Pecyn Dogfen Gyhoeddus

Gareth Owens LL.B Barrister/Bargyfreithiwr
Chief Officer (Governance)
Prif Swyddog (Llywodraethu)

Swyddog Cyswllt:
Janet Kelly 01352 702301
janet.kelly@flintshire.gov.uk

At: Cyng David Healey (Cadeirydd)

Y Cynghorwyr: Janet Axworthy, Sian Braun, Bob Connah, Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Joe Johnson, Tudor Jones, Dave Mackie, Ian Smith, Martin White a David Williams

Aelodau Cyfetholedig:
Lynn Bartlett a Wendy White

Dydd Gwener, 25 Mehefin 2021

Annwyl Gynghorydd

HYSBYSIAD O GYFARFOD ANGHYSBELL
PWYLLGOR TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU ADDYSG, IEUENCTID A DIWYLLIANT
DYDD IAU, 1AF GORFFENNAF, 2021 AM 2.00 PM

Yn gywir

Robert Robins
Rheolwr Gwasanaethau Democrataidd

Sylwch: Bydd hwn yn gyfarfod dros y we a bydd 'presenoldeb' wedi'i gyfyngu i Aelodau'r Pwyllgor a'r Aelodau hynny o'r Cyngor sydd wedi gofyn i Bennaeth y Gwasanaethau Democrataidd am wahoddiad. Y Cadeirydd fydd yn penderfynu a yw'r rhain yn cael siarad ai peidio.

Bydd y cyfarfod yn cael ei ffrydio'n fyw ar wefan y Cyngor. Bydd recordiad o'r cyfarfod ar gael yn fuan ar ôl y cyfarfod ar https://flintshire.publici.tv/core/portal/home

Os oes gennych unrhyw ymholiadau, cysylltwch ag aelod o'r Tîm Gwasanaethau Democrataidd ar 01352 702345.

R H A G L E N

1 **YMDDIHEURIADAU**

Pwrpas: I dderbyn unrhyw ymddiheuriadau.

2 **DATGAN CYSYLLTIAD (GAN GYNNWYS DATGANIADAU CHWIPIO)**

Pwrpas: I dderbyn unrhyw ddatganiad o gysylltiad a chynghori'r Aelodau yn unol a hynny.

3 **COFNODION**

Pwrpas: I gadarnhau, fel cofnod cywir gofnodion y cyfarfodydd ar 18 Mawrth a 14 Mehefin 2021.

4 **RHAGLEN GWAITH I'R DYFODOL A OLRHAIN GWEITHRED** (Tudalennau 5 - 14)

Adroddiad hwylusydd Addysg a Throsolwg a Chraffu Ieuenctid

Pwrpas: I Ystyried y flaenraglen waith Pwyllgor Trosolwg a Chraffu Addysg, Ieuenctid a Diwylliant a rhoi gwybodaeth i'r Pwyllgor o'r cynnydd yn erbyn camau gweithredu o'r cyfarfod blaenorol.

5 **ADRODDIAD BLYNYDDOL GAN Y GWASANAETH GWELLA YSGOLION RHANBARTHOL, GWE** (Tudalennau 15 - 154)

Pwrpas: Derbyn diweddariad ar y gefnogaeth gan y gwasanaeth gwella effeithlonrwydd ysgolion rhanbarthol, GwE a'i effaith i'r ysgolion.

6 **Y CYFRYNGAU CYMDEITHASOL A DIOGELWCH AR Y RHYNGRWYD** (Tudalennau 155 - 164)

Adroddiad Prif Swyddog (Addysg ac Ieuenctid) - Arweinydd y Cyngor ac Aelod Cabinet Addysg

Pwrpas: Rhoi diweddariad i Aelodau ar bolisi a darpariaeth y Portffolio ar y Cyfryngau Cymdeithasol a Diogelwch ar y Rhyngrwyd.

7 **CYCHWYN Y DDYLETSWYDD ECONOMAIDD-GYMDEITHASOL** (Tudalennau 165 - 170)

Adroddiad Prif Swyddog (Addysg ac Ieuenctid) - Dirprwy Arweinydd y Cyngor (Llywodraethu) ac Aelod Cabinet dros Reolaeth Gorfforaethol ac Asedau

Pwrpas: Diweddaru Trosolwg a Craffu ar ein parodrwydd ar gyfer cychwyn y ddyletswydd economaidd-gymdeithasol.

8 **ADRODDIAD MONITRO PERFFORMIAD DIWEDD BLWYDDYN**
(Tudalennau 171 - 184)

Adroddiad hwylusydd Addysg a Throsolwg a Chraffu Ieuenctid - Arweinydd y Cyngor ac Aelod Cabinet Addysg

Pwrpas: Adolygu'r cynnydd wrth gyflawni gweithgareddau, lefelau perfformiad a lefelau risg presennol fel y nodwyd yng Nghynllun y Cyngor.

Sylwch, efallai y bydd egwyl o 10 munud os yw'r cyfarfod yn para'n hirach na dwy awr.

Nodyn Gweithdrefnol ar redeg cyfarfodydd

Bydd y Cadeirydd yn agor y cyfarfodydd ac yn cyflwyno eu hunain.

Bydd nifer o Gynghorwyr yn mynychu cyfarfodydd. Bydd swyddogion hefyd yn mynychu cyfarfodydd i gyflwyno adroddiadau, gyda swyddogion Gwasanaethau Democrataidd yn trefnu a chynnal y cyfarfodydd.

Gofynnir i bawb sy'n mynychu i sicrhau bod eu ffonau symudol wedi diffodd a bod unrhyw sain gefndirol yn cael ei gadw mor dawel â phosib.

Dylai'r holl feicroffonau gael eu rhoi "ar miwt" yn ystod y cyfarfod a dim ond pan fyddwch yn cael eich gwahodd i siarad gan y Cadeirydd y dylid eu rhoi ymlaen. Pan fydd gwahoddedigion wedi gorffen siarad dylen nhw roi eu hunain yn ôl "ar miwt".

Er mwyn mynegi eu bod nhw eisiau siarad bydd Cynghorwyr yn defnyddio'r cyfleuster 'chat' neu yn defnyddio'r swyddogaeth 'raise hand' sy'n dangos eicon codi llaw electronig. Mae'r swyddogaeth 'chat' hefyd yn gallu cael ei ddefnyddio i ofyn cwestiynau, i wneud sylwadau perthnasol ac yn gyfle i'r swyddog gynghori neu ddiweddaru'r cynghorwyr.

Bydd y Cadeirydd yn galw ar y siaradwyr, gan gyfeirio at aelod etholedig fel 'Cynghorydd' a swyddogion yn ôl eu teitl swydd h.y. Prif Weithredwr neu enw. O bryd i'w gilydd mae'r swyddog sy'n cynghori'r Cadeirydd yn egluro pwyntiau gweithdrefnol neu'n awgrymu geiriad arall ar gyfer cynigion er mwyn cynorthwyo'r Pwyllgor.

Os, a phan y cynhelir pleidlais, mi fydd y Cadeirydd yn egluro mai dim ond y rheiny sy'n gwrthwynebu'r cynnig/cynigion, neu sy'n dymuno ymatal a fydd angen mynegi hynny drwy ddefnyddio'r swyddogaeth 'chat'. Bydd y swyddog sy'n cynghori'r Cadeirydd yn mynegi os bydd y cynigion yn cael eu derbyn.

Os oes angen pleidlais fwy ffurfiol, bydd hynny yn ôl galwad enwau – lle gofynnir i bob Cynghorydd yn ei dro (yn nhrefn yr wyddor) sut mae ef / hi yn dymuno pleidleisio.

Yng nghyfarfodydd Pwyllgorau Cynllunio a Chyngor Sir mae amseroedd siaradwyr yn gyfyngedig. Bydd cloch yn cael ei chanu i roi gwybod i'r siaradwyr bod ganddyn nhw funud ar ôl.

Bydd y cyfarfod yn cael ei ffrydio'n fyw ar wefan y Cyngor. Bydd recordiad o'r cyfarfod ar gael yn fuan ar ôl y cyfarfod ar https://flintshire.publici.tv/core/portal/home

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 MARCH 2021

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Thursday 18th March 2021.

