the results and make very strong progress in developing their critical thinking skills. In family learning classes, parents and grandparents improve their confidence and make steady progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills with their children.

In English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes, a majority of learners make worthwhile progress. They use language patterns, grammar and vocabulary well, appropriate to their level of study. They develop their speaking and listening skills well. A few become disengaged during lessons when the pace of teaching is not appropriate for them or when others dominate class discussions. Most learners develop basic reading skills suitably and many learners on intermediate courses gain deeper understanding of meaning when reading.

In numeracy sessions, most learners make steady or better progress and develop confidence and ability well given their previous, often negative, experiences with mathematics. In literacy and communication sessions, the majority of learners write well according to their level and ability. They use well-formed sentences to shape short written responses to tasks, for example when describing the history of rugby and football in Wales and their role in Welsh culture. Most learners make steady or better progress and work towards accredited literacy and numeracy qualifications. A majority continue their studies over a period of years and build on their prior learning and attainment.

Retired learners in community settings use tablet computers competently to search e-shopping sites or to list items for sale. In practical sessions such as sewing, most learners develop strong hand-sewing and machine skills and learn economical ways of sourcing and using materials.

Many learners use individual learning plans and journals to plan and reflect on their learning, and they find them a useful aid to identifying short-term targets and to monitor their own progress. As a result, many apply the skills they learn in their classes to their everyday lives, such as when reading, managing their money and increasing their independence.

Learners on a few courses, such as family learning, ESOL and skills clubs, practise basic Welsh words and phrases. For example, they use Welsh greetings and days and dates, and a 'Welsh word of the week', or receive feedback from their teachers using basic Welsh terms. In community classes, a few Welsh-speaking learners talk with each other and their tutors in Welsh, and freely switch between languages as part of bilingual conversations. However, learners on a majority of courses have little exposure to the Welsh language through their programmes.
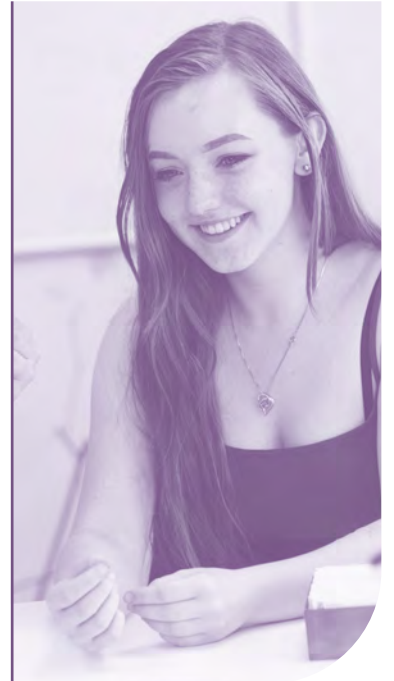
Sector summaries:
Adult learning in the community

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good in both of the partnerships inspected. Most learners are enthusiastic about their work and participate wholeheartedly in sessions. As a result, they enjoy their learning and demonstrate this clearly in their contributions to activities during sessions. They respect and interact well with teachers and other learners, support each other well and make new friends. Most work well in pairs and small groups. They maintain their concentration during sessions.

Nearly all learners feel safe and welcomed in class. Most benefit from a useful induction and understand safeguarding and health and safety procedures.

Many learners attend community-based courses following referrals from specialist support agencies, partner organisations and schools. Often these learners come to their programmes with multiple needs and health issues, including low self-esteem, anxiety or depression. Nearly all gain in confidence, and many are able to relate better to others and to integrate more successfully into society as a result of their learning. Many learners in community skills classes, such as patchwork and quilting or sewing machine skills, find their learning therapeutic. For example, learners with mental health issues and physical illnesses find that the courses alleviate stress and help them forget their everyday worries.

In one partnership, engagement officers make sure that vulnerable learners bond well with their peers and tutors. This means that learners persevere with their learning despite their many barriers. A few learners with physical and mental health issues find that attending classes to prepare for work or improve reading skills helps to reduce stress, for example in dealing with written correspondence such as medical records and letters.

Many learners with previous poor experiences of learning benefit from returning to study. Many begin to develop perseverance and resilience and become less dependent on additional support. Many gain the confidence to progress on to other learning, apply for work or seek more satisfying and sustainable employment. Overall, learners attend their classes regularly and show commitment despite personal and family issues that can be barriers to attendance in adult learning.

Many ESOL learners, who have had to start new lives in an unfamiliar country, engage well with activities in classes, which are relevant to their current life situation. As a result, they gain self-confidence and begin to restore their self-esteem.

Most learners, including those who have previously struggled in education, explain how their course is supporting their wellbeing and personal development. Many are able to demonstrate the impact their learning is having on life outside the course, including learners in digital skills courses who use their newly acquired skills to keep in touch with relatives.

Sector summaries:
Adult learning in
the community

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning experiences are good in both of the partnerships inspected. Most tutors use their comprehensive subject knowledge to plan well-sequenced and appropriately paced lessons that take account of learners' individual needs while providing a suitable level of challenge. They use a wide range of learning activities and refer well to learners' previous knowledge and experiences to plan new learning.

Most tutors manage classes and activities well. They are effective communicators who form a strong rapport and positive relationships with their learners. They create comfortable learning environments in which learners feel safe. For example, most tutors teaching family and parenting classes are highly skilled practitioners who have the ability to support and nurture learners and help them build resilience.

Many ESOL tutors plan and structure their lessons appropriately, so that learners develop skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking naturally through discrete and mixed skills activities. In a minority of ESOL classes, tutors do not always plan lessons that help learners to develop their linguistic skills from their individual starting points. For example, lessons often focus too much on grammar and sentence structures at the expense of developing learners' speaking and listening skills.

Many tutors use questioning techniques to help learners develop their problem-solving, thinking and evaluative skills. They give constructive and encouraging verbal feedback to help learners understand what they need to do to improve their work. Many monitor and support learners well as they work, and provide helpful individual coaching. Most tutors encourage learners to develop their skills further by studying outside of class. This gives learners more confidence to use what they learn in leisure and work activities.

Most tutors provide helpful regular written feedback to learners. In a few cases, their written feedback does not provide clear guidance to learners about their next steps in learning. Most tutors track learner progress and use individual learning plans to help learners review their own progress.

Most tutors use a wide range of resources to support and enhance learning, and take advantage of learners' mobile devices, interactive white boards and helpful teaching software. In a very few community settings, the lack of Wi-Fi connectivity hinders learners' opportunity to use their mobile devices fully in digital literacy sessions.

Many tutors plan activities that engage learners, with links to a range of topics, such as festivals, living in Wales or climate change. Partnerships provide an appropriate range of activities that support learning, such as international evenings where ESOL learners and members of the public experience and appreciate each other's food, language and culture.

Sector summaries:
Adult learning in
the community

Partnerships use individual partners' expertise to offer an appropriate range of literacy, numeracy, digital skills and ESOL courses to meet local needs and reflect the Welsh Government's national priorities. Overall, they recruit well to these courses. However, in one partnership, much of the provision is in a small number of main centres, while provision in other community-based centres is limited.

Partnerships also provide a very few self-financing courses, and work usefully with a small number of other partners to provide a few additional opportunities for learners in local communities. Examples of these include supporting learners and tutors to turn a very few long-standing courses into clubs with a more social purpose and working with the local health board to deliver healthy eating programmes. In a few cases, partners have begun to work with national and local businesses to upskill workers' literacy, numeracy and digital skills in the workplace. Partnerships also provide useful progression routes into other adult learning courses as well as on to further and higher education provision.

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance are good in both of the partnerships inspected. Tutors and support staff across the partnerships have a clear focus on developing learners' skills, confidence, health and wellbeing.

Nearly all tutors are aware of, and take good account of, learners' individual needs and commitments. Many promote the importance of regular attendance well. They are mindful of learners' commitments in their daily lives and are usually flexible when working to help learners get the most out of their learning.

Many partners have effective systems to identify, check and monitor learning support, wellbeing and attendance patterns. However, partnerships do not always use information from individual partners to monitor patterns in attendance or wellbeing across the whole provision.

Partnerships identify learners' support needs through course applications, guidance interviews and tutor observations as well as through learners' self-declarations. Where appropriate, learners have an initial assessment at the start of their programme. Across the partnerships, there are inconsistencies in the use of initial assessment to identify learners' starting points accurately.

Partnerships source and provide valuable support to help learners overcome a range of barriers to their learning and their personal development. For example, many tutors support learners' specific needs well, including those with social anxiety, literacy difficulties and hearing impairments. In early years and family learning programmes, tutors assist parents to build strong peer support networks, which impact positively on learner engagement.

Partnerships and tutors recognise and celebrate the achievements and successes of their learners. This is of particular benefit to vulnerable learners in helping build their self-esteem. Many learners participate in local celebration activities and a few achieve recognition at national celebration events.

Sector summaries:
Adult learning in the community

Partners draw suitably on learner services teams and appropriate external agencies to support learners with specific problems such as drug or alcohol misuse. They also provide learners with useful advice about student finance and how to apply for financial support. In a few cases, partnerships draw on additional learning support funding to support relevant learners directly. However, overall, they do not manage additional learning support funding well enough. In particular, they do not track additional support systematically enough to understand fully the impact of the funding on learners' progression and wellbeing.

Many learners benefit from impartial advice and guidance and useful induction activities when they join their learning programme. Nearly all learners either receive useful learner guides or are signposted to online information about funding, learning support and health and safety. In a few cases, partnerships do not always provide a convenient way for learners to find details of all learning opportunities available in their localities.

Nearly all staff receive worthwhile training on safeguarding and the Prevent strategy. Many tutors raise learners' awareness of keeping safe, including from radicalisation and extremism, as part of induction activities.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good in one of the partnerships inspected and adequate in the other. Leaders and managers in both partnerships have a clear vision with appropriate aims, objectives and policies that focus suitably on meeting many local learners' needs in line with key national and local priorities.

Partnerships have established an ethos of working collaboratively in delivery of courses in agreed key priority areas. In one partnership, there is a clear focus on essential skills and ESOL, and in the other there is an ethos of 'acting today for a better tomorrow'. Leaders understand their roles well and work together to drive forward strategic priorities.

Both partnerships have an appropriate focus on delivery targets, quality improvement and collaborative curriculum planning. They have clear cycles of quality assurance activities supported by generally appropriate structures and processes.

Leaders set appropriate expectations for staff and learners and most staff understand their roles and responsibilities clearly and undertake them well. Where leadership is good, leaders have maintained high standards of provision and know their main strengths and areas for improvement well. They define relevant and measurable actions for improvement in realistic timescales and allocate responsibility for their delivery appropriately. The partnership operates a rigorous system of teaching and learning observations, with all the main providers having clearly defined observation cycles. These observations identify good practice and areas for improvement suitably and help inform the continuous professional learning programme.

Sector summaries:
Adult learning in the community

Where leadership requires improvement, although partners operate their own quality assurance processes, the methodology and quality of lesson observations vary too much between partners. For example, lesson observation evaluations focus mostly on teaching and do not review learner progress and engagement strongly enough. As a result, the partnership has a limited understanding of learner progress across the range of providers. Overall, self evaluation processes at partnership level are not evaluative enough and there is an over-reliance on data to judge standards of teaching and learning.

Partners provide valuable professional learning activities for staff, including on themes such as bilingual teaching, health and wellbeing. Where leadership is good, partnership members work well together to monitor the impact of professional learning activities on learning and teaching. Where improvement is required, there is a lack of clarity at partnership level about priorities for professional learning and partners do not share good practice well enough.

Partnerships have a sound understanding of their income and expenditure, and manage their budgets for adult learning provision appropriately. They have appropriate levels of suitably qualified staff and resources.

In a few instances, the partnerships have been successful in obtaining additional sources of funding, such as a digital development grant from the Welsh Government. They use these funds well to widen provision and provide valuable access to learning opportunities. Accommodation is generally suitable to support teaching and learning. Leaders in one partnership have been particularly successful in establishing community hubs to ensure that provision and facilities are located in the areas of greatest social and economic need and are easily accessible to learners.

In 2020, Estyn undertook a thematic survey **'Community schools: families and communities at the heart of school life'** (Estyn, 2020f). This report identifies that leaders and staff in community schools that have strong parental engagement build the skills, confidence and self-esteem of parents. The report also highlights how well-designed family learning programmes help parents improve their ability to support their children. These programmes often support parents to move into employment or further learning.

Merthyr Tydfil Adult Community Learning Partnership

Family and parenting programmes have a substantial positive impact on the skills and personal development of learners and on the lives of learners and their families.

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

Section 1

Sector summaries: Initial teacher education

1

Context

This academic year, we did not inspect initial teacher education partnerships formally, as we were piloting with partnerships a new inspection methodology that aligns with the new accreditation procedures for initial teacher training. The new cycle of inspections will begin in September 2021.

Following the revised accreditation arrangements for initial teacher education (ITE) in Wales, there are currently four partnerships (comprising of higher education institutions and their partner schools) providing newly accredited programmes of ITE in Wales. Three additional partnerships will be providing ITE in Wales from September 2020.

These programmes, together with the remaining legacy provision in undergraduate ITE, the Graduate Teacher Programme and the Additional Graduate Training Programme, provide a varied set of routes to become a qualified teacher in Wales.

Sector summaries:
Initial teacher education

In preparation for the new inspection cycle, we are developing our inspection approaches in consultation with the sector. Inspection guidance has been drafted to reflect Estyn's Common Inspection Framework, the **Professional standards for teaching and leadership** (Welsh Government, 2020ll), and the **Criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes in Wales** (Welsh Government, 2018b). The new programmes of ITE that began in September 2019 require:

- an increased role for schools
- a clearer role for universities
- joint ownership of the ITE programme between schools and higher education institutions
- structured opportunities to link school and university learning
- the centrality of research

To ensure that the new inspection approaches help inspectors to gather evidence that reflects ITE reform, and to support the development of effective practice in the sector, we started a programme of 'try-out' pilot activities. We completed two try-outs during this year. The try-outs enable us to test out approaches to inspecting in collaboration with the new partnerships. Together, we identified five areas of focus that are designed to test different inspection methods. These are:

- the joint leadership of the programmes between the university and its partner schools
- the development of research practice in university and schools and how this impacts on student teachers' standards
- how well the programmes blend theory and practice in linking school and university learning
- how well the programmes prepare students to teach the Curriculum for Wales
- students' progress over the duration of their programme

We are planning the try-outs in collaboration with the partnerships to support their processes for continuous improvement. We will feed back the main messages arising from this work to each partnership at the end of the process but there is no written report. Feedback from the two try-outs completed was positive, from both leaders and staff delivering the new ITE programmes. Planning try-out activities alongside partnership leaders ensured that partnerships were able to highlight new and innovative aspects of their programmes. Involving peer inspectors from other partnerships in the visits also meant that partnership leaders have been able to share practice.

In addition to this work, we have kept in contact with the ITE partnerships throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We have held virtual engagement meetings with individual providers and regional consortia ITE leads, and worked with the sector to develop our inspection guidance materials.

Sector summaries:
Initial teacher education

Recruitment to ITE remains a concern in Wales, as in England (Sibieta, 2020). In 2019-2020, primary programmes recruited more successfully than secondary programmes, with just under 600 students training to be primary school teachers on the new programmes. This represents 86% of the target figure. Post-graduate primary programmes recruited more effectively than undergraduate programmes, achieving 95% of the target. Secondary programmes recruited less than 50% of the target number. A few subjects recruited very poorly. The proportions of students training to be teachers of physics, information technology and design technology were less than 20% of the target figures for each subject.[9]

Although the numbers of students recruited to programmes in 2019-2020 were below the targets set for ITE in Wales, the latest report from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS, 2020) indicates that there has been a notable upsurge in the number of applicants for ITE programmes in 2020-2021. The data suggests that this increase is due to the impact of COVID-19.

In November 2019, the Welsh Government launched a new conversion programme for Welsh-medium primary teachers who want to teach in secondary schools. The programme aims to increase the number of teachers who can teach at secondary level to meet the increasing demand for Welsh medium teachers.

In 2019, there were 293 primary and 326 secondary Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in Wales, a fall of around 13% since 2015 (EWC, 2020).

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[9] Unpublished data provided by the EWC.

Section 1

Sector summaries: Welsh for Adults

1

Context

In 2016, the Welsh Government transferred responsibility for the Welsh for Adults sector to the National Centre for Learning Welsh (National Centre). The National Centre allocates funding and provides strategic direction and quality assurance in the sector. It funds 11 providers to deliver Welsh for Adults courses in their designated geographical areas, known as Learn Welsh providers. The National Centre also receives additional funding from the Welsh Government to deliver the 'Cymraeg Gwaith/Work Welsh' programme to strengthen bilingual skills in the workplace.

Following the implementation of the National Centre's Data Management Plan in 2017-2018, this is the second full year of national data for the sector. In addition to the Learn Welsh courses reported on in 2017-2018, the 2018-2019 figures include learners on Cymraeg Gwaith/Work Welsh and Clwb Cwtsh (a family learning programme) courses. Cymraeg Gwaith/Work Welsh courses started in April 2019 during the reporting year and only courses that ended by July 2019 are included in the 2018-2019 data. In 2018-2019, 13,260 individual adult learners registered on Welsh for Adults courses with these providers, an increase of 5% when compared with 2017-2018. The overall number of learning activities rose by 4%, from 19,490 in 2018-2018 to 20,330 in 2018-2019. The first published figures regarding the age of learners, calculated from 1 August 2018, shows that 80% of learners are between 16 and 64 years of age (Welsh Government, 2019c).

Sector summaries:
Welsh for Adults

Providers offer learning opportunities at five levels. In 2018-2019, the proportions of learners studying at different levels was broadly in line with the previous year, with 51% of learners at entry (beginners) level, 17% at foundation level and 32% at intermediate or advanced levels, (including proficiency level courses). The National Centre has a strategic objective to increase the proportion of learners on more intensive courses, in order to accelerate their progress towards fluency. In 2018 2019, it offered 10% of learning opportunities at the highest level of intensity (110 hours or more of guided learning), a decrease of two percentage points compared with the previous year (Welsh Government, 2019c).

This year, we inspected two Learn Welsh providers. During these inspections we also observed a very few Cymraeg Gwaith/Work Welsh lessons.

Standards

Standards are good in both Learn Welsh providers inspected.

Many learners at entry and foundation levels make rapid progress in learning and practising basic patterns. They listen attentively, understand and respond appropriately to their tutor. Most recall their prior learning well and begin to adapt their skills to new situations effectively. Overall, they have good pronunciation. Most learners in higher level classes make very purposeful progress in developing their speaking skills. They speak with evolving fluency and use an increasing range of tenses, verb forms and vocabulary. These learners deepen their knowledge of the grammar and structure of the Welsh language. Most proficiency level learners become fluent, articulate speakers who are able to contribute to a wide variety of challenging discussions, such as about how sentences are structured in the Welsh language. A very few learners at all levels are reluctant to speak during whole-class sessions or offer short responses rather than extending their answers, and this limits their progress.

Many learners develop their reading skills well. Learners who are new to learning the language make sound progress in reading simple short sentences and dialogues and learn to read them aloud confidently and naturally. Learners at intermediate and advanced levels read with increasing confidence and fluency. Most make valuable progress in reading, understanding and responding to a wide range of factual and fictional texts. Most proficiency level learners read advanced texts well, understand increasingly complex vocabulary and develop the confidence to deal with different regional dialects.

Across the different levels, many learners develop their writing skills effectively. At entry and foundation levels, they write short sentences and show good progress in using a variety of tenses and vocabulary. Many intermediate and advanced learners write for a range of different purposes and audiences and demonstrate a sound understanding of grammar. Many proficiency level learners produce mature and sophisticated pieces of writing that demonstrate linguistic flexibility and eloquence.

Sector summaries:
Welsh for Adults

Many learners, across the levels, complete their courses and continue to the next level. Most learners from the intermediate level onwards complete their courses, develop well as independent learners and use a wide range of resources to extend their language skills.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In both providers inspected, wellbeing and attitudes to learning are excellent. The enthusiasm of learners towards acquiring the language is a notable feature. Most learners are highly motivated and passionate about learning Welsh. In a few cases, learners demonstrate exceptionally high levels of commitment by travelling considerable distances to attend lessons.

Nearly all learners enjoy their learning and feel part of the inclusive learning community that exists within both providers. They take part in learner surveys and opportunities to have their say and directly influence the provision.

Most learners succeed in working well with their fellow learners in lessons. They show good concentration and persevere when learning and using new linguistic elements. They support each other by assisting and encouraging each other sensitively to use and extend their Welsh language skills.

Many learners take advantage of opportunities to use their language skills outside of the classroom and become part of the wider Welsh-speaking community. In the best examples, learners are proactive in arranging very valuable opportunities for themselves and others to socialise and engage in activities through the medium of Welsh.

Teaching and learning experiences

In both providers inspected, teaching and learning experiences are good. Most tutors develop highly positive working relationships with learners. They are enthusiastic educators who succeed in engaging learners' interest effectively. They present the language in an interesting way that develops learners' knowledge of the Welsh language. As a result, learners make good progress, enjoy their learning and are proud to be part of a passionate learning community.

Most tutors have sound subject knowledge and model language patterns and constructions effectively for learners at all levels. Most make excellent use of Welsh to immerse learners in the language. In a very few cases, tutors do not speak Welsh enough in lessons to model the language and to help prepare learners for speaking activities. Most tutors have high expectations of learners and support them to make progress.

In most lessons, the pace of learning along with engaging activities ensures that learners develop their linguistic skills appropriately, in line with their level. Tutors use questions skilfully to help learners extend their responses and use the language independently. They use ICT and make good use of the extensive range of electronic resources supplied by the National Centre. Most tutors provide learners with constructive feedback to help them improve their skills.

Sector summaries:
Welsh for Adults

Both providers offer a wide range of formal and informal learning activities that ensure clear progression routes for learners. Informal activities enhance learners' confidence in using Welsh outside of lessons and include sessions to practise speaking and visits to places of cultural interest. These trips make a valuable contribution towards expanding learners' knowledge of Welsh history and culture, in addition to the language. Both providers emphasise that the process of learning Welsh begins in the classroom and develops further through practising and using the language in informal activities. As a result, many learners use their Welsh language skills outside lessons in activities such as coffee mornings, breakfast, history and dance clubs, as well as choirs and eisteddfodau.

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance are excellent in the two providers we inspected. Both providers achieve very high standards of care, support and guidance and are very effective in supporting learners and especially those who might otherwise leave their courses during the year.

Staff in both providers are highly committed to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment that encourages learners to practise their skills without fear of making mistakes. Nearly all tutors know their learners well and make sure that they focus learning effectively towards learners' individual educational or personal requirements. Tutors contact those learners who miss lessons and offer valuable individual assistance. As a result, many learners who are in danger of leaving continue with their courses. Both providers have effective arrangements for identifying and responding to learners' additional learning needs.

There are effective arrangements in place to help learners find the right course for them. Nearly all tutors support learners to set useful personal targets, evaluate progress, and plan the next steps of their learning.

Both providers ensure that learners have regular opportunities to express their views formally and informally. As a result, learners are able to contribute constructively to improving the provision and dealing with any pastoral issues.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are excellent in one of the Learn Welsh providers and good in the other.

Both providers have succeeded in creating an inclusive ethos that celebrates the enthusiasm and desire of learners to achieve fluency in the Welsh language, and this permeates all aspects of their work. They focus well on how to improve provision to enhance learners' experiences. They fulfil the strategic priorities of the sector as determined by the National Centre for Learning Welsh.

Learn Welsh Gwent

Learn Welsh Gwent provides excellent care, support and guidance that succeeds in meeting learners' needs well. Staff develop and maintain very positive working relationships with the learners in their care. As a result, staff provide them with effective support without delay, which in turn ensures that the provider retains learners that would otherwise be at risk of leaving their courses.

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

Sector summaries:
Welsh for Adults

Providers communicate well with staff and learners and have suitable systems for self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Overall, they have an appropriate understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement and provide useful professional learning opportunities for staff. In a very few cases they do not identify areas for development in teaching well enough.

Both providers work effectively to promote bilingualism within their host provider and within the wider community. In one provider, Welsh for Adults performs a central role in the college's strategic planning to promote the Welsh language in all aspects of its work, both internally and externally. As a result, it makes a very valuable contribution towards realising the Welsh Government's policy vision of creating a million Welsh speakers by 2050 (2017).

Cymraeg Gwaith/Work Welsh

Cymraeg Gwaith/Work Welsh is a programme delivered by the National Centre, to strengthen Welsh language skills in the workplace. In addition to providing general courses aimed at a wide range of workers' needs, it offers bespoke training for those who work in health, childcare and businesses as well as further and higher education. It also provides an introductory online course to support the use of Welsh at work.

This year, we observed a small number of Cymraeg Gwaith/Work Welsh lessons. Learners attending these lessons demonstrate increased confidence in their Welsh language skills and are proud to explain how they now use these skills at work.

Learn Welsh North East

Learn Welsh North East is an important and valuable part of Coleg Cambria and contributes effectively to the aim in the college's strategic plan to broaden bilingual opportunities for communities in north-east Wales. It succeeds well in supporting Coleg Cambria strategically and operationally in working towards the Welsh Government's aims in its Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers (2017) policy.

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

Cydnabod
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Section 1

Sector summaries: Careers

1

Context

This year, there were no inspections of Career Choices Dewis Gyrfa Ltd (CCDG), which trades as Gyrfa Cymru Careers Wales.

The company was formed in 2013 and is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government. It provides an all-age, independent and impartial careers information advice and guidance service for Wales.

The requirements for Careers Wales services are set out in an annual remit letter from the Welsh Government (Minister for Economy and Transport, 2019). The service aims to help people make effective decisions in planning their careers and progressing within training, further learning or employment. In this way, it aims to contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of Wales.

Sector summaries:
Careers

In the period since 2010, changes in its remit and reductions in its operating budget have led to many changes to the structure, staffing and role of the company, including its withdrawal from supporting young people to access work experience. In April 2017, Careers Wales launched its three-year vision, 'Changing Lives' (2017). The vision refocused resources on young people, with a particular emphasis on key stage 4 and support at other transition points up to the age of 19. The reduced resources available to the company have increased the importance of the role that schools have in helping young people to plan their career progression.

During this year, we published a thematic report on **'Partnerships with employers in secondary and special schools'** (Estyn, 2020l). This report identifies that, where schools engage well and work closely with employers, learners have a better understanding of the world of work and the skills and attributes they need for the future. The effectiveness of this partnership work usually depends on the vision and drive of the headteacher, senior managers and school staff. Many of the schools visited for the report engage with Careers Wales' Education Business Exchange initiative and invite employers to visit the school to talk to learners about their careers. These visits often include completing mock application forms and taking part in interview role-play.

Only a minority of schools now offer work experience for learners. This is because many schools have been slow to respond to the change in Careers Wales responsibilities. Where schools maintain a member of staff responsible for careers, they often still provide learners with opportunities to participate in work experience. A few schools collaborate to fund the costs of ensuring that work placements are safe and secure for learners, and that they vet employers. However, generally they expect learners to arrange their own work placements, with some support from the school for learners who struggle to achieve this.

Nearly all schools visited hold an annual careers' fair for their learners, to which they invite local and national employers, colleges, universities and other providers. Learners attend the fair to talk to employers and discuss their career options, but many schools do not measure the impact of these careers fairs well enough. This variability in the provision of different aspects of careers education was also identified in research by Millards *et al* (2019) who identified eight common barriers to effective careers education including issues around teachers' knowledge, the division of labour between schools and external partners and time, prioritisation and buy in.

We also published a thematic report on **'Business and social studies subjects at A level'** (Estyn, 2020c). This found that, in most subject options, learners are familiar with the subjects they are considering studying at A level by having studied them at GCSE. However, with new subjects, such as business studies or social studies, learners find it difficult to gain enough understanding of the options at A level to enable them to make informed choices and to prepare them well enough for the demands of A level study. Those progressing to degree level study gain helpful advice about university entry.

Section 1

Sector summaries:
Learning in the justice sector

1

Context

In Wales, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) leads on inspecting the seven prisons in Wales including the young offenders' institution. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) leads on inspecting the 17 youth offending teams. Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) leads on inspecting the secure children's home.

Sector summaries:
Learning in the justice sector

Prisons and young offender institution

This year, Estyn worked with HMI Prisons to inspect one adult prison and one young offender institution. These reports can be found here:

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons

Nearly all learners progress well towards their learning goals. Most learners achieve qualifications that would support their progression to education, training or employment. In the adult provision, a few learners had improved from entry level to level 3 and a few were working towards Masters level degrees. In the young offender institution, nearly all learners achieve several qualifications and a few with longer sentences attain GCSE and AS levels.

Many learners make strong progress in their literacy and numeracy skills. Nearly all improve at least one level above their level on admission. In the young offender institution, nearly all learn new skills to help them on release, such as ICT skills or budgeting and money management. Many learners also develop work-related skills and gain basic qualifications enabling them to progress to higher skills levels or to seek employment on release.

Most learners behave well in sessions and show good attitudes to learning. In the adult provision, many learners engage well with worthwhile community projects.

Staff make effective use of labour market information and learner feedback to strengthen the curriculum. In the adult provision, staff in each vocational workshop have recently formed valuable relationships with related businesses so that learners gain current industrial knowledge to help prepare them for employment. Many tutors plan engaging sessions to help learners make strong progress, assess learners' skills and knowledge skilfully during sessions and provide helpful feedback and encouragement. Nearly all teaching staff use a broad range of activities and resources that they adapt well to meet individual learners' needs. Nearly all staff manage learners' behaviour well, de-escalating potentially confrontational behaviour quickly and effectively.

Staff provide learners with well informed advice and guidance on employment and progression opportunities. This improves their chances of employment after leaving prison, as identified in **'Education in Prison'** (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, 2019). The adult prison's reducing re offending strategy has significantly decreased the number of prisoners who are unemployed. In the young offender institution, there are effective arrangements to induct children into education and to prepare them for release.

Sector summaries:
Learning in the justice sector

Leaders prioritise education and recognise its value in reducing re-offending behaviour. Managers use self-evaluation well to inform their quality development planning, prioritising areas for improvement appropriately. In the young offender institution, the strong management team communicate with each other and with staff well and have a strong collaborative approach that helps managers plan learners' education appropriately. In the young offender institution, managers develop good partnerships with several sporting organisations to provide enrichment and extra learning activities.

Youth offending services

HMI Probation undertook one joint inspection of a youth offending service in Wales. The inspection team included representatives from Estyn, Health Inspectorate Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. Estyn focused on the education and training received by young people working with the youth offending service. Overall, HMI Probation rated the youth offending service as 'Inadequate'. The report can be found here.

HM Inspectorate of Probation

The youth offending service has a strong partnership with Careers Wales to provide young people with effective support through three seconded careers advisers. The youth offending service works with a broad range of partners, enabling young people to have taster opportunities before committing to a progression route. However, most caseworkers do not understand the full range of opportunities available to young people. There is no clear strategy to support learners who have poor basic skills. Staff do not know where to refer young people to help them improve their skills. The service does not liaise effectively with local authority initiatives designed to ensure that all young people of school age have a timely offer of education provision. The lack of an education, training and employment co ordinator has adversely affected young people's chances of making progress within statutory education. Youth offending service staff do not gather young people's achievement information in a way that enables systematic analysis or evaluation. While the service has employed several bilingual staff since the last inspection, it does not do enough to promote the value of Welsh as an employment skill or to encourage learners who could speak Welsh to use this ability.

Secure children's home

Estyn worked with Care Inspectorate Wales to inspect the education provision in the secure children's home. This report can be requested here:

Care Inspectorate Wales

YOI Parc

Many of the young people at YOI Parc have complex and diverse needs. Teachers use a multidisciplinary learner-centred approach to work with them. They have a strong commitment to supporting learners and maximising their potential through the course of their sentence and towards resettlement.

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

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Section 2

Response to COVID-19 pandemic - March to August 2020

March 2020

- Chief Inspector for Wales announces immediate suspension of all of Estyn's inspections.

- Minister for Education announces that schools will close for statutory provision of education by 20 March. Also, announces suspension of GCSE and A level examinations for summer 2020.

April 2020

- Suspension of the Childcare Offer for Wales. Funding to be used to support vulnerable children and the childcare costs of key workers.

- Welsh Government announces £1.25 million for additional mental health support for children who may be experiencing increased stress or anxiety as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak. They announce £3 million for local authorities to purchase hardware and secure internet connectivity to ensure learners in Wales are not 'digitally excluded'.

- Estyn release advice for school and PRU leaders on how to continue with school and PRU business. In collaboration with Welsh Government, regional consortia and ADEW we release 'Developing Approaches to Support Distance Learning'.

- The Minister for Education sets out five key principles for when and how schools would return.

May 2020

£1.25M

- Welsh Government announces £3.75 million of funding to support mental health in schools and publishes a COVID-19 Resilience Plan for the post 16 sectors, including further and higher education, apprenticeships, employability and adult learning.

£3.75M

June 2020

- Further education colleges and work-based learning providers begin to re-open for face-to-face learning for a priority groups of learners.

- Minister for Education announces that she will use the Coronavirus Act 2020 to disapply temporarily basic curriculum requirements for Wales.

- Most schools re-open to pupils to provide an opportunity for them to 'Check in, Catch up and prepare for summer, and September'.

July 2020

- Estyn publishes several thematic reports and sector specific insights to support Wales to keep learning. In conjunction with the four regional consortia we also release 'Models of blended Learning' guidance to help from September.

- Welsh Government introduces the Curriculum and Assessment Bill to provide a legislative framework for the new curriculum and assessment arrangements. They announce the 'Recruit, recover and raise standards' scheme to employ 900 extra teaching staff in schools.

- Welsh Government announces additional funding of over £50 million for universities and colleges to maintain jobs in teaching, research and student services, invest in projects to support economic recovery, and support students suffering from financial hardship.

£50M

August 2020

- Wales's Childcare Offer is re-established. Working parents are again able to access 30 hours of early education and care.

- Estyn releases 'Planned approaches across maintained schools and PRUs', to capture a variety of approaches in response to common challenges across different education sectors.

- Welsh Government pledges an additional £4 million to support childcare providers affected by COVID-19 and further funding of up to £264m for local authorities to support a range of services, such as social care, education and leisure.

- Education Secretaries for Wales, England and Northern Ireland announce that exam results will be based on teacher assessment.

- Minister for Education guarantees that learners' final A Level grade will not be lower than their AS grade. Published GCSE and revised A-level results based on teachers' assessments show a notable increase in grades over previous years.

- The Minister for Education announces an independent review of the arrangements for awarding grades for the 2020 summer examinations.

Section 2A

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

2

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organisation (2020a) was contacted by Chinese authorities who informed them of a concerning rise in cases of pneumonia of an 'unknown cause'. This was followed a week later by the Chinese government identifying it as a new type of coronavirus (COVID-19), and subsequently the World Health Organisation (2020b) declaring a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern' on the 30 January 2020.

Throughout March 2020, the impact of COVID-19 on the UK began to unfold. In response to *'the rapidly changing and challenging period facing schools and other education and training providers due to COVID-19,'* the Chief Inspector for Wales announced a suspension of all of Estyn's inspection activity and joint inspections of non-maintained nursery settings with Care Inspectorate Wales from 16 March. The Chief Inspector (2020a) stated that, *'I have made this decision to allow leaders and staff in all education and training providers, and those organisations who support them, to focus fully on the wellbeing of their learners, their staff and their families'.*

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

On 18 March, Kirsty Williams the Minister for Education in Wales (2020n), announced that she was bringing forward the Easter break for schools in Wales and that schools would close for statutory provision of education by 20 March. She confirmed that schools would be repurposed to, 'support those most in need' and plans would be developed around the key areas of *'supporting and safeguarding the vulnerable and ensuring continuity of learning'.*

On the same date, the Minister for Education (2020e) announced the suspension of the summer examination series. *'Learners due to sit their GCSEs and A levels this summer will be awarded a fair grade to recognise their work, drawing on the range of information that is available'.* At the same time, Estyn began working with the Welsh Government to develop guidance for the continuation of learning in schools. The purpose of the guidance was to mitigate the impact of school closures on pupils, in particular those who face socio-economic disadvantage, as well as learners with special educational needs. This work also included guidance for non-Welsh speaking parents whose children attend Welsh medium schools. To support this approach, Estyn led and supported aspects of the strategy, including inclusion advice for schools in continuing to do school business and developing approaches to support distance learning.

On 20 March, the Minister for Education (2020b) gave clarification on the repurposing of schools in Wales. She announced that schools would be open for children of key workers, but wherever possible she advised parents that every child who *'can be safely cared for at home should be and only where there is no safe alternative should provision be made in schools or other settings'.* The Welsh Government released guidance to support hubs and schools in preparing their settings for these learners (Welsh Government, 2020k). The Minister for Education also announced £7 million of additional funding to support families of children who receive free school meals. This allowed schools and local authorities to make emergency provision for these families, including providing collection facilities from schools, or delivering food to home or community locations. It also ensured that local authorities had the option of distributing vouchers for local food retailers to families (Welsh Government, 2020hh).

On 23 March, Prime Minister Boris Johnson gave a televised address to the nation. He announced that UK citizens should only go outside to buy food, to exercise once a day, or to go to work if they absolutely could not work from home.

On 27 March, Kirsty Williams announced that Year 10 and Year 13 learners who were due to sit examinations in the summer term would not be required to sit these examinations at a later date (Welsh Government, 2020x). She wrote to Welsh higher education institutions, thanking them for their work in supporting students' wellbeing. She asked them to ensure that students are able to leave with qualifications that are a fair reflection of their abilities, whilst maintaining quality and standards (Minister for Education, 2020i).

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

At the beginning of April, the Chief Inspector for Wales (2020b) released a message of support for education providers around the country and the Minister for Education (2020g) announced support for supply teachers in Wales. She thanked 'the tremendous efforts of our teachers, school staff and childcare providers…allowing parents in key roles to continue doing critical jobs'.

By the end of the first week of April, the Welsh Government had published a range of documents to support education settings in Wales during the pandemic. These included information for governing bodies, support for students during the pandemic, guidance for schools on safeguarding children and changes to the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare. It also released information regarding the suspension of the Childcare Offer for Wales until September 2020, 'so that the funding can be used to support key workers with their childcare costs and support vulnerable children during the coronavirus pandemic' (Welsh Government, 2020v) under a 'Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme.