PRESENT: Mr David Hytch (Vice Chair in the Chair)
Councillors: Janet Axworthy, Sian Braun, Bob Connah, Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Joe Johnson, Tudor Jones, Dave Mackie, Ian Smith, Martin White and David Williams

CO-OPTED MEMBERS:
Mrs Lynn Bartlett, Mrs Rebecca Stark and Ms Wendy White

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillor Sean Bibby (for Councillor David Healey)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Patrick Heesom and Philippa Earlam (representative of the Standards Committee, attended as observers

CONTRIBUTORS:
Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education; Chief Executive; Chief Officer (Education & Youth),
Primary Learning Advisor; Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) and Strategic Finance Manager - Commercial and Housing (for agenda item 5) and John Grant, Senior Simon Budgen from Hawarden High School and Jim Connelly from Flint High School will be in attendance as observers for Agenda item 6.
Learning Advisor – Engagement (for agenda item 9)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, Democratic Services Officer and Democratic Services Support Officer

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillors Bob Connah and Tudor Jones declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5 – Community Asset Transfer Update. The Facilitator explained that Councillor Jones had received confirmation from the Monitoring Officer that the interest was personal and that he should not participate when voting for the recommendation relating to Holywell Leisure Centre within the report.

Councillors Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Dave Mackie, Tudor Jones and Mr. David Hytch and Mrs. Rebecca Stark declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 – Update on Council Funding for Schools, as School Governors.

Councillor Gladys Healey declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7 – Self-Evaluation Report on Education Services, as a School Governor at Castell Alun High School.

40. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2021 were received.

The minutes were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Tudor Jones and Martin Wright.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

41. SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND EXCLUSIONS

The Senior Learning Advisor (Engagement) introduced an overview of school attendance and exclusions for the year 2019/20, which had been impacted by the pandemic, as outlined within the report. He provided information on the trends for attendance, persistent absence and permanent and fixed term exclusions which had been highlighted by Estyn.

Councillor Dave Mackie commented on the table showing fixed term exclusions and asked what processes were in place to understand the causes of the increase in these figures and what steps were being taken to address them. In response, the Senior Learning Advisor provided information on the work carried out by the team, which was more proactive, working with children, families, head teachers and communities to better understand issues at an earlier stage.

The recommendations as outlined within the report were moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Cunningham and Dave Mackie.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the attendance data for Flintshire schools and the actions undertaken by officers to support engagement and safeguarding during the period of lockdown be noted; and

(b) That the Committee recognise that the data provided had been impacted by COVID-19 lockdown and school closure.

42. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING

The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator presented the report confirming the next meeting of the Committee was the joint meeting with the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee scheduled for the 17th June. The next ordinary meeting of the Committee was scheduled to be held on the 1st July where the Annual Report from GwE, Social Media and internet Safety would be presented. All actions arising from previous meetings had been completed.

The Facilitator also reminded Members of the Out of County briefing sessions which had been arranged for all Members and co-opted Members for 22nd March.

The recommendations in the report were moved and seconded by Councillor Paul Cunningham and Mrs Lynne Bartlett.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the Forward Work Programme be noted;
(b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises; and
(c) That the progress made in completing the outstanding actions be noted.

43. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER UPDATE

The report was presented by the Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) and Strategic Finance Manager (Commercial and Housing) and provided an overview of the progress of the two largest Community Asset Transfers and how the pandemic had impacted them. Cambria Aquatics had transferred in 2016 with Holywell Leisure Centre commencing trading in 2017 and the Chief Officer provided detailed information on the benefits to the council, the substantial financial impact because of the pandemic together with precautionary steps taken to enable re-opening safely. He also provided information on the grant support schemes and furlough opportunities. He paid tribute to the management of these organisations which had very strong community support and felt confident that these would move forward beyond the pandemic.

Councillor Mackie commented on the unprecedented difficulties faced by the two organisations and suggested that the Committee write to them to praise the work of the managers and volunteers for the way in which they had dealt with them. The Facilitator agreed to send a letter on behalf of the Committee to both organisations.

The recommendations outlined within the report were taken separately. The first and second recommendations were moved and seconded by Councillor Martin White and Mrs. Rebecca Stark. The third recommendation was moved by Councillors Janet Axworthy and Gladys Healey. Councillor Tudor Jones did not take part in the vote on the third recommendation.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the progress of the Community Asset Transfers be noted;
(b) That the Committee supported the continued grant support for Cambrian Aquatics into 2021/22; and
(c) That the Committee support the continued grant support for Holywell Leisure Centre into 2021/22.

44. SELF-EVALUATION REPORT OF EDUCATION SERVICES

The Chief Officer (Education & Youth) presented the self-evaluation report and explained that, due to the pandemic, the information had not been structured in the usual way against the Estyn Framework for the inspection of Local Government

Education Services which had been temporarily suspended together with the key data collections from Welsh Government (WG). She referred to previous reports to meetings attended by GwE and Estyn colleagues with the Thematic Review of the Regional Services presented at the last meeting and attached to the report was the letter sent to Flintshire County Council from Estyn which summarised the positive assessment of the work undertaken in schools during this period. She also provided information on the next steps and priorities within the Council Plan.

The Chair said that the format of the report was very useful in providing information on all service areas. He invited questions on each of the service areas, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report.

Inclusion and Progression Service

The Chair referred to page 54 the last paragraph and asked as this was now an online offer with no theoretical limit why the training was not available to everyone. In response the Chief Officer confirmed she would refer this to the Senior Manager (Inclusion and Progression) to provide a response.

Mrs Stark asked if provision had been considered for young person counselling and psychology services moving forward and were schools aware of pupils who may already require that support. In response the Chief Officer confirmed that this had been identified by the Children's Commissioner and that previously WG had provided additional funding for counselling services to support ALN services and that this would be a priority moving forward for them. There was a strong holistic recovery programme working with Health and CAMMS colleagues and Children's Services to enable a wraparound model to support these children and young people. She added that additional funding had been provided last year to support young people's emotional health and well-being.

Early Entitlement Service

The Chair asked for an explanation on what was covered by the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme. In response, the Chief Officer explained that during the pandemic WG had suspended the childcare offer and created the Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme and that similar to schools who operated during the pandemic providing childcare for critical workers, WG provided funding for this service to provide the same support for critical workers. This was managed by the Childcare team within Social Services.

Mrs Stark asked if WG had anticipated the impact of the gap in education for young learners in their early years' education and would this be taken into account when measuring their performance. In response, the Chief Officer confirmed that this was being discussed and referred to the Foundation Phase Curriculum for 3 – 7 year olds which firstly looked at the child and their personal and social development and then provided support across different areas of learning. She confirmed the early years was front and centre of the National Recovery Programme and that she was involved in discussions to shape that work moving forward.

The Leader confirmed that, as the WLGA Education Spokesperson, he was pressing the needs of the Foundation Phase as this age group were least able to

access any form of online blended learning. He had been pleased to see WG decide that the Foundation Phase should be the first to return to school and that the missed opportunities felt by those children was a priority for WG who had provided significant resources into the programme Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards which would enable all young children and people to receive that assistance when they returned to school.

Councillor Paul Cunningham commented that the speech and language aspect to this was important to these young children to be able to express themselves. The Chief Officer said that not all children would be in deficit when it came to speech and language and that many children would have been supported by their parents during this time and benefited from that time as a family bubble. The Leader added that parents and carers were owed a debt of gratitude for their support with their children's education during this time and he looked forward to all children returning to school after Easter.

Integrated Youth Provision Service

The Chair referred to page 71 of the report and the reference to the Dedicated Youth Worker working a day a week at 5 Secondary Schools and asked was this the limit of the demand or did resources prevent the other schools being involved. In response, the Chief Officer confirmed it was a resource issue and that progress was being made working towards having a Youth Worker in every school but that this was reliant on the realignment and efficiencies of resources within the service.

Youth Justice Service and Flintshire Sorted

The Chair asked if amendments to the Exclusion Policy and Substance Misuse Policy had been made and if the issue up for review was the first offence of being caught with drugs resulting in permanent exclusion. In response, the Chief Officer explained the reasons for exclusion had been looked at with substance misuse and violent behaviour a part of that. The policy had to be re-visited regularly to enable schools to be robust in how they managed these offences and that sometimes these young people were victims in situations beyond their control and that the Youth Justice Service needed a more prominent role in schools.