On 9 April, Kirsty Williams wrote to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) workforce to thank them for their efforts and explained that the Welsh Government was considering whether to implement temporary emergency powers under the 'Coronavirus Act' to modify the legal requirements on local authorities fulfilling their duties in relation to learners with SEN (Minister for Education, 2020h).

A week later, the Welsh Government (2020p) announced £1.25 million to provide additional mental health support for children who may be experiencing increased stress or anxiety as a result of the international coronavirus outbreak. A written statement from the Minister for Education (2020f) also confirmed that the 2020 Wales results day for AS and A level students, and for GCSE students, would be as originally scheduled.

On 20 April, the Welsh Government published its 'Stay Safe, Stay Learning: supporting the education system policy statement (2020pp). This identified that guidance would be developed in collaboration with Estyn, regional consortia, local authorities, the National Academy for Educational Leadership and Qualifications Wales. A timely announcement confirmed that Wales would become the first country in the UK to guarantee funding for children to continue to receive free school meals throughout the summer holidays (Welsh Government, 2020gg).

On 23 April, Estyn (2020a, 2020i) published a number of documents to support providers with distance learning. These offer advice to leaders and to governors of schools and PRUs, setting out some key principles in using technology to support school business.

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

The next day, the Welsh Government, in collaboration with regional consortia, ADEW[1] and Estyn, released 'Developing approaches to Support Distance Learning' (2020a). This set out key principles for schools to consider when developing distance-learning models. The Education Endowment Foundation (2020a) also released a rapid evidence assessment examining the existing research to support the remote learning of pupils.

During the last week of April, the Minister for Education (Welsh Government 2020aa, 2020cc) set out five key principles for when and how schools would return, as well as announcing £3 million for local authorities to purchase hardware and secure internet connectivity to ensure that learners in Wales are not 'digitally excluded'.

On 1 May, the UK government SAGE group (2020) met to consider a summary of research that suggested that *'younger children might be less susceptible to infection'.* The group suggested that 'reopening options relating to younger children are lower risk than those related to older children'. However, it warned that *'indirect effects of re-opening schools are likely to have a greater impact on transmission than schools themselves (e.g. work-related reopening, behaviour changes)'* (SAGE, 2020).

On 11 May, the UK Prime Minister announced that schools in England would open from 1 June, starting with the youngest children first. A collective response from teachers' unions questioned the plans for a phased return, saying it *'was still too early to be safe'* (BBC News, 2020c)*. In Wales, Kirsty Williams released a statement to clarify the position in Wales in light of the approach taken in England. She announced that 'the situation for schools in Wales will not change on 1 June'* and that a working document would be published to set out the next steps for education in Wales, including childcare and further education (Minister for Education, 2020l).

Throughout May, Estyn continued to support the Welsh Government in developing guidance and produced the first draft of the document 'Routes to Reopening Schools', including a discussion paper describing possible models that schools could adopt and logistical considerations when reopening. Estyn also resumed link inspector engagement calls with senior leaders of further education colleges, work-based learning providers, adult learning in the community partnerships and the National Centre for Learning Welsh. We conducted these meetings remotely and they enabled us to obtain a national picture of the work being done across post-16 providers in response to the pandemic.

On 14 May, Care Inspectorate Wales (2020b) published their approach to ensuring the quality and safety of childcare services during the pandemic. This included gathering intelligence by establishing lines of communication with providers and the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government (2020oo) also launched the 'Seren' resource containing advice and bridging units for pupils preparing for university.

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[1] FThe Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) is the professional group of local authority officers accountable for statutory education functions in each of the local authorities in Wales.

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

On 15 May, Kirsty Williams set out an approach for thinking about how and when schools would reopen called 'the decision framework for the next phase of education and childcare: considerations, planning and challenges' (Welsh Government, 2020uu). It included reference to working with a range of stakeholders, including Estyn, to develop a considered and strategic approach based on science. To further support providers, Estyn released 'Cameos and Ideas' (2020d), which describes useful approaches to continuing schools' and PRUs' business, such as supporting staff wellbeing and keeping in touch with pupils.

Throughout the Month, the Welsh Government continued to release guidance to support schools in delivering home learning, including guidance on live streaming and safeguarding. It announced £3.75 million of funding to support mental health in schools, which includes support for pupils under the age of 11 (Welsh Government, 2020kk).

On 20 May, the Welsh Government (2020f) published its COVID-19 Resilience Plan for the post-16 sectors, including further and higher education, apprenticeships, employability and adult learning. This strategy set out three phases of Rescue, Review and Renew from March 2020 to March 2021, where the Welsh Government will work closely with Estyn, Qualifications Wales, Jisc, Careers Wales, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, sector representative bodies, teaching unions, providers and learners to ensure a comprehensive approach to tackling shared challenges.

Towards the end of May, schools in England were told to prepare to start on 1 July for Early Years, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. In Wales, Kirsty Williams announced that she and her team would continue to work with teachers' unions, local authorities, scientists and education professionals (Minister for Education, 2020j). She also wrote to the Minister of State for Universities to express 'deep concern' over the UK government's proposals to control the number of English students able to attend Welsh institutions (Welsh Government, 2020y).

In early June, Estyn continued to support schools by drafting advice for approaches to blended learning that would later feed into work with the Welsh Government and regional consortia. We began making contact with providers through engagement phone calls to establish how they were coping with the crisis, discussing staff and pupil wellbeing, and practical aspects of school organisation. We shared the main findings from these calls with the Welsh Government to help inform policy decisions.

On 3 June, the Minister for Education announced arrangements for reopening schools. She proposed that all schools reopen on 29 June, with the summer term extended by one week to 27 July. This was to enable all pupils to 'Check in, Catch up and prepare for summer, and September' (Welsh Government, 2020d). The Welsh Government (2020ss) published the scientific advice to support its approach. Kirsty Williams and the Minister for Health launched the 'Young Person's Mental Health Toolkit' (Welsh Government, 2020ww). She also identified that further education colleges and work-based learning providers would begin to reopen for face-to-face learning from 15 June for priority groups of learners who

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

needed to return to college or training centres to carry out practical assessments to complete their qualifications, and those learners who needed extra support and guidance to stay in education.

On the same day, Meilyr Rowlands, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Education and Training in Wales, shared information on his blog about the role of Estyn in the current climate, including our role in providing the government with independent, objective evidence and advice, and supporting the government's Stay Safe, Stay Learning policy: supporting the education system. He clarified the arrangements for inspection activity and the work of inspectors to engage with schools in a supportive capacity to gather information and share effective practice (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for wales, 2020c).

On 8 June, The Children's Commissioner for Wales and the Welsh Youth Parliament published results of a survey 'Coronavirus and Me' (2020). Over 23,700 children responded between the ages of 3 and 18. The survey found that, while a few older children reported more negative feelings than younger children, many had commented on positive aspects of lockdown, such as spending time with family, learning new skills and taking daily exercise outside.

On 10 June, the Welsh Government (2020o) published guidance on face-to-face further education and work-based learning. This supported further education institutions and independent work-based learning providers in Wales to manage the safe return of learners and staff in face-to-face learning. This was followed on 12 June by an open letter from the Minister for Education to all school staff in Wales thanking them for all that they had done and continue to do to support children and young people (Minister for Education, 2020k).

The following week, many local authorities in Wales took the decision not to keep their schools open for an additional week in the summer term as recommended. Those few authorities that chose to work the additional week gained an extra week's holiday during the October half term.

On 23 June, Kirsty Williams announced that she would use powers under the Coronavirus Act 2020, to disapply temporarily the basic curriculum requirements for Wales and associated assessment arrangements for schools and funded non-maintained nursery settings (Minister for Education, 2020p). This was to allow flexibility for schools to focus on priorities for learning. Estyn (2020r) helped support these priorities, for example by publishing examples of how schools and PRUs were supporting their pupils and community in response to the difficult circumstances due to COVID-19 gathered from engagement with schools. Shortly after, the Welsh Government (2020s) published the **results of its COVID-19 survey,** which found that 93% of parents with a child at primary school and 85% of parents with a child at secondary school were content that the school was finding ways to support children with their learning.

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

On 29 June, most schools reopened to pupils to provide an opportunity for them to 'check in, catch-up and prepare' for returning full time in September. In each of the three weeks of opening, around 60% of pupils who schools invited attended for at least one session (Welsh Government, 2020b). Due to local conditions, a very few number of school did not reopen, including all those within Anglesey local authority.

On the same day, Qualifications Wales (2020c) published its aims that underpinned the way that GCSE and A level grades would be calculated in summer 2020, together with the requirements for the appeals process.

At the start of July, the Minister for Education (2020a) released a written statement confirming that, in 2020-2021, as for 2019-2020, qualification awards data will not be used to report on attainment outcomes at a school, local authority or regional consortium level.

Soon after, the Welsh Government (2020ff) announced that it would suspend the National School Categorisation system to 'help reduce the burden on schools and the system by removing or relaxing requirements where it is appropriate to do so'. In addition, it identified that it would invest £2.6 million to support children across Wales during the summer holidays, to *'help local authorities provide childcare and play provision over the summer and enable children aged five to 16 to take part in activities they may have missed out on while they couldn't go to school during the lockdown'* (Welsh Government, 2020bb). It targets the most 'vulnerable' pupils and those who have 'missed out the most'.

On 2 July, Estyn (2020f) published a report to help primary, secondary, all-age and special schools in building partnerships with their communities to support the learning and wellbeing of pupils and their families during the pandemic.

On 6 July, the Minister for Education introduced the Curriculum and Assessment Bill to the Senedd and later delivered an oral statement on the Bill to the Senedd. The Bill provided a legislative framework to support the new curriculum and assessment arrangements as part of a wider programme of education reform. It was designed to *'provide every school in Wales the opportunity to design and implement their own curriculum within a national approach that secures a consistency of approach for learners across the country'* (Minister for Education, 2020c).

On 8 July, the Ministers for Education and Health opened a consultation for a framework that would provide guidance for schools to embed effective provision for mental health and emotional wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2020j). This was supported by a report from Estyn into how primary and secondary schools support the health and wellbeing of pupils 'Healthy and Happy' (2019a). The Welsh Government (2020mm) also announced a scheme to employ 900 extra teaching staff to *"Recruit, recover and raise standards"* in Welsh schools. 'This will support learners taking their A level and GCSEs in 2021 and those known to have been affected most while many schools have been closed since March' (Welsh Government, 2020ii).

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

Schools received clarification from the Minister for Education regarding opening in September on 9 July. She announced that the autumn term would start on 1 September and schools that could accommodate all pupils from the start of the term should do so (Welsh Government, 2020w). The following week, two pieces of guidance were released to support schools in returning: operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term: Keep Education Safe (COVID-19) (Welsh Government, 2020u); and Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term: Keep Education Safe (COVID-19) (2020n).

The summer term ended for many schools on 17 July. On 22 July, the Welsh Government announced additional funding of more than £50 million for universities and colleges: £27 million provided to higher education institutions, and £23 million to support students in further education colleges and sixth forms. This would support universities to maintain jobs in teaching, research and student services, invest in projects to support the wider economic recovery, and support students suffering from financial hardship. For learners in sixth form, vocational courses or at further education colleges, funding would allow an increase in teaching support and provide digital equipment as well as supporting a variety of other approaches for learners in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020ee).

The following week, Estyn (2020h) published 'Insights into how independent schools and specialist colleges have responded during the COVID-19 pandemic'. We released a joint statement with Care Inspectorate Wales (2020a) in relation to non-maintained childcare settings. This stated that they we would not *'carry out joint inspections too soon and only when it is safe and appropriate to do so'*. The current suspension of joint inspections of non-maintained settings will continue until at least 31 December 2020.

Friday 24 July saw the end of the summer term for those schools who remained open for an additional week. On the same day, Estyn and the four regional consortia released guidance to support learning from September entitled 'Models of blended learning'.

On the 29 July, the Minister for Education proposed a 3.1% overall pay award for teachers, following the publication of the Independent Welsh Pay Review Body (IWPRB) (2020) report. In a statement she said, *"I would like to reemphasise our determination to promote teaching as a profession of choice for graduates and career changers. I believe these changes to pay and conditions will continue to attract high quality teachers to the profession in Wales. An eight week consultation with stakeholders will now begin, before the final pay deal is agreed."* (Welsh Government, 2020z)

On 30 July, Estyn published brief insights into how further education (2020q), work-based learning (2020s) and adult learning in the community providers (2020p) had worked to support their learners and community during the COVID-19 pandemic. These insights exemplified how education for a diverse group of learners over the age of 25 in aspects such as literacy, numeracy, digital skills has adapted and continued to rise to the challenge of the current situation.

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

At the same time, the Welsh Government (2020c) published blended learning guidance for further education institutions, work-based learning and adult learning in the community. This set out key considerations for developing and embedding blended learning programmes. It was developed in consultation with the Blended Learning Working Group, which included Estyn and many other representatives from this sector. In addition, the results and next steps from the COVID-19 online learning and resources survey were published to help support and inform the resilience plan for the post-16 sector, released in May (Welsh Government, 2020f).

On the final day of July, the Welsh Government published updated guidance to support higher education (2020q), further education (2020l) and work-based providers (2020vv) as they continued to prepare for the autumn term and beyond. This included guidance for safe operation in post-16 learning from September 2020 (Welsh Government, 2020l) and a strategic framework for learning delivery (2020rr).

August began with an announcement from the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Care (Welsh Government, 2020v), Julie Morgan, regarding Wales's Childcare Offer. Working parents were again able to access 30 hours of early education and care after this provision was suspended in April. In addition, the Welsh Government pledged an additional £4 million to support childcare providers affected by COVID-19. This was to allow most providers to access a one-off grant of £2,500 to meet costs such as rent, utilities and unmet wages (Welsh Government, 2020jj).

On 10 August, a written statement from the Minister for Education clarified higher education admissions constraints. In a letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, she stated that, *'in light of the regulations recently approved by the UK Parliament which will give effect to the UK Government's student number controls policy. I do not believe this approach is in the best interests of Wales. I have previously stated that my chief concern is to protect the interests of Welsh students and Welsh higher education institutions. I am therefore not proposing to seek similar measures in Wales.'* (Minister for Education, 2020q)

On 11 August, after consultation with headteachers, Estyn, local authorities and the Welsh Government (2020u) published an updated version of the operational guidance for schools and settings. Key changes included the latest medical advice on shielding and further clarification on school transport and food and catering arrangements. To support this guidance, the Welsh Government (2020dd) announced an additional £10 million to help the bus industry transport more passengers to school, college and work safely.

Concerns had begun to spread throughout the UK regarding the methodology applied in awarding examination grades for pupils. On 11 August, pupils in Scotland had their results amended to reflect teacher assessment following earlier demonstrations by pupils against the downgrading of about 125,000 results by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Many students believed that they were penalised during the moderation process because their schools had historically not performed as well as others.

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

On the 12 August, the Wales Minister for Education (2020m) released a statement guaranteeing that a learner's final A level grade would not be lower than their AS grade. She expressed her confidence that *'the system overseen by Qualifications Wales (QW) and WJEC, in response to the current emergency, is fair for students and robust in what it measures and signals to employers and universities.'* This was due to the different situation in Wales where 'almost half the final grade comes from AS Level exams' (Minister for Education, 2020m).

On 13 August, A level results were published after moderation by Qualifications Wales (2020b). These results included a record proportion of 29.9% A and A* grades, up 2.9 percentage points from 2019. However, these results were yet to be adjusted in line with the statement regarding AS level grades from the Minister, the day before: *'If the grade is the same or higher, then no action is required. If, however, the grade is lower it will be replaced with the same grade as that received for the AS level'.* (Qualifications Wales, 2020e)

The following week, the education secretaries for Wales, England and Northern Ireland announced that exam results were to be replaced by those based on teacher assessment rather than any 'algorithm' used previously. Education Minister Kirsty Williams also confirmed that A level, AS, GCSE, Skills Challenge Certificate and Welsh Baccalaureate grades in Wales would now be awarded on the basis of Centre Assessment Grades. She explained that, *'given decisions elsewhere, the balance of fairness now lies with awarding Centre Assessment grades to students, despite the strengths of the system in Wales'.* (Minister for Education, 2002o). The First Minister for Wales supported this approach and explained that they had taken the decision to award estimated grades because *'we heard early in the day that things were moving elsewhere in the United Kingdom. We were determined that we would have a level playing field where our young people were not disadvantaged.'* (BBC News, 2020b)

On 17 August, the Welsh Government (2020m) published guidance to help settings support vulnerable and disadvantaged learners as schools prepare to reopen in September. In addition, it announced further funding of up to £264 million for local authorities to support a range of services such as social care, education and leisure. The package includes £25 million for schools and £3.6 million for further education colleges, for additional cleaning costs to ensure that students and staff are able to work in a safe environment during the pandemic (Minister for Housing and Local Government, 2020).

On 20 August, GCSE results and revised A level results were released, based on teachers' assessments in line with the rest of the UK. At GCSE, grades improved considerably over previous years. For example, GCSE A*-A grades increased to 25.9% compared with 18.4% in 2019, and A*-C grades rose to 74.5% compared with 62.8% in 2019. At A level, results also increased, particularly those achieving A-A*. This rose substantially to 41.3% compared with the originally published result of 29.9% and a figure of 27% in 2019 (Qualifications Wales, 2020d). Qualifications Wales (2020a) also published a revised appeal process for GCSE, AS, A level and Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications based upon the revised teacher assessment grades.

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

On the same day, the Welsh Government (2020l) released updated guidance to support the safe operation in post-16 learning from September 2020, as well as guidance for youth work services to support a safe and phased increase of operations (2020xx). This was supported on 25 August with the publishing of advice for teachers and lecturers (Welsh Government, 2020g) and for learners (2020h) studying AS, A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate.

On 21 August, the Welsh Government (2020ii) released guidance for its 'accelerating learning programme', supporting the funding announced on 8 July to recruit 900 extra teaching staff. Entitled 'Recruit, Recover, Raise standards', it responded to evidence from a range of sources, including Estyn, that some learners may have been impacted more seriously than others by school and setting closures, such as those pupils in Welsh medium schools and settings who live in non-Welsh speaking households. It clarified that the focus for the coming year would be literacy, numeracy and digital competence within a broad and balanced curriculum, the development of independent learning skills, and support and engagement through coaching.

Towards the end of August, media reports began to focus on pupils returning to school. The four UK Chief Medical Officers released a joint statement on 23 August regarding schools and childcare reopening. They stated that they were *'confident that there is clear evidence from many studies that the great majority of children and teenagers who catch COVID-19 have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all'*. In addition, *'Transmission of COVID-19 to staff members in school does occur, and data from UK and international studies suggest it may largely be staff to staff (like other workplaces) rather than pupil to staff'* (UK Government, 2020).

Advice from the Technical Advisory Group for Wales followed, relating to face coverings for children and young people (under 18) in education settings. This advice built upon newly released publications from the UK Chief Medical Officers and Deputy Chief Medical Officers and the World Health Organisation. It stated that the Chief Medical Officer, *'currently recommends, but does not mandate, face coverings to be used in a risk assessed way in a range of settings where other physical controls cannot be maintained'*. It also recognised *'There are some risks and harms of face coverings to be considered, including the potential for inadvertent virus spread when putting on or taking off, the need for supply, safe wearing, storage and disposal, and the risk of stigmatisation or bullying of those with medical exemptions'* (Welsh Government, 2020tt).

This advice was followed by a statement from Vaughan Gething, Minister for Health and Social Services, and Kirsty Williams (2020), confirming that *'advice from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales is that face coverings are recommended for all members of the public over 11 years in indoor settings in which social distancing cannot be maintained, including schools and school transport'*. The Welsh Government would amend guidance to require settings and local authorities to undertake risk assessments to determine if face coverings should be recommended for their staff and young people in communal areas, including school and college transport. There was a mixed response from unions regarding this announcement (BBC News, 2020a).

Timeline of events linked to the COVID-19 crisis during the academic year 2019-2020

On 24 August, Estyn (2020b) released 'Arrangements for September 2020: Planned approaches across maintained schools and PRUs' This document outlined how schools and PRUs had started to plan for September and set out approaches that schools and PRUs are taking to support them in minimising the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

On 28 August, Kirsty Williams announced that she had issued a notice temporarily modifying the basic curriculum requirements for Wales and associated assessment arrangements for schools and funded non-maintained nursery settings. This notice modified the basic curriculum and associated assessment requirements to a *'reasonable endeavours'* basis for the month of September. It recognised that settings will need 'the flexibility to be able to prioritise the reinforcement of that key learning (drawing on the support provided by the Welsh Government's 'Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards' plan where appropriate)' (Welsh Parliament, 2020).

August concluded with a statement from the Minister for Education announcing an independent review of the arrangements for awarding grades for the 2020 summer exam series. Louise Casella, director of The Open University in Wales, who has *'extensive experience in strategic roles in the education sector in Wales'*, will chair this independent review. This review 'will consider key issues that have emerged from the arrangements which were put in place for this summer's exams, and the challenges resulting from the 2020 experience' and provide recommendations and considerations for approaches for 2021 (Minister for Education, 2020d).

Section 2B

Thematic report on sector response to the COVID-19 pandemic – March to August 2020

2

In response to the pandemic, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales suspended inspection activity from 16 March 2020. From that time, we have supported the Welsh Government and the education system as a whole in responding to the crisis. As part of this work, we kept in touch with senior leaders across the education system. The main focus of this engagement was on how education and training organisations were coping with the crisis, on the impact on learner and staff wellbeing and learning, and on practical aspects of organisational management. We conducted these meetings remotely and they enabled us to obtain a national picture of the work being done in response to the pandemic. We used the information to develop guidance to support schools and education and training providers. We also shared our findings with the Welsh Government to help inform policy.

From the outset of lockdown from 20 March 2020, all education and training providers across Wales had to consider how to continue delivering and supporting learning. Closure of education settings meant that face-to-face teaching, training and learning were impracticable, so providers were required to rethink their approaches and to respond to learners' needs as quickly as possible. While many providers went to great lengths to make sure their learners had access to appropriate learning, the nature of the learning experiences offered to learners has varied across and at times within providers.

All providers and local authorities placed learners' health, safety and wellbeing as their top priority while usual learning activities were disrupted due to the pandemic. Staff across all sectors responded quickly and worked creatively and collaboratively to minimise the risk that learners' health, safety and wellbeing would be compromised during lockdown.

Maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools

Supporting learner wellbeing

All schools placed pupils' wellbeing as their highest priority. They promoted guidance on good health and wellbeing to their pupils and their families, and gave advice on how to keep themselves safe. Often this was through forwarding information from public sector agencies and charities. Schools often included tasks relating to health, safety and wellbeing in the learning activities that they prepared for pupils. They often supported pupils and their families practically, for instance becoming involved in organising and running food banks, with staff making regular deliveries to the homes of vulnerable families. This also helped to build relationships with hard to reach parents.

Most schools encouraged pupils to take simple actions that would support their wellbeing, such as having a routine to their day, sleeping well, having breaks from screen time, taking time to reflect to how they are feeling, and doing something physically active every day. A few schools, mainly primary schools, provided daily or weekly videos featuring different members of staff sharing an uplifting, inspiring or thought-provoking message along with any important information. This helped maintain a sense of belonging and community for the pupils in these schools.

At school, pupils' relationships with staff and other pupils have a very significant influence on their wellbeing. Most schools understood the importance of finding ways to help pupils sustain the positive relationships that they had during lockdown. For example, some schools arranged for pupils to receive personal messages from teachers through short videos or postcards. Most schools contacted every learner's family directly during the closure period to check on their child's wellbeing, though the frequency of contact varied a lot from weekly contact to just one contact during the period.

As lockdown progressed, more schools introduced ways for pupils to connect with each other online, sometimes through live video sessions. Making these social connections, albeit online, supported pupils' wellbeing. A few schools used activities such as family quizzes to encourage pupils and parents to connect together.

Where schools identified concerns for a pupil's wellbeing, the school provided additional support or referred the pupil or their family to external support services such as counsellors, youth workers, educational psychologists or education welfare officers. Schools also used these support services for the very few cases where they had been unable to make contact with a family and were also concerned about the lack of engagement by the pupil.

Many schools provided professional learning for their staff on supporting pupils' wellbeing. This was provided through internal staff video meetings, through webinars by regional consortia or other external agencies, or through individual access to online training materials.

Maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools

While schools prioritised identifying pupils whose wellbeing was a concern, they often noted that many pupils reported enhanced wellbeing as a result of being away from school for an extended time. For example, pupils were benefiting from spending more time with their family or from being free from social issues that negatively affect their wellbeing, such as peer pressure or bullying.

Schools identified a small number of safeguarding concerns during lockdown, such as pupils not feeling safe due to domestic abuse. However, school leaders identified that they made fewer referrals overall during the lockdown period compared with typical rates.

In schools serving as childcare hubs, attending pupils' health and wellbeing was more easily monitored. Strict protocols were followed in hubs to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

When pupils returned to schools in June, teachers initially focused activities on pupils' wellbeing. For example, some schools used an activity promoted by their regional consortium, which through creating a lockdown time capsule encouraged small groups of pupils to share their experiences and feelings. This enabled staff to gauge whether each pupil was ready to learn and to identify anxious or vulnerable pupils who would benefit from extra support. A **Barnardo's survey** (2020, p.13) of schools found that almost nine in ten schools felt that the outbreak was 'likely to have an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils'.

Despite concerns about what impact lockdown would have on pupils' wellbeing and mental health, pupils were generally pleased to be back in school and keen to progress in their learning, and schools quickly moved from activities focused on wellbeing once they were confident that they were ready.

Learning

Maintained primary and secondary schools responded swiftly to the immediate challenge of distance learning[1]. In some instances, schools sent pupils home on 20 March with paper-based work-packs or other resources, such as reading books, to 'keep them going' until they established more sustainable arrangements. Some schools spent considerable time during the week before closure preparing and uploading work to online platforms, while staff and pupils received training to use these platforms.

Most primary schools provided regular literacy and numeracy activities along with thematic and 'fun' activities, such as helping around the home, cooking and outdoor experiences. As time passed, some recognised that uploading work every day was inefficient and unmanageable for parents and teachers, so they established a pattern of uploading a range of work once a week or fortnight. Overall, this helped parents and pupils to manage their learning more effectively. Despite modifications like this, many parents found supporting their children to learn at home challenging. According to a **parent poll** carried out by the Sutton Trust (2020b), only about two-fifths of parents felt confident to teach their children or explain work to them at home.

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[1] Distance learning is learning that takes place away from the learner's usual place of study, most often learning at home.

Maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools

The proportion of pupils participating in learning dropped over time and, in nearly all schools, a few learners did not engage with the learning offer at all. Engagement also varied a lot between classes or year groups. In primary schools, older pupils were more likely to take part in learning, while foundation phase pupils, especially nursery, engaged less frequently, reflecting the increased need for adult input and support. There were similar variations in secondary schools, where a few carried out all their work diligently, many engaged sporadically, and some failed to engage at all. Possible reasons for poor pupil engagement or motivation were insufficient IT hardware or inadequate digital skills, repetitive or unchallenging work, and limited feedback from teachers. **The National Survey for Wales: July 2020** (Welsh Government, 2020t) identified a drop in the proportion of parents helping their primary-aged child with mathematics and literacy as the lockdown period progressed. Many headteachers acknowledged that providing meaningful and timely feedback to pupils was challenging. Many simply recorded the tasks pupils completed or noted that pupils had accessed the materials. Only a very few schools evaluated the quality of pupils' responses to tasks systematically.

Initially, some secondary schools tried to follow their normal timetable, but many soon moved away from this approach and set pupils longer, more open-ended tasks. In a minority of schools, subject-specialist teachers used video presentations and voiceovers to introduce lesson content. A few schools provided 'live stream' lessons that enabled teachers to respond to pupils' questions through a 'chat' facility. However, one of the main challenges for schools was managing parents' expectations around 'live learning', even after the Welsh Government issued advice about the advantages and potential pitfalls of such approaches. Pupils' engagement with distance learning varied considerably from around 95% in the best cases, to as low as 20% in some providers with the greatest challenges.

A major concern from many schools, parents, local authorities and regional consortia was the impact of lockdown on the Welsh language skills of pupils from non-Welsh speaking homes who attend Welsh-medium schools. A majority of Welsh-medium schools collaborated well to help overcome these concerns. In the best cases, they shared resources and helped parents to support their children's learning. They used online platforms, often through Hwb, to provide activities for pupils, to promote oracy skills in particular. For example, in one primary school, staff recorded themselves reading Welsh stories and singing nursery rhymes so that pupils would continue to hear spoken Welsh. Schools provided guidance to parents to encourage their children to use Welsh with friends, siblings and other Welsh-speakers. In the best cases, schools provided distance learning activities bilingually to enable parents to help their children carry out tasks. A few Welsh-medium schools experimented with video conferencing to develop and consolidate pupils' speaking and listening skills. For example, they held Welsh language discussion sessions with small groups of pupils, including guessing games or bingo, played through the medium of Welsh. Hwb was also used successfully to share resources such as reading schemes nationally, and between teachers.

Maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools

Schools reopened for pupils to 'check-in, catch up and prepare' on 29 June, with all pupils of statutory school age being offered the opportunity to attend school at least once during July. The number of sessions that schools offered varied across Wales. Some schools offered pupils only one or two sessions over the weeks of opening, often linked to their capacity to accept pupils while maintaining social distancing.   In each of the three weeks of opening, a majority of pupils who schools invited attended for at least one session (Welsh Government, 2020b). Most primary and secondary schools planned to focus these sessions on pupil wellbeing, as they anticipated that pupils would need support to come to terms with their experiences and adjust to different ways of working in school. However, many schools found that pupils' wellbeing was better than expected. Many pupils had benefited from time spent at home with family, although naturally this picture was not as positive in all schools and for all pupils. This meant that many schools were able to introduce learning in other areas sooner than they expected. Many focused on literacy, especially oracy in primary and Welsh-medium schools, numeracy and developing pupils' distance learning skills so that pupils could engage effectively with blended learning[2] if necessary in future.

During face-to-face sessions in the three or four week period before the summer break, many primary schools used creative approaches to motivate pupils. Circle time, outdoor learning, Forest School[3] and creative expression, such as dance and art, helped pupils to get used to learning with fewer pupils and within social distancing guidelines. In general, pupils adapted to the changes well. They often found it easier to concentrate, and many teachers reported a deeper understanding of pupils' individual needs and interests.

Initially, leaders in primary schools had concerns about delivering a socially-distanced foundation phase provision. The solution in a few schools was to continue using foundation phase principles in the context of practical activities, but with pupils completing tasks alone, rather than with their peers. Occasionally, staff were concerned about pupils adjusting to new classroom layouts, but young pupils coped well. Teachers ensured that sitting at individual desks did not become a barrier to interaction and discussion, and pupils concentrated well on their tasks in their extra personal space. It was too early to identify any long-term impact on pupils' ability to collaborate with others, but many leaders plan to monitor pupils' learning carefully over time if social distancing returns for younger pupils in the future.

Most secondary schools also concentrated on ensuring pupil wellbeing in the first week of re-opening. After overcoming initial worries from pupils, arising from the unfamiliar environment, not being with their friendship group, and, for some, poor engagement with distance learning, teachers found that many pupils were eager to learn. Consequently, the focus shifted to teaching more widely across the curriculum. Many schools felt that moving to a more usual curriculum was especially important for Year 10 pupils as many were anxious about the loss of teaching time in the year prior to external examinations.

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[2] Blended learning is a mixture of on-site, face-to-face learning with a teacher and distance learning.
[3] Forest School is child-centred learning that supports play, exploration and supported risk taking in an outdoor, natural environment.

Maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools

'Coronavirus and me', a report by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020, p.20), suggests that over 50% of pupils aged between 12 and 18 years questioned were concerned about falling behind with their work, sad about missing out on important educational experiences, and worried about how the time they were missing in schools would affect their examination results. To try and address pupils' worries on their return to school, teachers used a variety of approaches to rebuild pupils' confidence, such as collaborative art work. Overall, pupils enjoyed re-engaging with learning and opportunities to discuss and express opinions in small groups. This gave confidence to other pupils and their parents and attendance increased in the second week of opening.

Headteachers in Welsh-medium schools reported a variation in the standards of pupils' Welsh language skills when they returned to school. In most cases, pupils had maintained their enthusiasm for the language, so many teachers modified their practice and decided not to correct them if they made mistakes to maintain their confidence. Headteachers often noticed a slight regression in pupils' Welsh language skills, particularly where pupils came from families where they do not speak Welsh at home.

Despite acknowledging the negative impact of school closures, some school leaders identified unexpected benefits. For example, some schools made changes to their models for curriculum delivery, and were keen to build on this in preparation for the Curriculum for Wales. Changes across schools included a greater emphasis on wellbeing, a strengthened sense of community and parental engagement, stronger staff working relationships, and getting to know their pupils better as a result of teaching smaller groups.

During lockdown, schools used a variety of digital platforms, including Hwb, to provide learning activities for pupils, building on the progress they had already made in using online learning tools. However, a few schools were not as prepared and had to adapt quickly in the days before closure. Although the IT skills of teachers overall improved significantly in a short space of time, many headteachers described the adoption of digital communication tools as a 'learning curve' for their staff. Leaders in many schools recognised the need to provide ongoing professional learning for their staff to support the use of blended learning in the future.

Some schools, particularly secondary schools, chose to use online platforms, other than Hwb, with which their staff and pupils were familiar. Where schools sought feedback from pupils and parents about online learning, most amended their provision in response to that feedback. For example, some schools moved away from setting several subject-based tasks each day to providing less frequent, more open-ended activities, such as thematic projects.

Throughout the lockdown period, schools' use of digital learning became more sophisticated over time. School leaders developed a range of strategies to use digital learning to support pupils and parents. For example, one Welsh-medium school asked pupils to record themselves reading in Welsh and in English on a daily basis and post the clips to their online learning account. This approach ensured that reading continued

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to have a high status while the school was closed. One headteacher planned training events for parents where they could log-on to a popular communication app and have tours of the apps and facilities, including important safeguards that their children will be using.

Despite changing their approaches, most schools found it challenging to keep the momentum for distance learning going throughout the period of school closure. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) in its **'Remote Learning: Rapid Evidence Assessment'** (2020a) identified access to technology as key to the success of remote learning, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Furthermore, the report recognised that ensuring that teachers and pupils have the support and guidance to use specific platforms is essential, particularly if new forms of technology are being implemented. In the primary and secondary sectors, rates of pupil engagement with online learning varied considerably. One of the biggest obstacles for pupils was a shortage of suitable ICT equipment, especially where pupils had to share hardware with siblings and parents. It soon became clear that, although pupils could usually access tasks using smartphones, using them to complete work was rarely appropriate. They were particularly unsuitable when pupils were expected to provide written responses of any length or to use specific software.

Schools worked with their local authorities to address shortages by providing equipment and internet access to those families most in need. Despite this, headteachers spoke of a 'digital divide' between those parents who were competent users of technology and could support their children at home, and those who did not have the digital skills necessary to use technology provided and whose children, therefore, did not engage well with learning. To overcome this, one school set up a technical helpdesk at the start of lockdown to help parents with issues. Parents welcomed this support and it enabled many pupils to access online learning instead of having to rely on paper-based packs. A few headteachers also identified pupils who did not have access to more basic resources, such as books and stationery.

Parents' expectations of what schools would provide, and the capacity of parents to be able support their children, varied widely. For example, pupils whose parents were working were sometimes disadvantaged because parents had less time to provide support overall. Some parents placed unreasonably high expectations on their children or school. However, the response of parents at schools that surveyed parents about the quality and quantity of distance learning was mostly positive. A wide difference in parental expectations and perception across the country is highlighted by a **Parentkind survey** (2020b) in July 2020. Just under a half of the parents responding were satisfied with the quantity and variety of work set for their children and a third were content with the teaching that schools provided to support this work.

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During lockdown, live streaming of online learning became a focus of online conversation among parents and teachers. Although schools saw live streaming as potentially beneficial in many ways, they also faced challenges around safeguarding, staff availability and wellbeing, and the need for professional learning for staff. Several secondary schools found audio-described presentations to be a useful way of introducing pupils to new content, while some primary schools pre-recorded storybooks and phonic activities for pupils. A very few schools made live calls, for example to assist individual pupils who had difficulty with work. However, most chose not to follow this route, waiting instead for guidance, although they had to justify their decision to parents who did not always appreciate the challenges that live streaming posed. Nearly 70% of parents who responded to the Parentkind survey (2020b) in July expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of live online lessons provided by schools.

Supporting vulnerable learners

All schools have pupils that are identified as vulnerable for one or more reasons. These pupils received particular attention during lockdown to support their health, safety and wellbeing. Schools, working with external partners, identified other pupils as vulnerable during lockdown if their wellbeing or circumstances changed significantly for the worse.

A very few schools used video meetings to keep in regular touch with their most vulnerable pupils, finding this a more effective way to understand how these pupils were coping than through an exchange of messages. In some areas, schools were reluctant to use this approach, as they were not confident that their local authority supported the idea prior to the Welsh Government (2020r) releasing **national guidance** on live-streaming and video-conferencing.

Most schools were positive about their partnership working with social services during lockdown, and the responsiveness of the support and intervention that these services provided for their pupils and their families.

Schools, working with their local authority, supported pupils eligible for free school meals to continue to receive a free meal. Headteachers found it most efficient when families were able to receive direct payments to purchase their own meals rather than having to collect food or the school having to deliver food. The **Bevan Foundation** (2020, p.1) found that providing cash in lieu of free school meals to be most effective way of assisting families when schools are shut and social distancing measures are in place.

The quality of support provided for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) varied from school to school. Where schools identified that vulnerable pupils were not accessing the work set for them, they often made contact to find out why. Where they could help, they generally supported pupils well. For example, one secondary school identified that a group of vulnerable pupils were not confident in using the laptop computers that the school had provided for them to access distance learning. To help these pupils, they provided them with paper-based work instead.   Primary schools often continued to monitor the progress that pupils with SEN made

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against their targets and in the strongest examples, worked in partnership with parents to review and adapt pupils' individual education plans remotely, setting new targets and providing appropriate learning tasks.