Ms Wendy White asked if the zero tolerance regarding drug related offences in schools had also considered joint enterprise with people who were using or selling drugs. The Chief Officer agreed to speak to Mrs White outside of the meeting to discuss this suggestion further.

School Planning & Provision Service

The Chair referred to the PRU and asked if there were plans to use or dispose of the redundant assets there. In response, the Chief Officer confirmed these would be surplus from the portfolio and would then revert to the capital assets team.

The Chair commented that this was a substantial report and that the clear format was worth considering for future reports.

The recommendation outlined within the report were moved and seconded by Councillors Tudor Jones and Dave Mackie.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the report be noted; and
(b) That the positive thematic report undertaken by Estyn on the work of education services in Flintshire to support children and young people during the pandemic be noted.

45. UPDATE ON COUNCIL FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS

The Chief Executive introduced a report to outline to the Committee the proposal for distributing the additional £1m allocated to secondary schools in the 2021/22 budget. Because of the timing and purpose of the funding, the Council will allocate the funding in 2021/22 as a supplementary allocation.

The Estyn inspection of the Local Authority in 2019 raised concerns about the long term nature of deficit budgets in certain secondary schools, and as part of their inspection report, a key recommendation was that the Authority took steps to address the deficits. The additional funding in the budget was primarily to provide additional resource to those schools in financial difficulty.

The Chief Executive explained that there had been no funding solution available to deal with the deficits, but by working hard to set the 2021/22 budget, together with investigating the opportunities within the Welsh Government (WG) WG settlement to realign additional funding to Schools, a solution had been reached to provide additional funding to secondary schools. Explaining the way in which the funding had been allocated, he commented on the concerns which had been received by some Headteachers and School Governors. He advised that it was acknowledged by the Authority that in recent years secondary schools in general had experienced pressure on budget, and therefore, a proportion of the funding would go to those schools which had not met the principles, as set out in the report.

The Leader of the Council spoke in support of the comments made by the Chief Executive and advised that the proposed additional funding had been fully supported by the County Council. He commented on the challenging position schools had faced due to austerity but said that young people across Flintshire had the right to access a broad and balanced curriculum.

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) added that young people in schools across Flintshire should not suffer because of a variety of very complex factors which had led to the deficits being accrued. She provided a detailed explanation of the allocation principles, as outlined within the report, which had included deprivation factors. Additional funding was also being provided to school from WG which would continue for the next financial year. Whilst this was welcomed, she commented on the importance of the Council maximising its Council budget to assist in addressing school deficits.

The Chair invited Mr. Jim Connelly, Head of Flint High School, who was in attendance, to comment on the proposal.

Mr Jim Connelly thanked the Chair for the opportunity to attend the meeting and address the Committee. He welcomed the comments made by the Chief Executive, Leader and Chief Officer, which he said had provided some rationale behind the proposal and said that had the Secondary Heads Federation received this information beforehand it would had alleviated some of the concerns. He asked that the consultation process be improved in the future and commented on the difficult decisions which had been made by all schools across Flintshire, due to austerity and a reduction in school budgets. He said that he fully understood that the Council had tried to provide schools across Flintshire with as much funding as possible but was concerned that providing additional funding to address the deficits could set a dangerous precedent for schools in the future in managing those deficits.

Councillor Dave Mackie commented on how the additional funding to address secondary school deficits had been calculated and said that there was concern around how this funding would continue in the future. He stated that if the funding continued, two of the schools would clear their deficits relatively quickly but the other schools would continue to need additional funding for a number of years. He explained that this was an assumption, as this had not been addressed within the report. He added that all schools across Flintshire should be recognised for working hard to address their deficits and remain within their allocated budgets and recognised that Flintshire continued to be an underfunded Council. He supported consistent allocation of funding and suggested that this be considered as part of the school funding formula. He also felt that the views of Secondary Headteachers should be considered when reviewing secondary school funding in the future.

The Chair commented that the proposal would be discussed at the forthcoming School Budget Forum meeting. He welcomed the Chief Executive's clarification around equity and that the objective was to address the deficit with notional amounts afforded to schools. He added that all schools were under significant pressure and that it was gratifying that the Council was able to provide additional funding to address the deficit. He referred to the underfunding of Councils and the comments made by the Chief Executive that there should be a minimum allocations which enabled Councils to provide their services and also a top up allocation to meet the needs of deprivation etc. and if that were the case it should be that a bare minimum was allocated to each school and top up thereafter.

The Leader said that from an equity point of view he did not believe that the size and viability of a school should matter when it came to the educational offer that was provided to children across Flintshire. He advised that school deficits had been subject to a great deal of scrutiny and referred to the work undertaken by himself and Chief Officers, together with the finance team to consider all options to resolve this. He reiterated his previous comments and said that Members had been right to take the decision at County Council to ensure every child received access to the same basic curriculum offer.

The Chief Executive, in response to the comments made by Mr. Connolly, said that he did not want a situation where schools were being pitched against each other.

He appreciated all of the work undertaken by Headteachers and staff to balance budgets and to try and reduce their deficits. In response to the comments made by Councillor Mackie, he explained that if the additional funding had been spread across all Schools there would be no impact on the reduction of School deficits. On increasing the spend per pupils, he added that it was not possible to confirm what WG settlements would be in the future, but that the Council would continue to make the case that better funding was required to meet the challenge of addressing School deficits.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his comments and said that he greatly appreciated the additional funding for schools which would be highly beneficial. He said that whilst he believed every effort had been made by the Council over a number of years to maintain school budgets, the education budget had been cut by 2% back in 1997 and that this funding had never been returned.

The Chief Officer responded to comments around consultation, and said that during a meeting with the Head Teachers Secondary Heads Federation, it was acknowledged that communication around the proposal to provide additional funding could have been better, but commented on the positive and transparent relationship with Head Teachers and colleagues. She reported on the robust process for supporting schools that were in a deficit position and that the Council had further strengthened the licensed deficit protocol in the light of the Estyn recommendations. She said there were a significant number of factors over a long period of time which had resulted in those deficit positions and that Headteachers had worked really hard to try and manage those.

In response to comments around challenge and scrutiny, the Chief Officer said that she welcomed the challenge from the Committee.

Councillor Tudor Jones sought clarification that the additional funding was not going directly to Schools, but was being used to reduce the deficits that sit with the Council. He suggested changing the wording in recommendation (a) to “That the Committee support the principles as the basis for allocating the £1m additional funding to reduce deficits of secondary schools in 2021/22, as set out within the report. The Chief Executive thanked Councillor Jones for the helpful clarification. He sought a steer from the Committee in terms of future steps year on year in the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which was currently being reviewed, in order to make a case for similar investments year on year, providing the settlement from WG allowed this to occur.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance and answering the questions from the Committee. He suggested that the Committee write to Mrs. Lucy Morris who had recently retired from the Council, to thank her for the support she had provided to schools during financial challenging times, and also the support she had provided to the Committee. This suggestion was supported by the Committee.

Following discussion, the recommendations outlined within the report, together with the suggested amendment to recommendation 1, as suggested by Councillor Tudor Jones and with the following additional recommendation, were moved and seconded by Councillors Tudor Jones and Gladys Healey:-

- That the Committee support the Council's intent to raise the amount of funding to support schools year on year, in line with the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

RESOLVED:

(a) That the Committee support the principles as the basis for allocating the £1m additional funding to reduce deficits of secondary schools in 2021/22, on the basis as set out within the report;
(b) That the allocations, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report, be noted; and
(c) That the Committee support the Council's intent to raise the amount of funding to support schools year on year, in line with the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

46. HWB DIGITAL PROGRAMME

The Primary Learning Advisor introduced a report which provided details of the implementation of the national HWB programme in Flintshire schools and the work undertaken to increase the ratios of devices to pupils.

During the pandemic there had been constant communication with schools and a gap analysis of devices was carried out. This provided information on how many devices were already in schools which had been very encouraging but there were more required to meet the formula agreed with the schools. The Primary Learning Advisor confirmed there was a need for 6,000 more devices following the last delivery into schools in January and February and confirmed there was also an order of Chrome Books which was due in May from WG which would meet some of the needs in the gap analysis.