In the best cases, schools continued to offer a range of distance learning at different levels of challenge, taking into account pupils with SEN well. One secondary school recorded learning support assistants reading texts, so that pupils who found accessing them difficult could undertake the work set. However, these practices varied considerably across Wales. A few schools grew increasingly concerned about the gap between pupils with SEN and their peers.

Some schools reported that parents were more willing to accept that their child has learning needs after spending time working with them during lockdown. This resulted in an increase in referrals for assessments and support.

A few schools reported that introverted vulnerable pupils without strong friendships at school became more reclusive during lockdown, making re-integration challenging when schools reopened.

Some vulnerable pupils attended childcare hubs at a school during lockdown. Often they benefited from the small group size in their hub compared with the usual class size at school. These pupils felt more comfortable and confident, but some then struggled to readjust to larger groups when schools re-opened. Occasionally hubs found it difficult to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils, especially when they joined at short notice.

Leadership

In primary and secondary schools, leaders made substantial efforts to consider how to run their schools, care for staff and pupils' wellbeing, and provide pupils with valuable learning opportunities when schools closed in March. As lockdown progressed, leaders dedicated significant time to considering how to run schools safely, such as cleaning requirements, catering, transport, redeployment of staff, timetabling and the physical environment, often working diligently with external partners. The additional challenges presented as a result of the pandemic put considerable pressure on headteachers and senior leaders and unsurprisingly this sometimes impacted negatively on their wellbeing.

For the most part, leaders were able to continue with school business, such as the recruitment of staff, and maintained contact with governors, for instance by holding governing body meetings online. In general, improvement activities were postponed or were evaluated more informally. In many cases, leaders' monitoring focused on quantifying the number of tasks offered to pupils and how many they completed, rather than considering the quality of the teaching and learning. In a few cases, leaders recognised that the work pupils were producing was of a lower quality than they complete in school.

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In the strongest examples, school leaders focused on developing systems and organising training that best supported staff and pupils. For example, they held discussions with staff about effective methodologies for distance learning, and facilitated digital meetings between teachers in their own schools or with other schools to plan activities jointly. They identified and made specific changes to improve provision for pupils learning from home. For example, one school worked with their challenge adviser to provide training for teachers on how to provide effective feedback for pupils through a digital platform. Leaders recognise that a positive outcome of lockdown is increased staff confidence in embracing and adapting to new approaches. A few leaders provided staff with additional professional learning to deal with pupils who may have suffered bereavement, such as agreeing suitable approaches and common terminology, and basic bereavement counselling.

Many leaders balanced work expectations with staff wellbeing by increasing the amount of planning, preparation and assessment time available for teachers. They recognised the added workload faced by teachers in planning for distance learning and subsequently for home learning and face-to-face learning simultaneously during the 'check-in, catch up and prepare' phase.

In a few schools, headteachers recognised the opportunity to link blended learning to developing practice for the new Curriculum for Wales. For example, one primary school had planned to introduce more opportunities for independent learning and decision making into key stage 2 in September 2020. They recognised that, during the lockdown period, an increased emphasis on independent learning was more important than ever. To facilitate this, leaders arranged training for teachers and provided time for joint planning based on the principles of the Curriculum for Wales.

Leaders maintained frequent contact with their local authority and regional consortium to advise and update them of the measures they put in place to support the continuation of learning. Most strengthened their use of technology to communicate with governors and other external stakeholders.

Headteachers found preparing for the 'check-in, catch up, prepare' a difficult time, for example considering the demands of their new school timetable and any simultaneous hub childcare provision. However, by planning the phased return in detail, most were able to ensure that reopening was broadly successful. Most schools described frequent and detailed communication with parents as a key factor in this success, as highlighted by the OECD in their report **'Coronavirus special edition: Back to school'** (2020). This continued through the 'check-in' phase, where leaders valued parental feedback in preparing for September.

Ensuring appropriate staffing levels was a challenge for many leaders, particularly in primary schools. In smaller schools, losing a few staff to shielding or illness affected the practicalities of opening for a particular class of pupils. Most larger primary and secondary schools coped well in this regard.

Maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools

Partnerships and communication

Leaders in primary and secondary schools implemented arrangements for keeping in touch with learners and their families quickly following school closure. This communication strengthened throughout the lockdown period, with schools maintaining regular contact with parents, learners, and staff. In many cases, the enhanced contact with families proved a positive consequence of the lockdown.

Following closure, most leaders ensured that staff made routine engagement contact with pupils, such as by telephone, email or video messaging. For example, one Welsh-medium primary school produced a virtual school assembly every week. This was a way for pupils to access a small part of their normal weekly routine, to see some familiar faces and to hear the Welsh language.

Communication with parents began mainly with the aim of providing information. As lockdown developed, a minority of leaders conducted parental surveys, for example to assess levels of satisfaction with distance learning arrangements and levels of support, and to share different proposals for ways forward. In other cases, when teachers spoke to parents they asked for feedback and information about what could be improved. In the best examples, these processes allowed leaders to address issues, such as by preparing bespoke plans for individual pupils. By May 2020, the **Parentkind survey for Wales** (2020a) identified that over 8 in 10 parents were satisfied or very satisfied with the home learning support from school.

Many leaders made more use of social media and other online services than previously in communicating with parents, rather than depending on letters and notes. As pupils returned for the 'check in' period, a few leaders continued with weekly calls to parents because of the positive impact it has on parents' interaction with the school. For example, one school ensured that staff continued to be available via webcam for an hour each afternoon once schools had reopened. This gave pupils and parents the opportunity to talk to them and allowed staff to answer queries and provide support for home learning.

Secondary schools used emails and telephone calls to support pupils and parents, for example with option choices for pupils in Year 9 and Year 11. Many leaders across schools provided video messages for pupils and parents. Examples of these included a virtual tour of the school site, video or presentation of plans to reopen, videos for Year 6 pupils and headteacher video-blogs. In general, schools have updated their websites to support student and family wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic by signposting a wide range of support from external agencies, such as links to the **Education Endowment Foundation's support resources** (2020b).

Leaders' efforts to reassure parents of the measures they had taken to ensure that the school was a safe place to send their children had positive consequences. Many received positive feedback from parents and as a result saw adherence to rules, such as strict drop-off and collection procedures for when 'check-in' began.

Maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools

Most leaders continued with professional partnerships in order to develop activities to support the transition of pupils from Year 6, often doing so creatively. These activities, including videos and e-books, tended to focus mainly on familiarisation and wellbeing. In the best examples, secondary schools engaged imaginatively with Year 6 pupils, offering experiences such as virtual tours, treasure hunts and webinars that enabled pupils and parents to ask questions of teachers and school leaders. A few invited Year 6 pupils to visit the secondary school at the end of term. However, transition arrangements varied considerably across Wales, and only occasionally included the sort of learning opportunities most pupils would normally experience in the run-up to transferring to secondary education.

All leaders recognised the need for clear communication with staff through either direct contact, email or online meetings. Staff updates and team meetings were generally regular. Where needed, many leaders identified particularly vulnerable staff and adapted how they supported them, for example contacting them more often and referring them to support services when necessary. In addition, many leaders felt it important to maintain informal contact with staff, for example through quiz nights.

Many leaders co-operated closely within and across clusters of schools to share practice and ensure that plans for reopening were as similar as possible. In a few cases, they sent information for parents on 'cluster' headed paper so that different schools spoke with the same voice.

Special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs)

Supporting learner wellbeing

Special schools and PRUs aimed to provide tailored provision to meet pupils' specific needs. This was often through distance and online learning, although nearly all maintained special schools remained open to provide specialist support for a few identified pupils. They prioritised pupils' wellbeing, and learning experiences focused on engaging pupils and having fun through learning. A minority of schools continued to maintain their statutory responsibilities to hold annual reviews of pupils' statements of special educational needs.

Leaders and staff in all maintained special schools set in place suitable arrangements to support the wellbeing of their pupils. These included face-to-face provision within their own settings or remotely, such as regular phone calls. Staff made arrangements to contact each pupil who remained at home on a weekly basis. A few remained in daily contact with those pupils identified as being most at risk.

All special schools maintained close liaison and continued to work with other agencies, including social care and other specialist services. This co-operation was crucial to the continued support of their pupils and families. For example, staff in one special school maintained close liaison with social care, occupational therapy and physiotherapy during this period. The school ensured that all families whose children were accessing these support programmes in school received hard copies of the programmes they followed, and where appropriate the resources to implement them.

Many special schools made changes to their curriculum plans and put greater emphasis on wellbeing. For example, pupils at one school received more outdoor learning experiences while staff at another school focused on the physical, social, and emotional impact of trauma on their pupils to understand their needs and provide support.

In a few special schools, leaders noted that pupils' hygiene practices and their motor skills, such as putting a coat on, had deteriorated substantially during lockdown, and staff had to support pupils with these areas on their return to school.

All pupils in PRUs and education other than at school (EOTAS) provision are regarded as vulnerable. All PRUs maintained regular contact with their pupils during lockdown. In some cases, especially where telephone or online contact had been unsuccessful, PRU staff or youth workers carried out physical visits to pupils, adhering to social distancing rules, to deliver learning packs. Visits were also carried out to provide free school meals or food parcels. Such visits provided a good opportunity for staff to assess the wellbeing of pupils and families, and to offer support or refer to agencies that could support.

Special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs)

Almost all PRUs risk assessed each pupil's level of vulnerability and then decided how best to support them, including who was best placed for making contact with them, according to the pupil's vulnerability and needs. For example, additional staff such as youth services or education welfare staff, as well as PRU staff, were also making welfare calls or visits to ensure that pupils' needs were met.

The take-up of counselling from PRU pupils was lower during lockdown than it had been before lockdown started. This could indicate improved wellbeing as much as it could indicate an issue with counselling services. **At one PRU**, the few pupils in receipt of PRU-based counselling have continued their individual sessions by either email, text or phone. All counsellors completed a module on phone counselling.

Learning

For many special schools and PRUs, their immediate response set a pattern of working, which was to develop and be refined for the rest of the academic year. They tried hard to respond as flexibly as they could to the needs of families by combining online and paper based learning, activities and support. This remained vital throughout lockdown, because it ensured that pupils with and without access to the internet and suitable IT equipment could access learning.

There were some challenges that applied almost exclusively to PRUs and linked provision. Pupils receiving local authority home tuition organised by the PRU, for instance, continued their learning largely as normal, with tuition via audio input using communication apps. Many of these pupils have anxieties or mental health issues, but most engaged well. In a few cases, these pupils were registered solely with their mainstream school. In these cases, leaders arranged for the mainstream school to oversee home tuition. This led leaders to realise the need to prioritise reviews of home tuition to provide a more co-ordinated and effective service in future.

Where older pupils in PRUs were following courses with FE colleges, or other providers, most set work for pupils in as normal a manner as possible, although for a few vocational courses this was not possible. Where pupils normally attend a PRU for the majority of their education, generally the level of engagement in distance learning during lockdown was low. Typically, these pupils engaged well with digital learning packages but less so with web-based services and online delivery by PRU staff. In a very few cases, leaders reported that pupil engagement was much better than expected because of stronger links with pupils and parents. However, all leaders expressed concern about a minority of pupils who remained hard to reach and engage. They were particularly concerned about re-engaging these pupils, trying to close a gap that may have widened further during the crisis, and the long term implications for this group and their future destinations. Several PRUs noted that they would need to act urgently to ensure that learners from Year 9 onwards would not progress to be not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs)

Special schools and PRUs returned to partial opening on 29 June for pupils to 'check-in, catch up and prepare' in small groups. Leaders identified careful preparation, clear procedures and staff involvement in planning as being key to a smooth re-opening. Preparation was particularly important in special schools and PRUs, where teachers' knowledge of pupils' needs and person-centred planning was vital in helping pupils to settle quickly into the routines and structures of the day. Many of these providers placed social stories and videos on their websites and social media accounts for pupils, parents and carers to share. They included tours of the school, games, fun activities and songs to familiarise pupils with the changes and to help pupils become aware of social distancing. This addressed many of the pupils' concerns, such as fear of staff wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) for specific activities. At one special school, for example, they used the slogan "Be smart … Stay apart".

Overall, the engagement of pupils attending PRUs was good during the 'check-in, catch up and prepare' period. Pupils relished the familiarity and established routines that their PRU offered and enjoyed doing 'real work' again.

Many leaders in special schools felt that a digital approach to distance learning worked well. The digital deprivation of many pupils was resolved by most schools by loaning equipment and providing basic training for parents. This enabled nearly all schools to provide a balance of activities for pupils, with a focus on wellbeing, as well as supporting the many parents for whom the delivery of online learning posed significant challenge. Most schools were creative in their use of digital learning. For example, in one special school, staff set weekly physical education tasks for children through video clips. These tasks were particularly popular, with parents often taking part as well. However, for pupils with complex needs, it was not always an effective option for learning. Nonetheless, the experiences of delivering distance, online learning led many schools to plan for its continued use, especially during times when pupils are unable to attend regularly.

Most PRUs reported that their local authority had supported digital learning well, including providing ICT equipment and working to improve internet access for individual pupils. However, PRUs with pupils in key stage 3 and key stage 4 took a cautious approach, as they were not able to rely on digital learning for all pupils, due to concerns for several pupils about staying safe online, particularly about the potential for grooming, or the sale of equipment. In a few cases where PRUs obtained laptops from the local authority, several did not distribute these until staff were assured that pupils could use the devices appropriately. A minority of PRUs had invested heavily in ICT over the 18 months or so before the pandemic, for example by introducing virtual learning platforms classrooms, new hardware and software, and by providing training for staff. In these PRUs, leaders believe that this investment was fundamental to supporting pupils' distance learning during the pandemic.

Special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs)

Supporting vulnerable learners

All leaders in special schools and PRUs identified their most vulnerable learners from the outset of lockdown. They recognised each pupil's level of vulnerability and assigned appropriate support for each pupil. Staff aimed to keep in regular contact with all pupils in special schools and PRUs, and their parents and carers, often more than once a week. In a few cases, staff were in contact with vulnerable learners' parents daily where there was significant concern.

Almost all PRUs gave pupils a named member of staff as their main point of contact during lockdown. Youth workers and education welfare officers supported PRUs in keeping in touch with their pupils, especially with visiting the homes of the most vulnerable pupils and those who did not respond to initial contact. Staff often arranged to meet pupils face-to-face outdoors to ensure that pupils had safe access to trusted adults.

Routine panel meetings for pupils in PRUs and the EOTAS provision continued online during lockdown, including meetings to discuss movement of pupils in or out of services. Staff carried out enhanced risk assessments for pupils whose behaviour presented a heightened risk in light of COVID-19, for example pupils with a history of spitting, biting or self-harm. Of particular concern were pupils who received public protection notices during lockdown, yet were known to be disregarding them.

There were fewer services available to support pupils during lockdown, but support through existing partnerships with statutory services – health, social care, police and youth justice – continued as far as possible within the constraints of lockdown rules.

PRUs submitted fewer child protection referrals during lockdown. PRU leaders were concerned about the experience of those on the child protection register during lockdown and the impact on the PRU when these pupils returned. They kept in close communication with social care services and kept their staff up to date in order that they could be as prepared as possible to support pupils affected.

Very few pupils from PRUs attended a childcare hub at a school. Where they did, PRU staff often joined them.

Many schools surveyed parents to assess the needs of pupils prior to their potential return to school in June, and to inform their planning for the autumn term. A small number of schools did not accept a very few pupils with specific needs back to school in June. This is because health and safety risk assessments highlighted issues that they felt they could not overcome or because of limited school transport, particularly for pupils in special schools.

Special schools
and pupil referral units (PRUs)

Leadership

Leaders in nearly all maintained special schools ensured that the school did not close, in order to provide specialist support for a small number of identified pupils. Most moved swiftly when the government announced school closures to undertake an early identification of pupils' level of vulnerability, and planned how to best support these pupils. They set in place a package of blended learning while prioritising the wellbeing of all pupils.

In maintained special schools, one of leaders' biggest challenges was keeping pupils safe, while maintaining appropriate social distancing. This is because pupils have a wide range of needs and understanding boundaries is a challenge for many. Most leaders developed and implemented clear procedures, involving all staff, as a means to ensuring that they operated as smoothly as possible.

Leaders in special schools implemented a range of strategies and operational plans to help support staff wellbeing during school closures and to manage anxieties about returning. For example, leaders produced a 'protocol handbook', held individual back to work meetings to discuss concerns and organised staff wellbeing surveys to ascertain levels of anxiety. In a very few special schools, staff had access to a school counsellor with whom they could address issues and concerns.

All leaders ensured that rigorous risk assessment processes took place to consider the individual health, learning and behavioural needs of their pupils and staff, and the school buildings and classrooms. They worked carefully with multi-agency staff, such as physiotherapists, nurses and local authority health and safety officers to support this work.

Most leaders organised the school environment into bubbles, such as dedicated learning, play and hygiene spaces, and staggered their day's timings. For example, one special school held three lunch sittings in order to minimise numbers in one place at a time. Leaders considered staffing implications of these changes to ensure sufficient capacity to provide ongoing and appropriate support for all pupils. However, they had to close several specialist teaching facilities, such as hydrotherapy pools and sensory or soft play rooms, which meant that pupils with the most profound needs were not able to receive their usual therapeutic learning experiences.

Where necessary, leaders in special schools worked to address transport concerns, such as a minority of families not having access to their own transport, inconsistent practice within local authorities for taxi arrangements, and school buses not transporting pupils who need rescue medication. In the worst cases, leaders report that only about one-in-five pupils were able to take advantage of the phased return, because of social distancing measures affecting the availability of transport.

In PRUs, leaders continued to set and communicate clear expectations to staff, usually by retaining the regular programme of staff meetings through digital communication platforms. For example, they provided valuable opportunities to discuss plans, pupils' wellbeing and progress and

Special schools
and pupil referral units (PRUs)

continued staff daily check-ins and weekly meetings to help support staff wellbeing. Often, leaders used these meetings to consider and progress improvement priorities in areas such as the Curriculum for Wales and preparation for additional learning needs reforms. Several leaders also used meetings to support professional learning networks, such as teaching assistants discussing how they could apply accredited online modules they had completed on child mental health to support pupils returning to school.

Throughout school closure, leaders were mindful of the health and wellbeing of staff. This was particularly the case for staff who were shielding, and for the PRUs that remained open as a hub or provided specialist support for other hubs.

Together with their staff, most leaders in PRUs successfully managed the re-opening for the 'check-in' period, particularly the operational and practical arrangements, by replicating what worked well as a hub and enhancing this process. They organised rigorous risk assessment processes, for example to manage staffing levels, hygiene and health needs, cleaning and movement around buildings.

Many leaders took an adaptable approach to accommodate requests from parents and carers for their child to attend on particular days and this helped the returning process. Leaders ensured regular and detailed communication with parents to reduce anxieties. As a result, there were generally high levels of engagement from attending pupils, most of whom settled quickly into the routines and structures of the day.

Partnerships and communication

Leaders in special schools and PRUs maintained varied communication channels with pupils and their families. This was key factor in alleviating anxieties about pupils' return and maintaining wellbeing. In addition to welfare calls, a few leaders in special schools arranged doorstep visits to support learners.