There had been very positive feedback from schools regarding blended learning with detailed analysis shown in section 1.04 of the report. The Primary Learning Advisor confirmed MiFi devices were procured as part of the HWB and these had gone to families who did not have enough Wi-Fi connection. She referred to the Neumark Foundation who had supported all of the North Wales Authorities procuring a further 110 devices and about 80 or 90 devices had been deployed directly to schools where they were needed. A sustainable model would be put in through the School funding formula to ensure all schools had the same equipment as schools would now be required to maintain the same level of devices and hopefully all learners would have more devices to do their homework.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to the financial impact on schools on their commitment to keep the devices up to date and fund repairs etc. which could be an expensive cost in the future. He understood this was being considered as an allocation on funding within the school budget formula and asked if schools were aware of the cost implications. In response, the Primary Learning Advisor advised that additional funding was to be provided to Schools as digital devices would now be a key part of pupil's education and digital equipment was the new resource that schools needed to budget for. This would be discussed further at the forthcoming School Budget Forum meeting.

Councillor Smith as for clarification on the PSBA Network. In response, the Chief Officer commented that this was the internet network which was routed through the council's network to schools to ensure the firewalls were maintained together with internet speeds. The Primary Learning Advisor added that this was monitored by the Council's IT department and that during lockdown most schools had had sufficient capacity. The Chief Officer confirmed that if there were issues with the bandwidth used by schools to deliver lessons then schools were able to escalate this with the IT Department.

The Senior Manager (School Improvement) confirmed the term PSBA was the Public Sector Broadband Aggregation across lots of public sector networks all the way through Wales where usage could be monitored. Education delivery had changed over the last few months with more online virtual lessons to children in school and out of school. Capacity changes and usage data provided by WG enabled schools to forward plan to ensure there was enough capacity during peaks of use. Schools and school governors would be involved in the strategic plans for their school to future proof costs for maintenance and replacement of devices and she commented how much the pupils had improved their digital capabilities and embraced the digital world.

The Chair commented on the remarkable achievements and paid tribute to the Council and Corporate IT team for the support provided to Schools. He said that he was reassured that bandwidth was being monitored, especially for those areas with low internet speed.

Mrs Rebecca Stark asked what access was given to pupils to search the internet. Was it only education sites that could be accessed through their devices or could they access social media sites etc. In response, the Primary Learning Advisor confirmed that HWB was the platform for digital learning with learners and teachers given HWB emails. She added that as part of their work pupils would be able to use safe internet search tools to search for things online with the google platforms hosted by HWB. The Chief Officer added that pupils could access anything on the internet but using the HWB and the council's firewall ensured they were protected and that the MiFi devices required a parent to sign a safeguarding statement ensuring that young person used that device appropriately.

The recommendations, as outlined within the report were moved and seconded by Councillors Paul Cunningham and Ian Smith.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the implementation of the National HWB programme in Flintshire schools and the work undertaken to increase the ratios of devices to pupils be noted; and

(b) That the Committee was assured that Flintshire learners had not been digitally disadvantaged during the lockdown period by the effective actions of schools and the Council's Education and IT Services.

47. RECOVERY STRATEGY UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) introduced a report to provide an oversight on the recovery planning for the Committee's respective portfolio. She referred to the portfolio risk register and risk mitigation actions which were appended to the report and reported on the most significant risk; secondary school funding, which had been discussed earlier in the meeting.

The Chair applauded the support of the HR team to schools asked that the Committee's thanks be passed to the team.

The recommendation, outlined within the report, was moved and seconded by Mrs Rebecca Stark and Councillor Dave Mackie.

RESOLVED:

That the updated Risk Register and Risk Mitigation Actions, as outlined within the report, be noted.

48. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was one members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 4.45 pm)

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Chairman

Mae'r dudalen hon yn wag yn bwrpasol

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 JUNE 2021

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held on Monday 14 June 2021.

PRESENT: Councillor David Healey (Chair)
Councillors: Sian Braun, Bob Connah, Paul Cunningham, Gladys Healey, Tudor Jones, Dave Mackie, Ian Smith and Martin White

CO-OPTED MEMBER: Mr David Hytch

APOLOGIES: Councillor Joe Johnson**.** Rebecca Stark, Lynn Bartlett and Wendy White. Chief Officer (Education & Youth)

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Patrick Heesom (for Councillor David Williams)

CONTRIBUTORS:
Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education

IN ATTENDANCE:
Head of Democratic Services and Democratic Services Officer

01. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Head of Democratic Services reported that at the Annual Meeting, the Council had determined that the Labour Group would chair this Committee. The Committee was advised that Councillor David Healey was the Chair of the Committee for the municipal year.

RESOLVED:
That the appointment of Councillor David Healey as Chair of the Committee be noted.

Councillor Healey chaired the meeting from this point forward.

02. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Gladys Healey nominated Councillor Tudor Jones as Vice-Chair of the Committee and this was seconded by Councillor Paul Cunningham. There were no further nominations. On being put to the vote, this was carried.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Tudor Jones be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

03. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

There were no declarations of interest.

04. RECOGNITION OF DAVID HYTCH AND REBECCA STARK

The Chair advised that the terms of office for David Hytch and Rebecca Stark, who were Co-opted members of the Committee, would end in June 2021. He paid tribute to David and Rebecca in recognition of their longstanding service and robust contribution to the work of the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee. He also expressed thanks to David for his effective support as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Councillor Paul Cunningham spoke in praise of the commitment and work undertaken by David and Rebecca and said their contribution would be greatly missed.

Councillor Ian Roberts also expressed his thanks to David and Rebecca for their longstanding service as co-opted Members of the Committee and for their contribution to Education Services and Welsh language provision in Flintshire.

Councillors David Mackie and Tudor Jones commented on the professional skills and personal qualities of both David and Rebecca which would be missed. Members stated that David and Rebecca had been a great asset to the Committee and their input and perspective had been invaluable.

Mr Hytch thanked Members for their kind acknowledgments and said he had had been pleased to be part of a constructive process to achieve the best outcomes in education for children and young people in Flintshire. He paid tribute to Councillor Ian Roberts, Leader of the Council, and the Chief Officer (Education & Youth) for the progress achieved in Welsh medium education and wished Members success in the work and challenges to be addressed by the Committee in the future.

In her absence the Head of Democratic Services read out a letter from Rebecca Stark which was addressed to Members of the Committee. Rebecca said it had been a privilege in her role as a co-opted Member to represent parents on the Committee and thanked Members, officers, and David Hytch for their hard work and support.

The Head of Democratic Services explained that each of the retiring co-optees would be sent a pair of Flintshire County Council glasses in a presentation box, as gesture of thanks from the committee.

05. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 10.22 am)

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Chairman

EDUCATION YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday, 1st July 2021
Report Subject	Forward Work Programme and Action Tracking
Report Author	Education Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview & Scrutiny presents a unique opportunity for Members to determine the Forward Work programme of the Committee of which they are Members. By reviewing and prioritising the Forward Work Programme Members are able to ensure it is Member-led and includes the right issues. A copy of the Forward Work Programme is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration which has been updated following the last meeting.

The Committee is asked to consider, and amend where necessary, the Forward Work Programme for the Education Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The report also shows actions arising from previous meetings of the Education Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the progress made in completing them. Any outstanding actions will be continued to be reported to the Committee as shown in Appendix 2.

RECOMMENDATION	
1	That the Committee considers the draft Forward Work Programme and approve/amend as necessary.
2	That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.
3	That the Committee notes the progress made in completing the outstanding actions.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND ACTION TRACKING
1.01	Items feed into a Committee's Forward Work Programme from a number of sources. Members can suggest topics for review by Overview & Scrutiny Committees, members of the public can suggest topics, items can be referred by the Cabinet for consultation purposes, or by County Council or Chief Officers. Other possible items are identified from the Cabinet Work Programme and the Improvement Plan.
1.02	In identifying topics for future consideration, it is useful for a 'test of significance' to be applied. This can be achieved by asking a range of questions as follows: 1. Will the review contribute to the Council's priorities and/or objectives? 2. Is it an area of major change or risk? 3. Are there issues of concern in performance? 4. Is there new Government guidance of legislation? 5. Is it prompted by the work carried out by Regulators/Internal Audit? 6. Is the issue of Public or Member concern?
1.03	In previous meetings, requests for information, reports or actions have been made. These have been summarised as action points. Following a meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee in July 2018, it was recognised that there was a need to formalise such reporting back to Overview & Scrutiny Committees, as 'Matters Arising' was not an item which can feature on an agenda.
1.04	It was suggested that the 'Action tracking' approach be trialled for the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Following a successful trial, it was agreed to extend the approach to all Overview & Scrutiny Committees.
1.05	The Action Tracking details including an update on progress is attached at Appendix 2.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None as a result of this report.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	In some cases, action owners have been contacted to provide an update on their actions.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	None as a result of this report.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Draft Forward Work Programme Appendix 2 – Action Tracking for the Education Youth & Culture OSC.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Minutes of previous meetings of the Committee as identified in Appendix 2. **Contact Officer:** Ceri Shotton Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator **Telephone:** 01352 702305 **E-mail:** ceri.shotton@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	**Improvement Plan:** the document which sets out the annual priorities of the Council. It is a requirement of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to set Improvement Objectives and publish an Improvement Plan.

Mae'r dudalen hon yn wag yn bwrpasol

CURRENT FWP

Date of meeting	Subject	Purpose of Report	Scrutiny Focus	Responsible / Contact Officer	Submission Deadline
Thursday 16th September, 2021 **2.00pm**	**School Reserve Balances Year Ending 31st March 2021** **Archive Service**	To provide the Committee with details of the closing balances held by Flintshire schools at the end of the financial year. To provide an update to the Committee on the Archive Service.	Assurance Monitoring Information Sharing	Chief Officer (Education & Youth) Chief Officer (Education & Youth)	
Thursday 21st October, 2021 **2.00pm**	**Emotional Health and Well-being**	To provide a report on the regional approach to the delivery of the new national framework.	Consultation	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)	
Thursday 2nd December, 2021 **2.00pm**	**Mid-Year Council Plan Monitoring Report 2020/21**	To review the levels of progress in the achievement of activities, performance levels and current risk levels as identified in the Council Plan.	Assurance Monitoring	Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator	
Thursday 3rd February, 2022 **2.00pm**	**School Modernisation Update**	To provide Members with an update on the School Modernisation Programme	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)	

Thursday 24th March, 2022 **2.00pm**	**Self Evaluation of Education Services 2021**	To update Members on overall service performance	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)	
	Community Asset Transfer Update	To provide an annual update on the Business Plan for Holywell Leisure Centre and Cambrian Aquatics	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Housing & Assets)	
	School Attendance and Exclusion	To provide the Committee with an update on learner attendance and exclusions for Flintshire Schools	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)	
Thursday 16th June, 2022 **2.00pm**					
Thursday 30th June, 2022 **Joint meeting with Social & Health Care OSC** **2.00pm**					
Thursday 14th July, 2022 **2.00pm**	**Annual Report from Regional School Improvement Service, GwE**	To receive an update on the support provided by the regional school effectiveness and improvement service,	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth) and Managing Director of GwE	

	Social Media and Internet Safety	GWE and its impact on schools To provide Members with an update on the Portfolio's Social Media and Internet Safety policy and provision	Assurance Monitoring	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)	

INFORMATION REPORTS TO BE CIRCULATED TO THE COMMITTEE

Item	Purpose of information report	Month
Health & Safety in Schools	Information report on accidents during the academic year and the actions taken to support schools in achieving healthy and safe environment	December

REGULAR ITEMS

Month	Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
	School Modernisation	To update Members on the progress made with School Modernisation	Senior Manager School Planning & Provision
February	**Self-evaluation on education services**	To update Members on overall service performance	Interim Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
April	**Learner Outcomes – include attendance and exclusions in annual leaner outcomes report**	To provide Members with a summary of learner outcomes across primary and secondary school	Interim Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
June	**Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE)**	To receive an update on progress with the development of the regional school effectiveness and improvement service, to include a presentation from the Chief Officer of GwE.	Interim Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
December	**School Balances**	To provide the Committee with details of the closing balances held by Flintshire schools at the end of the financial year	Finance Manager
Annually	**Learning from the School Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG)**	To receive the annual report on progress and learning from the SPMG	Senior Manager – School Improvement;
Annually	**Social Media & Internet Safety**	To receive an annual report assurance/monitoring	Healthy Schools Practictioner
	Class Size Grant	To receive a regular update on how the Class Sizes Grant from Welsh Government was being used and how this aligned to the School Modernisation Programme	Senior Manager School Planning & Provision

ACTION TRACKING FOR THE EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting Date	Agenda item	Action Required	Action Officer(s)	Action taken	Timescale
18.03.2021	5. Community Asset Transfer Update	That the Chairman writes to Cambrian Aquatics and Holywell Leisure Centre colleagues on behalf of the Committee to thank them for their work and dedication throughout the emergency situation.	Cllr David Healey / Ceri Shotton	Letter sent to both Cambrian Aquatics and Holywell Leisure Centre.	Completed
18.03.2021	6. Update on Welsh Government Funding for Schools	That the Chairman writes to Lucy Morris, Strategic Finance Manager - Schools Accounting and Finance, who had recently retired, to thank her for her work and support over a number of years.	Cllr David Healey / Ceri Shotton	Letter of thanks sent to Lucy Morris on 19.05.2021	Completed
18.03.2021	7. Self-Evaluation of Education Services	David Hytch asked how the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) training was being offered and delivered. Claire Homard agreed to provide the Committee with further information on the training following the meeting.	Jeanette Rock	Information e-mailed to all Committee Members on 25.03.2021	Completed

Mae'r dudalen hon yn wag yn bwrpasol

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 1st July 2021
Report Subject	Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service (GwE)
Cabinet Member	Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education and Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The GwE Annual Report provides a detailed overview for members of the work of the Regional School Improvement Service across the North Wales region.

This year's GwE Annual Report for 2020-2021 outlines how GwE have repurposed several times during the COVID pandemic to provide effective services and support for all their school communities and how it has responded to Estyn recommendations provided to local authorities and regional consortium in their thematic report. It also describes how schools have been supported to implement the reform journey and prepare for the new curriculum, and identifies strategic and regional priorities for 2021-22.

The main areas for development, identified from the self-evaluation processes undertaken within GwE, are priorities in the Business Plan for 2020-2021. The regional priorities and areas for improvement are based firmly on the findings of GwE's internal self-evaluation processes, external reviews on their current practice and direction of travel, and through consultation with headteachers and the Local Authorities. The Business Plan also addresses Welsh Government and the Local Authorities strategic priorities that fall within the remit of the work of GwE.

RECOMMENDATIONS	
1	The Education, Youth and Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to accept the Annual Report from GwE and note the positive impact of the regional service in supporting Flintshire schools during the

	pandemic and in their ongoing preparations for the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	**EXPLAINING THE GwE ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2020-2021**
1.01	The GwE annual report provides an overview of the following areas: 1. Background and context 2. GwE work programme 3. Main impact of GwE work during Covid-19 Pandemic 4. Estyn Thematic Review: Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19 5. GwE response to Estyn recommendations from thematic report 6. Support during the pandemic that has provided growth points in preparation for the new curriculum 7. Business matters 8. Business plan priorities for 2021-2022
1.02	GwE's strategic priorities for improvement in 2021-2022 are: 1. **Curriculum and Assessment** - supporting a national curriculum with equity and excellence at its core that sets high standards for learners 2. **Developing a high quality education profession** - improving the teaching and learning in our schools 3. **Leadership** - supporting inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards and includes future leadership and professional networks 4. **Strong and inclusive schools** – committed to excellence, equity and wellbeing 5. **Supporting a self-improving system** – supporting a system where the education profession have the skills, capacity and agency to continually learn and improve their practice 6. **Business** – ensure that GwE has strong governance and effective business operational support that provides value for money.

2.00	**RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**
2.01	There are no financial implications arising from this report. GwE will operate within the current financial resources.