Almost all leaders in PRUs and special schools gave useful and informative information for their pupils and parents on distance learning activities and through social media, websites and regular newsletters. Information focused effectively on such aspects as the latest advice from the Welsh Government, updates on using digital devices and the changes they needed to make before pupils returned.

In a few cases, PRUs worked with social services and families to ensure that vulnerable pupils from the PRU accessed hub provision daily, or used 'letters of concern' successfully to maintain contact with hard-to-reach pupils and their families. For example, one PRU wrote 'letters of concern' to families when other attempts to contact them had failed and followed this up with referrals to agencies, such as social services, when needed. This approach was successful in helping to ensure that the PRU remained in contact with all pupils during this period.

Special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs)

Leaders' communication with staff in these settings remained strong throughout lockdown. In many cases, a regular programme of staff meetings continued, with agendas covering important topics, including risk assessments and pupils' learning.

Across Wales, leaders of special schools shared information usefully throughout the period of lockdown. Meetings of special school leaders and multi-agency staff continued digitally and supported schools. For example, one school federation established a multi-agency triage team to support pupils and their families. This was widened to include all schools in the local authority.

In general, leaders in PRUs worked closely with their local authorities and regional consortia. For example, staff worked with the local authority to identify and address the need for resources, such as ICT equipment, and facilitate multi-agency working. In a few cases, there were inconsistent approaches towards practical support, such as transport arrangements.

Several PRUs collaborated with others outside the sector to enhance provision for their pupils. For example, one PRU was a hub for its own pupils and also supported a local special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. A few leaders in PRUs collaborated with their local authority to refine guidance. For example, staff worked with the local authority to produce additional guidance as part of the behaviour policy to promote a consistent approach to COVID-19-related behaviours across the local authority.

Non-maintained nursery settings

Supporting wellbeing, learning and vulnerable learners

A minority of settings remained open when the lockdown period began, where many staff worked continuously to ensure that settings could continue to provide vital childcare for vulnerable children and those of key workers.

Whether open or not, many settings and their umbrella organisations used social media channels well during the closure period to promote children's wellbeing and ideas for physical activity. For example, one setting provided parents with helpful suggestions about yoga sessions for young children.

The closure of many non-maintained settings during lockdown provided a major challenge for local authorities to ensure some form of continuity of learning for the three and four-year-olds who normally receive their early education in non-maintained settings. Few local authorities had established procedures that would allow early years advisory teachers to contact families with children directly. This made it difficult to reach parents to encourage them to engage with learning. However, over time, many local authorities shared information with parents and supported settings that remained open increasingly well. In the best examples, early years teams worked with setting leaders and practitioners to provide learning materials for children at home.

For example, they used the local authority website to provide parents with ideas for a range of useful learning activities for their children, as well as advice on looking after their health and wellbeing. Many settings also shared ideas on their own social media platforms.

Organisations that support settings across Wales provided distance learning resources on their social media platforms. For example, Mudiad Meithrin launched a daily 'Clwb Cylch' to provide Welsh language circle time sessions and encourage parents and children to engage with the Welsh language as much as possible.

Local authorities with well-established processes for working together shared good practice productively from the start. For example, Wrexham early years advisory teachers shared expertise in the use of social media platforms with the Flintshire team, enabling both authorities to provide useful advice and guidance for parents quickly. The Early Years Advisory Teachers' group shared good practice, challenges and concerns, and encouraged a more consistent approach across Wales and began to remove some of the duplication of work that was evident during the early part of the pandemic.

Leadership

Leaders in non-maintained nursery settings faced significant difficulties, and in many cases struggled financially. Unlike the maintained sector, non-maintained settings are nearly all run as private businesses or not-for-profit charitable companies. They are funded by government grants, the Childcare Offer and income from fees. The suspension of the Childcare Offer for Wales, along with the reduction in numbers of children allowed to attend, led to a majority of leaders having to close temporarily from mid-March.

Non-maintained nursery settings

A minority were able to remain open to act as hubs for those children who qualified for the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS). They provided much-needed childcare for their communities. Their emphasis was on safeguarding the health and wellbeing of children, and less on providing education during this time.

Since March, the Welsh Government has published new guidance regularly to support schools, childcare settings and parents. As many settings provide early education entitlement and childcare, leaders had to react to guidelines for schools and settings as well as those for childcare providers. This initially caused uncertainty about which guidance to follow if they provided funded education.

Leaders who suspended their operations in March or April continued to incur expenditure costs, such as rent, mortgages or other loans. For settings that remained open to provide childcare for children of key workers and vulnerable children, the situation also had an impact on their business. While many leaders furloughed a proportion of their staff due to the initial restrictions regarding which children could attend, they still had to employ enough staff to comply with health and safety and social distancing guidelines. As a result, the income generated from operating as a childcare hub did not always cover expenditure, particularly when considering the increased staffing ratios and the added expense of personal protective equipment and cleaning materials.

The impact of COVID-19 on the non-maintained sector has been considerable. The uncertainty around the financial viability of settings, coupled with a possible reduced take up of early education entitlement, could also have a long-term impact on the sector.

Partnerships and communication

Non-maintained settings continued to collaborate with and receive support from five umbrella organisations working within the Cwlwm partnership[4]. For example, members received advice and guidance on financial issues such as implications of furloughing staff under the Coronavirus Retention Scheme, and online training packages. In the best examples, officers from these organisations and from the local authority worked together to ensure a co-ordinated approach to supporting settings. However, in general, there remained inconsistencies in ensuring a joined up approach to providing advice and support to settings in all local authorities.

Many leaders made good use of social media platforms to share ideas for learning activities and wellbeing advice. For example, they used their websites to provide daily ideas for parents on a range of useful learning activities for their children, as well as advice on how to look after their health and wellbeing.

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[4] Cwlwm is the partnership of the five leading childcare organisations in Wales: Early Years Wales, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs, Mudiad Meithrin, National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA Cymru) and PACEY Cymru.

Local government education services, including regional consortia and youth work

Supporting learner wellbeing

Local authorities provided advice and guidance to schools and other education providers on how to promote and support learners' wellbeing. In addition, many local authorities used their own websites and social media channels to promote wellbeing and signpost learners and families to support that was available locally or nationally.

Many local authorities updated their safeguarding guidance to support the safe use of online learning platforms, live online contact with learner and families, and the use of loaned IT equipment. For instance, in Ceredigion local authority, officers supported schools to pilot live teaching online, taking into account potential safeguarding issues, which provided reassurance for other schools that they could use live streaming safely.

A minority of local authorities reported an increase in demand for counselling services during lockdown, whereas many other authorities have seen reduced demand. The reason for this variation is unclear at this stage.

Many youth workers visited hubs, particularly in secondary schools, to provide support for young people. Detached youth workers[5] continued to make contact with young people outside their homes, especially those causing concern to local residents. These youth workers used their skills to build relationships with young people, promote their wellbeing, help them consider how their actions affect other people, and signpost them to support where relevant.

Learning

Throughout the period of school closure, local authorities and consortia aimed to maintain close, supportive relationships with their schools to co-ordinate approaches to distance learning. The challenges of ensuring a consistent and equitable distance learning provision for pupils was difficult, and there was much variation across Wales.

Early on in the pandemic, Swansea local authority became aware that there were inconsistencies in the way schools were delivering online distance learning materials. This prompted discussions with headteachers on how best to provide better continuity and consistency in delivery within and across schools. Officers identified the most effective practice, which they shared with schools across the local authority. They also created a central contact point to allow pupils and parents to contact their school should they need help and guidance with specific tasks or if they needed technical support. Managing parents' expectations about the scope and frequency of distance learning experiences was also a challenge for schools and local authorities.

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[5] Detached youth work operates without the use of a building or activity and takes place where young people "are at" both geographically and developmentally. It delivers informal and social education, and addresses whatever needs are presented to or perceived by the youth worker.

Local government education services, including regional consortia and youth work

Many local authorities conducted surveys with schools to gather and analyse information about how they maintained learning for their pupils, with a specific focus on vulnerable learners. For example, Rhondda Cynon Taf gathered information from schools about the most effective distance learning tools, and how teachers and support staff were supporting pupils' learning from day to day.

Officers in Monmouthshire local authority worked closely with their regional consortium to develop schools' understanding and approach to distance and blended learning. They recognised the long-term advantages of these ways of working and encouraged schools to evaluate and refine their existing practice in light of what they had learned from the challenges of lockdown. At the beginning of lockdown, the authority undertook a survey of schools, which indicated that all were introducing systems to support pupils and their families during home learning, but that there was considerable variation in the approach taken by schools and its effectiveness. The lessons from this period have prompted the authority to reconsider its delivery of post-16 education, with learners potentially accessing a wider range of options as teachers deliver elements of their courses online.

Many local authorities also used parental questionnaires to gather developmental feedback about how parents managed to support their children's learning during the pandemic. A key issue identified by parents was the lack of provision for under-fives in schools when this group did not return to school in June in most local authorities. Maintaining support for other pupils who did not return to school before the summer and provision for vulnerable pupils were other concerns that parents raised.

Local authorities recognised the importance of helping pupils to maintain their engagement with the Welsh language. For example, Carmarthenshire developed useful guidance for parents, which promoted contact with organisations such as 'mentrau iaith', who provided a range of useful resources to support engagement and learning.   The four regional consortia and Welsh Government, working with Estyn and teachers from a number of schools, developed a broad range of Welsh language resources to support learners in Welsh-medium and English-medium schools. They made these resources available on Hwb, along with 50 Welsh language reading books for school age pupils.

Some local authorities gathered information on the impact on learning for pupils in Welsh medium schools who do not speak Welsh at home in response to concerns raised by parents and schools. A minority of authorities were concerned that there may be a drift away from Welsh medium provision by this group of pupils. To counteract the potential impact, some local authorities supported these pupils directly, including Conwy, where the Welsh advisory team maintained contact with pupils transferring into Welsh-medium immersion classes at the beginning of Year 7.

Once the Welsh Government announced the re-opening of schools from June, most local authorities worked closely with regional consortia to help schools develop effective blended learning practices based on Welsh Government guidance (Regional Consortia, Estyn and Welsh Government, 2020b).

Local government education services, including regional consortia and youth work

Supporting vulnerable learners

Local authorities have a lead role in co-ordinating support for vulnerable learners alongside their statutory and non-statutory partners. This included ensuring that the families of vulnerable learners who were entitled to access childcare hubs were aware of the provision and supported to access it if necessary.

Local authority and partnership services adapted their ways of working to ensure as much continuity as possible for vulnerable learners and their families. Many local authorities' education services worked closely with health and children's services to help deliver a coherent and joined-up approach to supporting their school communities during this period. This was particularly the case with the setting up of the hub arrangements prior to the first lockdown period. In many local authorities, the first few weeks saw a poor take-up by vulnerable groups in the childcare hub provision. Working closely with social care staff, all local authorities targeted these learners to support their attendance, which increased over time. However, the overall challenges of engaging a core group of vulnerable learners were considerable.

Local authorities faced significant challenges in ensuring that schools and hubs complied with statutory requirements and provision for pupils with SEN. This included providing support for pupils with complex disabilities and health needs while also abiding by social distancing requirements.

Wherever possible, local authority officers, schools and settings, and multi-agency partners continued the SEN statutory assessment and annual review process remotely during lockdown. This included the work of local authority SEN panels. Educational psychologists and other specialists undertook assessments and consultations online where they were able, although this was not always be possible as some assessments or consultations require face-to-face contact or use of specialist equipment. Local authority specialist officers worked remotely to provide ongoing advice, support and guidance to schools and settings, learners and their parents and carers. For example, mobility officers worked alongside school staff to identify adjustments needed to meet the needs of particular learners.

Many local authorities and parent partnership groups produced bespoke information packs or resources for parents and carers. These focused on a range of issues, including supporting them in developing their child's understanding of the current situation, establishing routines, reducing anxiety and supporting the return to school. Some local authorities made these available directly to parents and carers, for instance by placing them online or via social media.

Education services used online tools and found creative solutions to the problems posed by lockdown rules. Local authorities provided advice and guidance to schools and other providers in relation to their work with vulnerable learners. For example, Caerphilly held online surgeries for school staff on how to support pupils with specific SEN issues.

Local government education services, including regional consortia and youth work

Local authorities often used their staff creatively to provide additional support for schools in working with vulnerable learners and the families. For example, early years advisory teachers, youth workers, education welfare officers, educational psychologists and behaviour support staff provided remote support to learners and families, visited homes, delivered food parcels and household essentials, and supported childcare hubs. These staff often had a focus on engaging vulnerable learners, such as children looked after by the local authority, young carers and homeless young people, to informally assess how they were, provide a safe space to listen to any concerns they had, and ensure that they received the support they needed. Free school meals were often provided to eligible learners as food bags at the start of lockdown that they had to collect from school or, in some cases, had delivered to their home. Over time, more local authorities moved to giving families direct access to the funding for meals through bank transfer or vouchers, which proved to be more efficient. Local authorities worked with partners including voluntary sector organisations to provide additional food parcels to families in greatest need.

Local authorities were particularly concerned about the short-term and long-term impact of lockdown on the most vulnerable learners that have not engaged with their school or other education provider. They were aware that some vulnerable learners lost contact with services during lockdown.

Youth workers across Wales set up virtual groups so that young people could stay connected. These included activity groups for young people with disabilities, young carers and groups for young mums, where they can discuss issues and practise skills such as cookery together online. Vulnerable young people were particularly targeted to participate. In Blaenau Gwent, for example, youth workers set up virtual youth clubs online and found that more young people 'attended' these clubs regularly than would usually attend their clubs at a physical centre. The virtual Welsh medium youth club they set up was particularly successful and the learning from this approach is changing the approach to Welsh medium youth work. Some youth services set up specific groups online for young carers and young people with disabilities. Youth workers sometimes delivered packs to homes so that young people could take part in activities online together, for example the ingredients to cook something or the parts to build a skateboard.

Leadership

Local authority leaders in nearly all areas focused their initial efforts on ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of their residents, staff and others as a priority. Many worked to identify human resource availability and to rebalance this and realign some of their staff to other roles where shortages occurred. As the lockdown progressed, leaders in many authorities continued to work diligently on ensuring the wellbeing of their staff.

Local government education services, including regional consortia and youth work

Senior officers developed clear communication structures, and made difficult decisions under challenging circumstances, often with limited information. Many were successful in implementing remote working for nearly all of their education employees where the role would allow this.

By the end of the academic year, leaders in the majority of local authorities had suspended their democratic scrutiny processes, with a few noting that they had other more informal processes to update and inform elected members. However, the effectiveness of these measures against that of normal scrutiny operations has not been evaluated. A minority of local authorities continued with cabinet meetings, as much as possible, with revised agendas.

Many local authorities shared information with parents and supported non-maintained settings that remained open increasingly well as the lockdown period continued. For example, Wrexham's Funded Early Education Team uploaded practical activities on their Home Learning Page and on their social media platforms, which have around 3,000 followers.

Early on in the COVID-19 period of restrictions, officers in Ceredigion local authority analysed the financial position of their non-maintained nursery provision. They established quickly that it was not financially viable for these settings to remain open and, through their early years' advisory teachers and senior officers, in partnership with Mudiad Meithrin, advised them to close and supported them in placing their staff on furlough under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. This bespoke support enabled the responsible individual for each setting to make an informed decision as to whether to suspend their service temporarily. As a result, nearly all settings that provided early education entitlement to three-year-olds closed their doors soon after the Welsh Government announced the lockdown measures. The local authority then set up two regional hubs for young children of key workers, staffed by volunteers from the settings that had closed.

Partnerships and communication

Leaders in local authorities supported effective communication between their services and school communities, for example through regular emails and useful documentation sent to all headteachers. Many issued regular guidance to leaders along with 'frequently asked questions' whenever there were changes. Leaders in a few authorities developed particular communication structures, for example a steering group of three primary and three secondary headteachers who worked regularly with officers looking at the reopening of schools and issues, such as digitally excluded learners and human resource issues.

In the best cases, senior officers held regular virtual meetings, such as those with all primary and secondary headteachers, and a few with governing body chairpersons, to address concerns, clarify the authority's approach and share next steps. Many local authorities also involved a range of professionals in multi-agency groups in their discussions.

In a very few authorities, initial communication was slow, especially in providing information about hub provision in the early days of lockdown. However, all made useful improvements as time progressed. Most

Local government education services, including regional consortia and youth work

authorities adapted Welsh Government guidance to reflect the particular context and needs of their schools. Where this wasn't the case, school leaders were often finding difficulty in managing and accessing the information they needed quickly and coherently. Local and national youth work providers built on well-established patterns of partnership working to be proactive and agile in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The youth work profession provided timely guidance and advice for working with young people in a digital world. In April 2020, Joint Education and Training Standards (JETS), the organisation which brings together the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies for youth work in the four UK nations and Ireland, issued a briefing paper bringing together the guidelines and competencies for workers and organisations for the delivery of digital youth work, including safeguarding and data protection. Youth workers and youth work trainers have, over the past few years, developed and promoted an understanding of the issues involved in digital youth work, and this helped youth workers to be ahead of the game when delivering services and contact online. At the start of the lockdown, the Welsh Government issued clear guidelines on safeguarding issues for using specific online platforms for youth work with individuals and in groups. The guidance draws on experience from across Wales. For example, Caerphilly youth service developed and shared best practice guidelines for using a popular media sharing app.

The Meic service, funded by the Welsh Government and delivered by Pro-Mo Cymru, was particularly important during the crisis, dealing with a variety of issues including mental health, housing and rights-based issues. Meic is a confidential advocacy and advice helpline for young people up to the age of 25. It is staffed by trained Helpline Adviser Advocates from the youth work, careers, legal, social services and teaching professions. In addition to the funding to continue the service until March 2021, the Welsh Government provided additional funding to ensure that the Meic service was able to support the needs of young people in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Independent schools and specialist colleges

Supporting learner wellbeing

Nearly all mainstream independent schools remained open during lockdown, either physically or in the sense of providing live online learning sessions. As a result, these schools placed a strong emphasis on safe online communication with learners and families, taking care to familiarise staff with expectations and potential issues. For example, one mainstream independent secondary school produced a protocol for video-conferencing lessons, which kept staff and pupils safe when conducting sessions.

Independent special schools and colleges that educate day learners put in place measures to support the wellbeing of learners. They maintained contact with learners, for example through regular phone calls, social media or visits to homes. This enabled leaders to respond to concerns, such as through the provision of counselling or through referral to relevant agencies. For example, one school that provides day and residential placements for pupils with social and emotional behavioural difficulties used its website to provide useful guidance for parents and carers, such as on practical approaches to manage challenging behaviour, to help them support their child's learning and wellbeing at home.

In schools with residential provision, residential learners were kept separate from day learners to reduce the risk of spreading infection. These schools carried out health and safety risk assessments for individual pupils, often involving local authorities, to determine whether they could continue to attend daily.

All specialist providers found it particularly challenging to maintain pupils' usual therapeutic services, and a lot of services involving face-to-face contact stopped due to national guidance for therapists at that time.