3.00	**IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT**
3.01	Risks related to schools are managed through the appropriate risk management processes both within GwE and within the Local Authority.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	Regular discussions are held with GwE Management Board which comprises of the Senior Management Team of GwE and the six Chief Education Officers of the North Wales authorities.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	**Appendix 1 to this Scrutiny report** GwE Annual Report 2020-2021 Flintshire **GwE Appendices to their report** **Appendix 1** Estyn report: 'Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19' **Appendix 2** Estyn letter: 'GwE's work to support schools and PRUs: March-August 2020 / From September 2020' **Appendix 3** '*Journey to 2022*' which was published in October 2020 and co-created by Estyn, the 4 regions and Welsh Government **Appendix 4** Curriculum for Wales Professional Learning Timeline **Appendix 5** The Reform Journey – Think Pieces

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	**Cwricwlwm i Gymru** https://hwb.gov.wales/cwricwlwm-i-gymru/ **Curriculum for Wales** https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	**Contact Officer:** Arwyn Thomas, GwE Managing Director **Telephone:** 01492 806115 **E-mail:** ArwynThomas@gwegogledd.cymru **Contact Officer:** Vicky Barlow, Senior Manager for School Improvement **Telephone:** 01352 704019

	E-mail: vicky.barlow@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**
8.01	GwE – Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service for North Wales OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development PDG – Pupil Development Grant SIA – Supporting Improvement Advisers

GwE ANNUAL REPORT

2020 – 2021

CONTENT

1. **Background and context**
2. **GwE work programme**
3. **Main impact of GwE work during Covid-19 Pandemic**
4. **Estyn Thematic Review: Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19**
5. **GwE response to Estyn recommendations from thematic report**
6. **Support during the pandemic that has provided growth points in preparation for the new curriculum**
7. **Business matters**
8. **Business plan priorities for 2021-2022**

Supporting Documents:

- **Appendix 1: Estyn report: 'Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19'**
- **Appendix 2: Estyn letter: 'GwE's work to support schools and PRUs: March-August 2020 / From September 2020'**
- **Appendix 3: 'J*ourney to 2022*' which was published in October 2020 and co-created by Estyn, the 4 regions and Welsh Government**
- **Appendix 4: Curriculum for Wales Professional Learning Timeline**
- **Appendix 5: The Reform Journey – Think Pieces**

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The response to COVID-19 has dramatically changed our lives. In this challenging context, the education system and schooling has been significantly disrupted. On 23rd March 2020, schools were re-purposed to support children of key workers and some vulnerable learners whilst also supporting all learners to stay safe and keep learning at home.

On June 3rd 2020, the Welsh Government (WG) announced that there would be a phased opening of schools from 29th June, 2020 to give all pupils the opportunity to "check in, catch up and prepare." Welsh Government published their Learning Guidance [https://gov.wales/keep-education-safe-guidance-learning-over-summer-term] to provide advice on learning and teaching taking place in schools and settings for the remainder of the summer term and to support practitioners as they prepare for the autumn term.

On July 9th, 2020 the Education Minister confirmed that all pupils would return to school in September, and that schools were required to return to full capacity by September 14th. Welsh Government published further learning guidance [https://gov.wales/guidance-learning-schools-and-settings-autumn-term-covid-19] for the autumn term that gave schools and supporting partners a common set of priorities for learning, regardless of the level of operations in response to COVID-19.

During the Autumn Term, the level of disruption to schools varied considerably across the region, with some schools regularly having whole year cohorts self-isolating at home for an extended period, to others that were able to open to all pupils throughout the term.

On January 4th 2021, schools remained closed to all children except those of key workers and some vulnerable learners following the introduction of a second lockdown period, with schools providing remote learning for most of the spring term.

In the week commencing 22nd February 2021, under 7s in the foundation phase started back at schools, with other primary school children and older secondary students (Years 11 and 13) returning back on 15th March 2021. From 12th April 2021 primary, special and secondary schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) returned to provide onsite provision for all learners.

This year's GwE Annual Report outlines how GwE have repurposed several times during the COVID pandemic to provide effective services and support for all their school communities and how it has responded to Estyn recommendations provided to local authorities and regional consortium in their thematic report. It also describes how schools are been supported to implement the reform journey and prepare for the new curriculum, and identifies strategic and regional priorities for 2021-22.

2. GWE WORK PROGRAMME AND SUPPORT TO SCHOOL DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC
(Presented to Flintshire Education, Youth and Culture Scrutiny on 17/12/20 and 28/01/21))

Staff in the Local Authorities and GwE have adapted their work over the last year in order to continue to provide effective services and support for all their school communities during the COVID pandemic. During this very difficult period, GwE have kept true to their vision and values as an organisation that is continually learning. The OECD's transversal themes of Trust, Thinking together, Time and Technology have remained at the heart of the work with schools and partners.

The service in its entirety has re focused several times during this period to meet the needs of the range of stakeholders. The ability to be flexible and agile and to work effectively together in different teams, often cross sector, has had significant impact on organisational behaviour and external perception. At the heart of the refocusing has been the need to ensure that the well-being of school leaders, their staff and learners is paramount to the decision-making and ensuring that the right level of support, operational or professional, can be directed accurately by the service. Regular contact with school leaders has been well received and has contributed to Head teachers feeling that they could turn to a professional colleague to share challenging issues and to find solutions to address day-to-day issues. These included operational discussions on opening school safely as well as professional discussions regarding remote and blended learning.

Weekly staff meetings have contributed to a consistency of approach in ensuring common messages to school teachers and leaders. There has been a strong emphasis on modelling appropriate and supportive behaviour throughout the period. This has included very regular contact with headteachers to ensure that they get the appropriate support to operate effectively and also as a sounding board to support their own well-being. Further support for senior leaders well-being has been provided through a series of workshops and webinars which will support their resilience during this difficult period. GwE staff also conducted face to face pastoral visits on behalf of the Local Authorities during the autumn term and also when schools reopened in spring 2021 after the second lockdown period.

GwE sees itself as a partnership organisation, especially with the Local Authorities and even more so during the pandemic and in moving forward. GwE have worked effectively with Welsh Government on policy and continuity of learning. It has also worked consistently with the other regions and with Estyn in preparing guidance and resources for distance and blended learning and to provide advice on formative and continuous assessment. It has also strengthened the working relationship between those parties with positive professional exchanges, ensuring that the stakeholders are getting quality advice and resources.

One of the main strengths of work across North Wales has been the consistent messaging from the six local authorities through their political education portfolio holders and directors working with GwE to have one common message for the schools in North Wales. This consistency of messaging has been not only welcomed by schools but also by teacher unions and non-teaching unions who welcomed the clarity of messaging and support for their staff. One such example is the operational group of local authority and regional staff working on and developing risk assessments policy, advice and guidelines, and creating a regional dashboard which is a strong foundation for all schools to be able to reopen with risks being identified and locally managed and supported.

The six local authorities and GwE have taken a collegiate and collective regional approach to supporting schools throughout the COVID pandemic. This was clearly demonstrated in the consistent regional approach in developing a supportive framework to ensure that all regional schools had the right policies in place together with a comprehensive risk assessment in order to create a safe environment to welcome the children back into schools.

The framework included resources to support planning for:

1) Health and safety requirements
2) Site and facilities arrangements
3) Transport
4) Staffing arrangements
5) Blended teaching and learning
6) Inclusion and pupil support
7) Key management tasks.

Teamwork, joint working and collaboration has also been at the heart of the work with schools. All schools in the region are part of a cluster or a forum where they can come together to discuss operational issues as well as sharing best practice regarding distance and blended learning. This joint work facilitated by GwE staff has been very successful and sets a very strong infrastructure in place for future work and working relationship across the region.

One noteworthy aspect of the work has also been the bespoke nature of support for teachers and schools. GwE have worked on the strengths of individuals within the team and redeployed them where they have provided the maximum impact in their roles in supporting individual local authorities, schools, clusters, subject and phase networks. This bespoke provision of support based on strong principles of collaboration, exchanging and sharing and developing the best practice is a key learning principle that we will continue to develop in the next stages of evolving the service.

Schools who were causing concern prior to lockdown have had access to clear and targeted support to help them through this difficult period. This has been at several levels including network support, support to senior leadership and middle management in those schools and support with provision of distance and blended learning. Schools that have found the lockdown and post lockdown period difficult due to staff having to self-isolate have been supported in various ways. This has included modelling of exemplar materials, webinars, shared materials and resources. Also, GwE staff directly leading, directly teaching in schools or providing distance learning to learners.

A lot of time and energy have been put in place to contact international experts and to research international practice to learn and establish the principles of effective distance and blended learning. Discussions with international colleagues including the OECD have also deepened thinking within the organisation. GwE have provided practical support for leaders to enable them to consider their whole school strategic planning of provision for remote and blended learning, refine and evaluate their evolving provision and consider planning for various scenarios where pupils may be in school and / or at home during the academic year. This has supported schools to have a better strategic overview of their provision.

GwE has also supported schools in evaluating the quality of their blended learning and remote learning provision, sharing local examples and case studies of effective provision to reduce variation where it exists. Live streaming developed well and enhanced the blended learning experience. Schools soon realised that COVID will be with them for an extended period and are now planning more strategically and effectively. As schools and settings have become more confident with the delivery of remote learning, they are better able to adapt their self-evaluation processes and tools to monitor, evaluate, review and revise if appropriate, the provision.

School leaders acknowledge that one of the greatest challenges to the delivery of blended and remote learning has been and continues to be ensuring that staff and pupils have the necessary skills' set and resources available to them. There has been a rapid pace of upskilling for some staff to move to digital platforms. Schools have undertaken a range of planned professional learning offered by regional consortia around the use of digital technology to support learning. This has also proved to be an opportunity as a greater number of practitioners are now able to confidently use an increasing range of technology to support learning.

Many schools acknowledge that parental engagement has been a key factor in securing effective remote/blended learning. GwE and the Local Authorities have provided a range of

guidance to support school in improving parental engagement, including the sharing of good practice.

Many schools also acknowledge that there are ongoing operational challenges that change on a day-to-day basis, where a range of scenarios have to be planned for including cohorts of learners self-isolating or individual / small groups of learners and staff self-isolating. There are many examples of how schools are managing these complex situations well, having clear whole school strategies. GwE and the Local Authorities continue to support schools, using clusters and networks of schools to support each other and share resources and strategies.

GwE have also adopted a regional approach to accelerating learning, working on a tri-level approach which includes universal support led by the consortium, targeted support jointly led by the consortia and the local authority, with the acute being the responsibility of the local authority. This work has been developed on an evidence base approach working closely with Bangor University and regional staff to ensure a range of high-quality resources to support physical and emotional wellbeing, literacy and numeracy, these being made available to all learners across, all age range in all schools. The impact of this work will be captured through a regional dashboard which will include all grants made available to schools by Welsh Government during this financial year.

During the current academic year, GwE have provided opportunities for schools to form alliances or to work within developed clusters to address gaps in provision and alternative ways of delivery to meet any future lockdown scenarios. This work has included:

- Identifying, developing and shareing blended learning resources within the cluster/alliance and with other regional clusters/alliances;
- Ensuring all identified and developed resources are submitted through their Supporting Improvement Adviser to be included on the GwE Support Centre;
- Supporting schools within the cluster with their provision to meet any future 'lockdown scenarios';
- Prioritising additional support for the secondary sector in preparation for the awarding of examination grades in the summer 2021.

Schools in the GwE region have a significant collection of resources for each age group. Resources can be accessed through the GwE Support Centre:

http://cefnogaeth.gwegogledd.cymru/?lang=en

The GwE Professional Offer for this academic year has been rationalised and concentrates on 5 main areas: Wellbeing, The Reform Journey, Developing the Workforce, Accelerating the Learning and Digital Learning. In addition, GwE will continue to facilitate cluster working to support the development of Curriculum for Wales, ALN Transformation and the Welsh Language.

https://www.gwegogledd.cymru/professional-learning/?lang=en

3. MAIN IMPACT OF GWE WORK DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The main impact of GwE work during the pandemic is outlined below:

- Effective collegiate and collective regional approach between the six local authorities and GwE.
- Joint working has ensured strong governance and regional consistency in support, messaging and guidance given to schools.

- Strengthened collaboration between peers at a cluster/forum level has ensured effective co-constructed strategic thinking and direction.
- Clear regional and local approach in place for effective repurposing of both the service and its schools.
- Schools are well informed and confident that effective support is available should any needs arise.
- School leaders' wellbeing supported through regular and clear communication.
- Clear guidance given on how to prioritise and structure both remote and blended learning.
- Schools provided with coherent guidance and resources to effectively support vulnerable learners with their wellbeing, engagement and learning.
- Best practice being shared across schools and clusters, i.e. engaging with reluctant learners and families, digital platforms and communication systems, blended learning models, etc.
- Schools and settings have built upon several growth points in preparation for the new curriculum and generally have:
    - a more adaptable and skilled teaching profession;
    - greater focus and emphasise on both learner and staff wellbeing;
    - improved digital competency amongst staff, pupils and parents;
    - a more blended approach to teaching and learning;
    - improved partnerships with parents.

Other outcomes and impact include:

- Effective communication provided via single point of contact (Supporting Improvement Adviser)) for school leaders and ease of access to support.
- Schools have been able to remain open to key workers in the event of staff shortages.
- Schools are well informed and confident that support is available should any needs arise. School leaders' wellbeing is supported through regular communication.
- Shared understanding of the importance of the welfare of pupils, parents and staff
- Clear guidance given on how to prioritise and structure both Distance and Blended Learning.
- Schools having access to a wealth of quality resources for reference as they plan for and deliver distance and blended learning.
- Comprehensive distance and blended learning models available for schools to adopt, adapt or refer to. This has in turn ensured strengthened leadership and improved balance of work that can be completed at home.
- Co-ordinated approach to supporting schools which has led to greater consistency and quality of remoteand blended learning across the region.
- Best practice being shared across schools i.e. engaging with reluctant learners and families, digital platforms and communication systems etc.
- Strengthened use of ICT to enable effective communication between schools, within schools and with school stakeholders.
- School staff being upskilled through the use of a digital platform for professional development.
- Information shared with the LA is up to date and timely support is given to any School.
- In conjunction with the LA, ensured that the process of appointing school leadership candidates is appropriate and fair.
- Consistent messages disseminated to schools by GwE / LA officers.
- Strengthened collaboration between peers at a cluster level through digital means ensuring co-constructed strategic thinking.
- Strengthened collaboration between local authority officers and GwE.
- Clear regional and local approach in place for adapting schools for different purposes.

- Effective cascading of key messages to school staff to ensure consistency and clarity.
- Increased collaboration between regions and other stakeholders.
- Increased understanding of key messages and work streams.
- Stronger awareness amongst school leaders of effective strategies to ensure continuation of school business.
- Quality Professional Learning developed in readiness for future needs.
- Newly Qualified Teachers having clarity regarding completing their induction year.
- Strong partnership work with Bangor University to ensure initial teacher training students have clarity on the appointment system for next year.
- Strong partnership working with Caban to ensure increased research opportunities and recognition of excellence by School staff.

4. ESTYN THEMATIC REPORT ON LOCAL AUTHORITY AND REGIONAL CONSORTIA SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS AND PRUs IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 (Presented to Flintshire Education, Youth and Culture Scrutiny on 28/01/21)

During the early autumn term, the Welsh Government asked Estyn to undertake a review of local authorities and regional consortia's work in supporting their learning communities in schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) during the period from March to October 2020.

In January 2021, Estyn published a thematic report titled '*Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19*'. The full report is included in *Appendix 1*.

In addition, GwE received a letter outlining the outcome of this work in the region.The letter is included in *Appendix 2*.

The Estyn recommendaions for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers were to:

R1: Urgently address barriers to learning at home, particularly where this is due to a lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity;

R2: Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs;

R3: Develop a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionally affected by thepandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals;

R4: Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils;

R5: Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design.

5. GWE RESPONSE TO ESTYN RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC REPORT

During the spring term (January 2021 – April 2021), GwE have addressed the Estyn recommendations outlined in Section 4 above. A summary of the work is outlined below.