Learning

Independent mainstream and special schools and independent specialist colleges all continued to provide learning opportunities for their learners. For those attached to children's homes or residential homes, some face-to-face teaching continued, while other teachers provided work for care-home staff to deliver, supported by live streamed lessons. Providers made adjustments to adhere to new health and safety measures, and teachers reduced off-site activities and often provided more outdoor learning in the school grounds. Schools and colleges that cater for pupils from more than one children's home modified timetables and reviewed staffing arrangements to reduce social contact.

Independent schools and specialist colleges

Independent schools and colleges adopted a variety of approaches to learning depending upon the size and age profile of the school. Many leaders and staff improved their use of ICT and online platforms considerably during lockdown. In some cases, this refreshed their teaching and encouraged them to experiment with new, more practical or pupil-centred approaches. For example, one school distributed devices with preloaded software that allowed pupils to design a garden planter. Staff then made the planters using a 3D printer. Providers also benefited from developing systems to facilitate online meetings between staff and external stakeholders. Several special schools and specialist colleges believe that this helped their pupils to engage more willingly in annual reviews as they felt more comfortable and in control online than in face to face meetings in an enclosed environment.

Independent special schools and colleges that educate day learners faced different challenges in providing meaningful activities for their learners because the nature of their special educational needs meant that it was more challenging for them to engage with distance learning. Many independent special school pupils in particular do not see themselves as successful learners because they have experienced disruption to their education. Generally, these pupils have less access to ICT resources to enable online learning, and often, their family circumstances are not supportive of home learning. Schools reported that the engagement of these pupils in learning was inconsistent with many not engaging with the work set at all.

Supporting vulnerable learners

Schools and colleges that educate day learners had to restrict the number of learners who could be on site at any one time. In most cases, leaders agreed with local authorities which learners would continue to attend based on an assessment of their needs and vulnerabilities. A few of the most vulnerable learners were assessed as too high a risk to attend school, for example due to the likelihood that they had not observed lockdown or practised social distancing.

Most schools with high numbers of vulnerable learners took a careful and thoughtful approach to ensuring that they cared for the health and wellbeing of these pupils and staff. For example, one school for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties where pupils continued to attend throughout the lockdown period ensured that all staff had personal protective equipment and that all staff and pupils attending daily had their temperature taken on arrival.

Many specialist independent schools and colleges ensured that multi-disciplinary teams and therapeutic staff continued to meet online to review and update support plans and strategies for vulnerable learners. They produced additional resources to support learners' wellbeing and learning. Leaders were concerned about the impact of the lack of social contact for some vulnerable learners. They were also concerned about the challenge of re-integrating these learners following lockdown, especially those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Independent schools and specialist colleges

Leadership

In most cases, independent schools and colleges have continued to operate during the period of lockdown, albeit for a reduced number of pupils. This has given leaders insight into what worked well under lockdown restrictions and what they need to refine or adapt to accommodate a full return to school.

Many schools continued to provide professional development for staff during the school closure period, mostly through online training. A few made use of the time to develop and implement training programmes for staff that link to identified improvement priorities, such as the development of the curriculum. For example, one school for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties ensured that teaching staff who were not attending in person were engaged in a programme of planning and training to develop the curriculum according to the principles of the Curriculum for Wales. Teachers were able to plan together, focusing on developing skills for pupils working at pre-progression step 1[6].

Leaders considered carefully what they needed to do to prepare for the return of all learners. They assessed what adaptations they needed to the physical environment and what health and safety measures they required to prevent the spread of infection, particularly where learners had underlying health conditions. In nearly all cases, these considerations had an impact on what could be taught, and how. Most providers reviewed their current curriculum and models of delivery to accommodate enhanced infection control measures.

Leaders in a few small independent schools furloughed all staff, with the result that the responsibility for providing education rested with either the headteacher or the proprietor. In a very few cases, independent schools only furloughed non-teaching staff, such as kitchen staff and learning support staff.

Most independent mainstream schools offered a reduction in fees. This varied between age groups and between schools. A very few mainstream independent schools have closed permanently due to the lack of funds during the COVID-19 crisis.

In nearly all cases, leaders considered the impact of re-arranged systems and teaching practices on staff wellbeing. They provided support for staff in a variety of ways, from access to employee assistance programmes to changing the structure of the school day to reduce the teacher/pupil contact time and to allow staff time for preparation and marking. In addition, leaders worked well with staff to respond to their individual needs and caring responsibilities.

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[6] Progression in the Curriculum for Wales is supported by descriptions of learning that provide guidance on how learners should progress as they journey through the continuum of learning. They are arranged in five progression steps, which provide reference points for the pace of that progression. They correspond broadly to expectations at ages 5, 8, 11, 14 and 16.

Independent schools and specialist colleges

Partnerships and communication

All schools and colleges understood the need for clear communication with pupils, their families and staff. Leaders in nearly all independent schools and colleges put in place useful arrangements for keeping in touch with learners and their families or carers on a regular basis. For example, one all-age boarding school produced an informative weekly newsletter for staff, pupils and parents. This included a broad range of relevant and helpful information and guidance, such as how parents could to assist their children's learning.

Many schools maintained more informal contact with staff, for instance through quiz nights. Several mainstream independent schools identified that coping with the pandemic brought the school community closer together and, in many cases, the enhanced contact with families was a positive, though unintended, consequence of the lockdown.

A few schools that are part of larger organisations or have wider external contacts gained advice from school leaders around the world. These overseas schools who were already addressing issues relating to educating pupils during the pandemic offered helpful advice, for example on how to develop a distance learning curriculum.

Leaders in mainstream and special schools that educate day pupils, or a mix of day and residential pupils, developed information-sharing strategies to meet the different circumstances of these groups of learners. For example, where sharing by online platforms was not practicable, leaders facilitated information sharing and distance learning by delivering hard copies to the family home.

Specialist schools and colleges that educate day learners used a range of approaches to maintaining contact with parents, including regular phone-calls and online meetings. In most cases, these arrangements worked well and were appreciated by parents and carers. For example, one independent special school that provides education for primary-aged pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties made daily phone calls to all families to offer support and check on the wellbeing within the household. A member of staff delivered a weekly food pack and hard copies of school work to each house. The work was marked and returned the following week. This allowed appropriate face-to-face and socially distanced contact and gave parents the opportunity to share their experiences with their child present.

Post-16 education and training

Supporting learner wellbeing

Across the sectors, providers identified the health and wellbeing of learners and staff as a key priority. Staff put in place a wide range of support interventions to learners.

Post-16 providers contacted learners who were not engaging with planned learning activities to check their wellbeing. Usually this was through telephone, text or email. **In one college**, a team of 20 wellbeing officers visited learners' homes to check on their wellbeing, when other forms of contact were not successful or appropriate. They also delivered food parcels and IT equipment to those in most need of additional help. The college also developed an online wellbeing area, including links to activities such as yoga and meditation techniques, to help promote and support learner and staff wellbeing.

A majority of colleges carried out surveys of learners' wellbeing. Through these surveys, many learners reported missing friends, social interaction and face-to-face contact with teaching staff and the wider college community. Most colleges maintained pastoral provision through online tutorials, but these were less well attended than online learning sessions.

Across post-16 providers, learners were often anxious about their final assessments, their transition to university, or securing and retaining employment in an uncertain labour market. Work-based learning providers reported high anxiety for apprentices who were furloughed, who had lost their jobs during lockdown, or who experienced considerable changes to their apprenticeship. A **report by the Sutton Trust** (2020a, pp.1, 3) highlights that 'the … pandemic has caused complex challenges across the apprenticeship landscape' and that 'apprentices, already on low pay, have faced additional financial strains' that 'may also affect their mental health and wellbeing'.

In adult learning in the community partnerships, there was a lack of clear information on how elderly learners were engaging with online learning, and what impact the crisis was having on their health and wellbeing.

Most providers reported an increase in demand for counselling, via telephone or online, often associated with challenges with learners' family circumstances. They also reported an increase in safeguarding referrals, particularly relating to self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Providers worked closely with external agencies to make sure that appropriate support was available for these learners.

Post-16 education and training

Learning

At the start of lockdown, leaders and staff in further education, work-based learning and adult learning in the community sectors moved swiftly to introduce or extend distance learning delivery methods across all learning programmes. They used various online learning platforms and e-portfolio systems, and ran specific online courses in literacy, numeracy, digital skills, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and Welsh. In the justice sector, staff produced resources for learners to continue learning in their cells while face-to-face classes were suspended. Across all sectors, staff developed their digital skills rapidly and providers introduced professional learning on pedagogy specific to distance and blended learning.

In further education colleges and adult learning in the community partnerships, staff rescheduled the timetabling of synchronous[7] delivery sessions to reduce 'screen fatigue' and to provide learners with easy access to classes. Many providers introduced an upper daily limit on the time learners and staff could be scheduled to take part in online activities. Across all post-16 sectors, teaching staff produced useful resources to help learners develop more practical skills. Examples included chef lecturers filming demonstrations of how to prepare meals, and agriculture learners producing videos of themselves shearing sheep.

All providers reported good engagement from most learners. However, there was concern about engagement levels among specific groups of learners, including independent living skills (ILS) level 1 and level 2 learners in colleges, traineeship learners in work-based learning, ESOL learners and those with low levels of literacy, and older and other vulnerable learners in adult learning in the community partnerships. These learners are often the hardest to engage and many have significant barriers to education, training and employment, including difficult home circumstances and deprivation. Many of these learners did not have access to a suitable laptop computer or broadband internet connection and, in a few cases, no suitable area to work at home. Providers lent out equipment or provided other financial support to help provide broadband, mobile data or Wi-Fi dongles to those learners most in need of support.

Across post-16 sectors, there was general agreement that a 'blended learning' approach is likely to be an integral component of learning programmes for the foreseeable future. Colleges anticipated that they would make use of blended learning programmes for at least the early stages of the 2020-2021 delivery year, and planned most learning programmes to incorporate a mix of on-campus delivery, online learning and independent learning tasks. Planning for the flexibility to revert to full remote delivery in the event of further national or local lockdown or restrictions was an important priority across all post-16 sectors.

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[7] Synchronous learning refers to a group of learners working with a practitioner for a set period online.

Post-16 education and training

Across the sectors, staff worked flexibly to provide formative assessment and feedback to learners on the work they completed online. Summative assessment was a particular challenge because of the large volume of learners undertaking externally accredited qualifications and the extensive range of qualifications being delivered. Due to the nature and variety of vocational qualifications, the revised assessment arrangements for these qualifications were more complex to implement than for GCSE and A levels, especially where on-site practical assessments were still required. Although awarding organisations made temporary adjustments to allow providers to adapt or delay assessments for vocational qualifications, a few learners were unable to complete their qualifications within the usual timescales due to ongoing difficulties related to the COVID-19 crisis. Providers continued to prioritise and support these learners to help them achieve their qualifications, wherever possible.

For the few qualifications where 'licence to practice' assessments formed part of learning programmes (such as electrical and gas installation), further education colleges invited a very few learners back into college from mid-June 2020 to undertake specialised assessments. In work-based learning providers, assessors visited a few learners who were able to undertake assessments in the workplace. Providers faced considerable challenges in enabling learners to undertake their assessments while complying with social distancing rules.

Since the start of the pandemic, work-based learning apprentices have been furloughed or made redundant across most learning areas. By the end of August 2020, the number of furloughed learners had reduced considerably from its peak in May 2020. However, nearly 5,000 learners remained furloughed and around 250 learners made redundant or had their apprenticeships terminated due to redundancy (Welsh Government, 2020a). The learners most affected were the young, males, those of white or of mixed race, and those who most self-identify as having a   disability or learning difficulty. Learners who were furloughed or made redundant were often employed in the private sector in companies that employ fewer than 50 staff. The most affected learning areas were hair and beauty, leisure, sport, travel and tourism and hospitality and catering.

Supporting vulnerable learners

In all post-16 sectors, staff prioritised maintaining regular contact with vulnerable learners by telephone, text, social media, video calls and online platforms. Work-based learning providers had mixed success in securing the regular engagement of vulnerable learners during lockdown. In a very few cases, **providers helped deliver food and essential supplies to vulnerable learners** (Estyn, 2020p).

Providers prioritised the return of vulnerable learners during the summer term. At this time, they had concerns about reopening for some vulnerable learners. Transport for learners from home to the provider presented a challenge, especially for those with learning difficulties or disabilities. There was considerable uncertainty about when and how colleges would be able to restart on-site delivery of independent living skills programmes. This reflected concerns about risks involved in providing personal care and difficulties among some learners not being able to understand and follow social distancing requirements.

Post-16 education and training

Nearly all adult learning in the community partnerships lost contact with a few vulnerable learners during lockdown, especially those on entry-level literacy and English as a second or other language courses. In many cases, tutors tried to mitigate this by producing podcasts and online videos.

Leadership

Across the post-16 sectors, leaders responded quickly and positively to most challenges presented by the lockdown. They restructured their provision to allow remote learning and trained staff in online delivery. In prisons, managers took swift action to ensure that prisoners were held safely, including implementing appropriate regime restrictions and by isolating prisoners who were showing symptoms of illness. Colleges and college-led work-based learning consortia identify that positive working relationships with trade unions helped facilitate greater flexibility in working practices.

In the adult learning in the community sector, most chairs of partnerships were members of their local authority and often had multiple job role responsibilities, including emergency roles in activities such as local track and trace activities in response to the pandemic. In many cases, this helped implementation of a joined up approach with other local authority departments, with a clear focus on the most deprived and socially isolated adult learners in the community. However, the need to fulfil multiple roles did place increased pressure on these staff and their capacity to sustain learning provision.

Leaders faced significant challenges across the post-16 sector, including delivering operations across multiple sites and geographical areas. However, they put appropriate social distancing arrangements in place ahead of wider opening of their facilities, for instance workshops, salons and other realistic work environments such as training restaurants.

Leaders in work-based learning providers undertook risk assessments and social distancing assessments of their off-the-job practical areas, and established protocols for how learners would enter and exit buildings. Where employers were re-opening, they considered how they would undertake visits and assessments in the workplace safely while complying with social distancing regulations.

Leaders in adult learning in the community partnerships continued to work on reconfiguration plans for the sector, as requested by the Welsh Government. This was supported through adult learning network meetings.

Partnerships and communication

Leaders in further education colleges maintained external communications mainly through their websites backed up by social media posts. Initially, a few work-based learning providers were slow to place information on their websites. Although this was rectified, the quality and currency of the content remained variable.

Post-16 education and training

Providers across the sectors maintained good internal communication with staff and often made contact on a more regular basis than prior to the lockdown, for example by circulating weekly staff bulletins. Most managers and staff continued to meet on a one-to-one basis through online platforms. Many leaders reviewed their approaches to communication to retain perceived improvements, such as by making greater use of virtual meetings to cut down travelling.

Leaders in adult learning in the community partnerships maintained effective communication between partners and with their counterparts in other partnerships. In work-based learning, the communication between lead contract holders and their partner consortium members or sub-contractors was variable. In the stronger examples, they maintained regular contact to review the ongoing situation and discuss their practices and responses. A few had less contact and partners operated in a less co-ordinated way.

Recruitment of further education learners for 2020-2021 was also moved online following site closures. Colleges participated in national virtual open day events organised with the Welsh Government, schools and local authorities. Colleges also ran their own online virtual open days and many provided online taster sessions. Work-based learning providers continued to sign up new apprentice learners where there was sustained demand. Adult learning in the community partnerships reported that, in addition to learners from within Wales signing up for their new online courses, they also experienced unexpected demand for these from elsewhere in the UK and several other countries worldwide (Estyn, 2020p).

College leaders met regularly, as frequently as two or three times a week throughout the lockdown period, to plan and share responses to COVID-19. They also worked closely with the Welsh Government and other key stakeholders to agree guidelines for revised ways of working as lockdown restrictions were eased. Colleges and work-based learning providers submitted information to the Welsh Government as part of regular surveys of the impact of COVID-19 on the education and training sector.

Leaders in adult learning in the community partnerships continued to attend Adult Learning Network meetings hosted by the Learning and Work Institute. These were held online from March 2020. Meetings were often attended by Welsh Government officials and provided valuable opportunities to discuss key issues and to share information and practice.

The availability of external information and guidance on vocational qualifications was slower and less effective than for academic qualifications. In general, information provision and assessment arrangements were put in place more smoothly for qualifications regulated through Qualifications Wales than for those qualifications delivered across the three home nations. In particular, the furloughing of awarding organisation staff hindered communications and caused frustration when colleges were unable to contact external verifiers and their other usual link officers.

Welsh for Adults

Learning

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic was strong in the Welsh for Adults sector. After a week of lockdown, the National Centre for Learning Welsh, working with the 11 Learn Welsh providers, ensured that most community-based courses could continue during the summer term. Tutors used video platforms and remote conferencing technology creatively to teach their learners. As a result, many learners continued to attend their courses virtually. The sector took advantage of the situation to target new learners. For example, the National Centre streamed beginners' lessons daily on a popular social media site, attracting over 2,000 domestic and international learners, along with live question and answer sessions. In July, they streamed daily Clwb Cwtsh sessions every afternoon for learners who wished to use Welsh with their children. The National Centre brought forward its first national blended learning courses for beginners to May. These courses combined tutor-led distance learning with independent online study. They established 89 of these courses across Wales, attracting over 1,300 learners.

Learn Welsh providers offered a range of intensive distance and online learning courses during the summer instead of the usual face-to-face provision, and tailored provision creatively to adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic. The sector's positive response was in part due to its increasing strategic emphasis on developing digital learning provision. The result of this strategy was that more than a thousand digital learning resources and a range of online taster courses on the sector's national digital learning platform became available to everyone, free of charge. Over 8,000 learners accessed these courses during the lockdown period[8].

The sector was flexible in its approach to using different technologies used by the providers' host institutions. This meant that tutors could use a range of platforms and social media to teach and engage with their learners. Video conferencing enabled learners to practise their language skills in chat rooms, while tutors observed and interacted with them.

The sector used digital media to promote informal learning opportunities so that learners could use Welsh in online clubs, such as reading, gardening and music. The 'Siarad' scheme that pairs learners with fluent speakers provided learners with meaningful opportunities to speak Welsh, while some learners benefited from well-known Welsh speakers visiting virtual classes for question and answer sessions.

The sector enabled learners with additional learning needs to participate in learning, for example by recording an audio version of the entrance level beginners' course and, in the best cases, providing individual tuition to learners with serious sensory impairments. The National Centre and providers consulted with learners throughout this period to consider their opinions when planning future provision.

WJEC provides a suite of qualifications for adults who are learning Welsh, called Defnyddio'r Gymraeg. All Welsh for Adults exams were cancelled this summer because of the public health crisis.

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[8] https://learnwelsh.cymru/news/thousands-more-are-learning/

Welsh for Adults

Leadership

Leaders at the National Centre for Learning Welsh formulated a digital learning plan that led to staff being re-deployed to bring forward the further development of digital provision and resources. A special quality group met weekly, with representation from all of the 11 Learn Welsh providers, to share good practice as well as monitoring learning activities and the technologies used across the country.

Leaders provided useful training opportunities for staff, both nationally and locally, to facilitate these changes. This included the annual national conference that attracted over 200 participants, a good representative sample from the sector, and focused on developing effective online pedagogy.

Leaders in the National Centre for Learning Welsh worked in co-operation with partners, such as the National Museum and National Library of Wales, to continue to provide the 'Ar Lafar' festival for Welsh learners in a virtual format. The sector also worked with the National Eisteddfod to create a virtual Learn Welsh Village as part of the Eisteddfod AmGen. In addition, the Cymraeg Gwaith/Work Welsh scheme, in conjunction with further and higher education sectors, continued through distance learning.

Leaders communicated well with other organisations to develop useful further opportunities for learners. They formed a formal partnership agreement with an independent online provider that strengthens the status of the National Centre as a one-stop-shop for information and resources. As part of this partnership, both bodies have agreed to share resources and to offer financial discounts to each other's learners.

Regular and useful communication between the National Centre and the Learn Welsh providers ensured that the transition away from traditional face-to-face delivery to distance learning was effective and generally successful.

Initial teacher education

Learning

All initial teacher education (ITE) partnerships kept in contact with student teachers. Students received regular, online tutorials organised to support their wellbeing. The use of online tutorials prompted partnerships to evaluate their usual use of face-to-face tutorials, which in most cases they run on a referral or self-referral basis.

Many students were anxious about securing a teaching post for September 2020. Partnerships have supported students by helping them to prepare for online interviews.

In March 2020, many ITE students were undertaking the school experience element of their programme. As soon as the Welsh Government advised ITE providers to withdraw students from school, all providers began to support their students online. The higher education institutions in the partnerships found the transition to working digitally relatively easy because the use of virtual learning environments is well established in ITE. Students were already familiar with working on digital platforms as part of their programmes.

The partnerships adapted their programmes quickly. They gave students time to complete their academic assignments, and placed a greater emphasis on the review of literature, so that students might extend their knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning. The partnerships supported students with the completion of their Professional Learning Passports (PLPs) and engaged students online with tasks that would normally be undertaken in university, such as mock interviews and support for job applications.

On undergraduate programmes, where students would usually be engaging in the taught parts of the programme during the late spring and summer terms, many partnerships discovered new ways to teach students using digital approaches. They explored imaginative ways to present lectures and seminars. They designed webinars, 'live' teaching sessions and interactive packages so that students could continue their learning at home, individually, in groups and with their tutors. Many partnerships carried out research into practice in blended learning in other parts of the world to help them to develop new approaches to pedagogies. For example, one ITE provider developed its programmes with a particular emphasis on digital learning. It gave each student a tablet computer so that they could use a wide range of applications for learning activities, including presentations, digital workbooks, and videos. The long-term aim of the partnership is to employ more blended approaches to teaching and learning in university and in school.

Initial teacher education

In the main, ITE students, particularly those on post-graduate programmes, were unable to complete the school experience component of their course due to the COVID-19 crisis. This meant that they could not fulfil the number of school placement weeks required normally for them to achieve qualified teacher status (QTS). In order for these students to achieve their QTS, the Welsh Government issued **guidance to ITE providers** (Welsh Government, 2020e) that required ITE partnerships to consider students' success in meeting QTS by assessing whether students were 'on a trajectory' to meet the QTS descriptors of the professional standards for teaching and leadership. All partnerships found this process relatively straightforward and were able to award QTS to students where appropriate. This was due to the partnerships having developed stronger processes for tracking students' progress than was previously the case in ITE.

Leadership

From the beginning of the crisis, leaders in higher education institutions providing ITE and their partner schools continued to work together through online leadership and management meetings. The three partnerships providing new programmes in autumn 2020 continued with their planning meetings to ensure that they were prepared for the next academic year. The partnerships were supportive of one another across Wales, through regular remote meetings where they discussed issues, such as common approaches to the challenges they faced.

Leaders in all partnerships identified potential problems for running the programmes in the autumn term 2020. All made contingency arrangements for restricted access to schools and universities, and planned to put learning materials online for students. This meant a focus on academic and theoretical study for students in the first few months of the programmes, which inhibits the intended approach of the new ITE partnerships to blend theory and practice.

Leaders in ITE and the Welsh Government developed a collegiate approach to working in ITE across Wales. This was pivotal in ensuring a consistent approach to various challenges faced during the crisis. For example, they worked with the Education Workforce Council to develop ways that students might collect digital evidence to support their PLP.

The partnerships also worked with regional consortia to develop important collaborative work, for example in developing approaches to teacher enquiry, or through supporting induction processes. Some of this work was instigated in response to the crisis, but has provided a plan for ways in which schools, universities and school improvement services might work together in the future, for example by providing a smooth transition in professional learning for newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

Annex 1
Overview

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

Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- primary schools
- secondary schools
- all-age schools
- special schools
- pupil referral units
- independent schools
- further education
- independent specialist colleges
- adult community learning
- local government education services
- teacher education and training
- Welsh for adults
- work-based learning
- learning in the justice sector

Our inspection work is aimed at raising standards and quality in education and training across Wales.

In a number of sectors, we work with other regulators and inspectorates to inspect provision. We work in partnership with Ofsted to inspect work-based learning provision that operates both in Wales and England. Our inspectors liaise with CIW to inspect residential schools and local authority secure children's homes. We also take part in inspections of youth offending teams (YOTs), led by HMI Probation, and of prisons led by HMI Prisons. On occasions, we join Ofsted to inspect independent specialist colleges in England that have 10 or more Welsh learners. We may also join inspections of prisons in England where there are significant numbers of Welsh prisoners. In addition, we include inspectors from the Wales Audit Office when we inspect local government education services, and work jointly with CIW inspectors in the inspection of non-maintained nursery settings.

We also provide advice on specific matters to the Welsh Government in response to an annual remit from the Cabinet Secretary for Education. Our advice provides evidence of the effect of the Welsh Government's strategies, policies and initiatives on the education and training of learners.

We make public effective practice based on inspection evidence. We have a unique and independent view of standards and quality across all aspects of education and training in Wales, and this contributes to the policies for education and training introduced across Wales.

If you want to find out more about what we do and how we work, please follow this link:

www.estyn.gov.wales

The Common Inspection Framework and judgement descriptors for the cycle of inspection from September 2017

The framework will apply for the inspection of further education institutions from 2018.

This framework covers five inspection areas and 15 reporting requirements.

1 – Standards
1.1 Standards and progress overall
1.2 Standards and progress of specific groups
1.3 Standards and progress in skills

2 – Wellbeing and attitudes to learning
2.1 Wellbeing
2.2 Attitudes to learning

3 – Teaching and learning experiences
3.1 Quality of teaching
3.2 The breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum
3.3 Provision for skills

4 – Care, support and guidance
4.1 Tracking, monitoring and the provision of learning support
4.2 Personal development
4.3 Safeguarding

5 – Leadership and management
5.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers
5.2 Self-evaluation processes and improvement planning
5.3 Professional learning
5.4 Use of resources

The Local Government Education Services Inspection Framework

1 – Outcomes
1.1 Standards and progress overall
1.2 Standards and progress of specific groups
1.3 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

2 – Quality of Education Services
2.1 Support for school improvement
2.2 Support for vulnerable learners
2.3 Other education support services

3 – Leadership and management
3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers
3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning
3.3 Professional learning
3.4 Safeguarding arrangements
3.5 Use of resources

We use the following four-point scale to show our inspection judgements:

Excellent   Very strong, sustained performance and
                            practice

Good   Strong features, although minor aspects
                            may require improvement

**Adequate and needs   Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but
improvement**   important aspects require improvement

**Unsatisfactory and needs Important weaknesses
urgent improvement**   outweigh strengths

The Framework for the inspection of regulated non-school settings eligible for funding for part-time education

1 – Wellbeing
1.1 To what extent do children have a voice?
1.2 To what extent do children feel safe, happy and valued?
1.3 How well do children interact?
1.4 To what extent do children enjoy their play and learning?
1.5 How well do children develop, learn and become independent?

2 – Learning
2.1 How well do children acquire skills and make appropriate progress in their learning?

3 – Care and development
3.1 How well do practitioners safeguard children whilst keeping them and healthy?
3.2 How well do practitioners manage interactions?
3.3 How well do practitioners promote children's development and meet their individual needs?

4 – Teaching and assessment
4.1 How well do practitioners plan learning experiences that meet the needs of children?
4.2 How well do practitioners teach and assess children?

5 – Environment
5.1 How well do leaders ensure the safety of the premises?
5.2 How well do leaders ensure the suitability of the premises?
5.3 How well do leaders ensure the quality of resources and equipment?

6 – Leadership and management
6.1 How effective is leadership?
6.2 How effective is self-evaluation and planning for improvement?
6.3 How effective is the management of staff and resources?
6.4 How effective are partnerships?

For these inspections, we use the following four point scale to show our inspection judgements:

Excellent   Very strong, sustained performance and practice

Good   Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement

Adequate   Strengths outweigh weaknesses but improvements are required

Poor   Important weaknesses outweigh strengths and significant improvements are required

Follow-up

During an inspection, we consider whether the provider needs any follow-up activity.

This can range from identifying excellent practice to recommending special measures. The table below illustrates the different types of follow-up and to which sectors they apply.

	Maintained schools	Pupil referral units (PRUs)	Local authorities	Non-maintained settings	Post-16	Initial teacher training
Excellent practice	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Estyn review	✓	✓			✓	✓
Estyn monitoring				✓		
Focused improvement				✓		
Significant improvement	✓	✓				
Special measures	✓	✓				
Re-inspection					✓	✓
Causing significant concern			✓			
Local authority monitoring				✓		

Category	Explanation
Excellent practice	If a provider gains any excellent judgements, they will be invited to write a case study to share with other providers. The case study may be published on the Estyn website.
Estyn monitoring	Normally, this level of activity will be required when at least one of the overall judgements for a provider is adequate, but it is not causing concern to the extent of requiring significant improvement or special measures. If a monitoring visit is required, a small team of Estyn inspectors will visit the provider to judge progress around a year to 18 months after the publication of the report. From September 2017, this category has only been applied for inspections of non-maintained settings for children under five.
Estyn review	Normally, this level of activity will be required when at least one of the overall judgements for a provider is adequate, but it is not causing concern to the extent of requiring significant improvement or special measures. All schools in this category will receive a team desk-based review. The review will take place in October/November, after provisional KS4 data has been published. As a result of the desk-based review, schools who demonstrate clear evidence of progress will be removed from this category. Schools who have not demonstrated clear evidence of progress will either remain under Estyn Review for a further 12 months or they will receive a monitoring visit at some point during that academic year.
Focused improvement	If a non-maintained setting is identified as requiring focused improvement, Estyn will inform the Welsh Government of its concerns. The setting's management committee / proprietor must send their action plans to Estyn for approval. An Estyn inspector will visit the setting every term for up to three terms following the publication of the inspection report. If the setting does not make enough progress, Estyn will contact the local authority to suggest that funding is withdrawn from the setting as it is failing to provide an acceptable standard education.
In need of significant improvement	Estyn will inform the Welsh Government that the provider has been placed in a statutory category. The provider must send its action plan to Estyn for approval. A small team of Estyn inspectors will usually visit the provider to judge progress around a year to 18 months after the publication of the inspection report. If progress is insufficient, the team will consider whether the provider requires special measures.
Special measures	If a provider is identified as requiring special measures, Estyn will inform the Welsh Government that it has been placed in a statutory category. The provider must send its action plan to Estyn for approval. A small team of Estyn inspectors will usually visit the provider every term following the publication of the inspection report. Inspectors will focus on the progress the provider has made towards addressing the recommendations highlighted in the report. Estyn will continue to carry out monitoring visits until the Chief Inspector decides that the provider has improved enough to remove it from special measures.

Category	Explanation
Estyn review: post-16	If a post-16 or initial teacher training provider is identified as needing Estyn review or monitoring, a small team of Estyn inspectors will visit the provider to judge progress around a year later. If inspectors judge that insufficient progress has been made, this may result in a full re-inspection. Following Estyn monitoring, if inspectors judge that sufficient progress has been made, a letter will be published on the Estyn website.
Re-inspection	If a post-16 or initial teacher training provider is identified as needing a full re-inspection, the inspectorate will write a letter to the provider, copied to DfES, and, in the case of initial teacher training, to the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCW) identifying the areas that require improvement, and will carry out a full re inspection of the provider within a year to 18 months. After the re-inspection, Estyn will publish a full report evaluating the progress made by the provider. If the team judges that insufficient progress has been made at the end of a re-inspection, this will be reported to DfES, and to HEFCW in the case of initial teacher training, as part of their contract management procedures.
Causing significant concern	This level of activity will be required where inspectors judge that local government education services require follow-up activity. Around three months after the inspection, we will chair an improvement conference with senior leaders and other key stakeholders. Around a year after the post-inspection improvement conference, Estyn will facilitate a progress conference. We will consider how likely it is that the authority could be removed from follow-up in a year's time. If we think it is likely that the authority will be able to demonstrate enough progress to be removed from follow-up, then we will plan a monitoring visit. However, if Estyn thinks that the authority will require more time, then we will facilitate a second progress conference in a year's time.

Explanation of words and phrases used to describe our evaluations

The words and phrases used in the left hand column below are those that we use to describe our evaluations. The phrases in the right hand column are the more precise explanations.

nearly all	with very few exceptions
most	90% or more
many	70% or more
a majority	over 60%
half or around a half	close to 50%
a minority	below 40%
few	below 20%
very few	less than 10%

Notes about the data used in this report

The data we show in charts or discuss within the text of this report is mostly from Estyn's database of inspection outcomes. Where appropriate, data from other sources is referenced in the report, and this is mainly derived from data published by the Welsh Government. Figures in all charts are rounded to the nearest whole percentage. Totals may therefore not be equal to 100%.

When analysing inspection outcomes, it is important to note that there can be difficulties in comparing trends in outcomes between years. Each year, we inspect a proportion of providers in each sector.

For this academic year, 2019-2020, we ceased all inspection in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic and therefore inspected a smaller sample of providers than is usually the case.

It is also important to note that considerable care needs to be taken when comparing inspection outcomes, and other data, between and within sectors when the number of providers is small.

Annex 2

Inspection outcomes 2019-2020

Annex 2 – Inspection outcomes 2019-2020

This appendix summarises inspection outcomes for 2019-2020 in each sector. We published our inspection outcomes for 2019-2020 as official statistics. The statistics were pre-announced and published on the Estyn website and prepared according to the principles and protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Our interactive data website provides summaries of our inspection outcomes and questionnaire responses from pupils and parents. Users can apply filters to customise their data views and download the results. The website includes data for inspections carried out between 1 September 2010 and 16 March 2020.

Our statistical release and interactive data can be found here:
https://www.estyn.gov.wales/annual-report-her-majestys-chief-inspector-education-and-training/official-statistics

For more information about the inspection reports for individual providers, please visit: www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection/search

Non-school settings for children under 5

Number of inspections = 52

	Excellent	Good	Adequate and needs improvement	Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement
Wellbeing	15%	81%	4%	
Learning	12%	85%	3%	
Care and development	12%	73%	12%	4%
Teaching and assessment	10%	85%	6%	
Environment	4%	85%	10%	2%
Leadership and management	8%	73%	13%	6%

Follow-up

Not in follow-up	Progress review	Focused improvement
81%	13%	6%

Primary

Number of inspections = 108

	0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Standards	10% — 69% — 19% — 2%
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	21% — 72% — 6%
Teaching and learning experiences	10% — 65% — 24% — 1%
Care, support and guidance	20% — 72% — 6% — 2%
Leadership and management	17% — 56% — 22% — 5%

● Excellent ● Good ● Adequate and needs improvement ● Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Follow-up

73% 22% 2% 3%

● Not in follow-up ● Estyn review ● Significant improvement ● Special measures

Secondary

Number of inspections = 25

	0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Standards	52% — 36% — 12%
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	28% — 44% — 24% — 4%
Teaching and learning experiences	52% — 40% — 8%
Care, support and guidance	28% — 48% — 24%
Leadership and management	4% — 52% — 32% — 12%

● Excellent ● Good ● Adequate and needs improvement ● Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Follow-up

56% 28% 8% 8%

● Not in follow-up ● Estyn review ● Significant improvement ● Special measures

Maintained all-age schools

Number of inspections = 2

Standards	1 (yellow) / 1 (red)
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	1 (blue) / 1 (yellow)
Teaching and learning experiences	1 (yellow) / 1 (red)
Care, support and guidance	2 (yellow)
Leadership and management	2 (yellow)

- Excellent
- Good
- Adequate and needs improvement
- Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Follow-up

Estyn review	1
Significant improvement	1

- Estyn review
- Significant improvement

Maintained special schools

Number of inspections = 6

	Excellent	Good	Adequate and needs improvement
Standards	33%	17%	50%
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	33%	50%	17%
Teaching and learning experiences		50%	50%
Care, support and guidance	33%	17%	50%
Leadership and management	17%	33%	50%

- Excellent
- Good
- Adequate and needs improvement
- Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Follow-up

Not in follow-up	Estyn review
50%	50%

- Not in follow-up
- Estyn review

Independent special schools

Number of inspections = 5

Standards	Good: 3	Adequate and needs improvement: 1
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Excellent: 1, Good: 3	
Teaching and learning experiences	Excellent: 1, Good: 3	Adequate and needs improvement: 1
Care, support and guidance	Excellent: 3, Good: 1	Adequate and needs improvement: 1
Leadership and management	Excellent: 2, Good: 2	Adequate and needs improvement: 1

● Excellent ● Good ● Adequate and needs improvement ● Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Independent mainstream schools

Number of inspections = 3

Standards	Good: 3	
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good: 3	
Teaching and learning experiences	Good: 2	Adequate and needs improvement: 1
Care, support and guidance	Good: 3	
Leadership and management	Good: 2	Adequate and needs improvement: 1

● Excellent ● Good ● Adequate and needs improvement ● Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Pupil referral units

Number of inspections = 2

Standards	Good: 1	Unsatisfactory: 1
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good: 1	Unsatisfactory: 1
Teaching and learning experiences	Good: 1	Unsatisfactory: 1
Care, support and guidance	Good: 1	Unsatisfactory: 1
Leadership and management	Good: 1	Unsatisfactory: 1

● Excellent ● Good ● Adequate and needs improvement ● Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Follow-up

Not in follow-up: 1	Special measures: 1

● Not in follow-up ● Special measures

Work-based learning

Number of inspections = 2

	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Standards				1				1			
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning					2						
Teaching and learning experiences				1				1			
Care, support and guidance				1				1			
Leadership and management				1				1			

● Excellent ● Good ● Adequate and needs improvement ● Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Follow-up

1	1	

● Not in follow-up ● Estyn review

Adult learning in the community

Number of inspections = 2

	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Standards					2						
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning					2						
Teaching and learning experiences					2						
Care, support and guidance					2						
Leadership and management				1				1			

● Excellent ● Good ● Adequate and needs improvement ● Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Follow-up

1	1	

● Not in follow-up ● Estyn review

Welsh for Adults

Number of inspections = 2

	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Standards						2 (Good)					
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning						2 (Excellent)					
Teaching and learning experiences						2 (Good)					
Care, support and guidance						2 (Excellent)					
Leadership and management			1 (Excellent)			1 (Good)					

● Excellent ● Good ● Adequate and needs improvement ● Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Follow-up

2

● Not in follow-up

Other sectors

We also carried out three inspections of local government education services, one inspection of a further education college and one inspection of an independent specialist college. The individual inspection reports on our website provide details of our findings from these inspections.

Annex 3   References

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