R1: Urgently address barriers to learning at home, particularly where this is due to a lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity

Local Authorities have worked with schools to enable all learners to access remote education during this period. Access challenges for learners have largely been met by the commitment, creativity and persistence of schools. Schools have loaned significant numbers of laptops/Raspberry Pis/wireless dongles to learners who do not have them at home from their own resources and have accessed grants or used donations to help fill gaps when needed. They have also recalibrated their expectations around timetables to support asynchronous/recorded approaches to allow access to a single device by more than one user in a household. Where necessary, paper copies of work have been delivered to households throughout lockdown. These approaches have had a significant impact of the engagement of some learners.

R2: Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs

Remote and blended learning provision

- GwE have supported schools to make effective use of blended learning and recovery curriculum guidance to plan retrieval practice and new learning when returning to face-to-face teaching and learning.
- Regular meetings with head teachers (individually) and through head teacher forums have initiated and prompted reflective practice and the sharing of practice and ideas.
- Individual support has been given to a number of senior leaders and heads of department – particularly where leaders are new - and to teachers in the authority, including NQTs. Networking meetings – Foundation phase teachers/ Literacy and Numeracy leads/ curriculum leaders/ heads of subject/ heads of VI Form – have been well received and proved mutually supportive. Coaching support is also being provided for a number of leaders in schools.
- All schools received guidance documentation regarding Remote and Distance learning to support Head teachers and teachers in planning remote learning as part of provision for learners, to assist schools in managing parental and stakeholder expectations, supporting schools to make best use of live learning and to enable schools to evaluate remote learning practices and when reporting to stakeholders including governing bodies.
- All schools received guidance for parents on remote and distance learning. These documents were co-created between schools and GwE / LA officers.
- Weekly discussions with Head teachers in a pastoral role included discussions around blended and distance learning.
- The collaborative sharing of blended learning materials allowed resources to be seen by SIAs and enabled feedback to be given on the quality of the work.
- Some SIAs received invitations to attend live lessons with learners.
- GwE have reported to the Joint Committee and to various LA scrutiny committees throughout the period, bringing together an evaluation on the provision during the period.
- The GwE Supporting Improvement Advisor work programme from March 2021 has being based around co-evaluating the provision during the lockdown period, return to school and identifying development needs that have arisen from the period.

Strengths and shortcomings in the provision of remote and blended learning for pupils

- The strengths that have been noted include the use of digital technology in allowing the learning to take place, collaboration including sharing of resources and practices, partnerships with parents and development of different types of pedagogy over the period.

- Collaboration within the schools and across the schools has also been a major strength over the period. Despite having to make considerable adaptations to operational practices due to Covid, schools continue to be very reflective on their own plans and actions and are fully embracing and adapting parameters in order to improve further. Alliance / Cluster working and Peer Review involvement are all a demonstration of the commitment schools have in looking to draw down good practice and develop a stronger foundation for an approach as learning organisations and self-improving schools.
- Secondary Alliances have identified Teaching and Learning as a priority – collaborating to develop effective classroom pedagogies; intelligent technologies and engagement in both online and face to face learning; and feedback and assessment. GwE facilitate the T&L forum meetings and to date schools have shared effective practice / resources and identified next steps to develop the collaboration and provision in schools. This collaboration has ensured more consistency in provision across the authority.
- Areas that schools have found difficult include the consistency of learner engagement. This has been variable both within schools and across schools and has limited learner progress where engagement has been low. IT equipment, both software and hardware has also limited provision and progress in some cases. Where provision has been inconsistent, SIAs have worked with the school to ensure teachers are well equipped to provide an education for learners.
- Engagement levels have increased over the second lockdown period.
- Where things that haven't been as successful, consistency, capacity of the infrastructure, ensuring continuity of feedback.

Supporting schools to develop teaching and learning strategies that build the resilience of pupils' learning and develop their independent skills

- During this period, more than ever, schools have had to ensure continuous learning opportunities for all staff in order to ensure that they are able to deliver effective distance learning and to use technology creatively in order to facilitate this distance learning. Through the Professional Learning Grant teachers have engaged in relevant and timely professional learning during the last year to ensure that they have a firm understanding of what effective distance learning should look like. In some schools this has included weekly cluster meetings, head teachers' forums, subject specific training and developing remote learning models within teams or across clusters.
- During lockdown, there were opportunities for schools to work as learning organisations to strengthen and develop the 4 transversal themes of Time, Thinking Together, Trust and Technology. There has been the promotion of team learning and collaboration among schools and staff to ensure that schools are able to deliver effective distance learning to all their students.
- Professional Learning has continued during the period. Examples of this have been PL given by the Foundation Phase Team which has included:

  NQT training on Language, Literacy and Communication with the main focus of session on reading
  - How do we teach reading?
  - Strategies to engage the 'Love of Reading'
  - What are higher order reading skills?
  - Ideas for challenging reading tasks in the enriched and continuous provision

  And further professional learning on developing mathematical, numerical and numeracy skills across all areas of learning and provision delivered on request from clusters and high risk/ schools in statutory category/Estyn follow up. Further professional learning included 'The Role of the Adult' aimed at practitioners facilitating the learning in the FP. This focused on:

- Effective questioning e.g. Blank levels of questioning to encourage children to reflect and to develop their higher order thinking and oracy skills
- Effective strategies to promote and develop independent learners

- Whilst there is still a focus on current logistical challenges, Headteachers have been keen to keep developing aspects of teaching and learning. 'Secondary Alliance' and Primary Cluster Plans have been finalised and networking in this way has been a valuable strategy for sharing best practice. School SLTs have found the EDT SPP Peer Review training also extremely valuable in supporting evaluation.
- As a Consortium we have ensured that we have promoted the use of Remote Asynchronous Learning Design through our weekly bulletin. We have also tasked several our subject advisors to work with secondary schools to delve deeper into the RALD Modules and develop effective practice examples which will be hosted on our new website. We have 25 resources thus far which include PowerPoints, videos, Podcasts and Vodcasts from teachers and students alike.
- We see asynchronous and synchronous learning design as an integral part of teaching and learning moving forward and will endeavour to upskill one practitioner from every catchment area who can then cascade the learning to all schools.

Coping with any future periods where blended and distance learning may be necessary

- In the primary sector, Supporting Improvement Advisors have worked closely with their link cluster, facilitating collaboration around effective classroom pedagogy, feedback and assessment and the use of technology to enhance provision during this time. School have evaluated that they were in a far stronger position to provide an education during the second lockdown period and that if at any time they have to return to a period of lockdown, they have processes and resources in place to do this effectively.
- Alliances and Clusters have mutually shared resources in blended learning, initially within alliances and clusters and then via the regional resource. This sharing was also supported by a full exchange of ideas around progress in blended learning, approaches to teaching and learning in the pandemic including assessment and experiences of agile and effective approaches to professional learning. These resources can be accessed in the school to school resource section of the Regional Support Centre - Regional Support Centre. GwE have regular meetings with schools to support schools to evaluate provision and their quality assurance activities – identifying strengths, areas to develop and planning PL opportunities for staff. Schools have captured good practice and shared across the school e.g. resources on shared drive, staff website on online learning, every teacher to create a case study of best practice, weekly drop-in sessions for teachers to share good practice and challenges, designing INSET to develop staff digital skills and confidence.

- The following resource centre data has been made available up to the end of April:

	Published Resources	Unpublished Resources
FPh	35	56
KS2	75	73
KS3	52	14
KS4	75	41
KS5	5	2

  - Number of page views since launch - 20,000
  - Number of resources downloaded since launch - 3,400
  - Most visited page - KS2 School to School resource

R3: Develop a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionally affected by thepandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals

Advice and guidance provided to schools to support their use of additional funding to support pupils whose skills have been affected by the pandemic

The consortia additional PDG funding has funds on support for schools/settings in three categories:

1. Teaching and whole-school strategies
2. Targeted support to accelerate learning and supporting key groups of learners
3. Wider strategies (including supporting parents and carers)

The above model focused on both universal and targeted approaches (using the FMS/LAC data as source for targeting schools/settings).

1. Production of literacy resource materials and translation of High Frequency Word strategy/Rapid Reading strategy for all learners.
2. Numeracy Catch Up - Transfer of key stage 2 SAFMEDS cards onto CRAM app for accessibility for all learners across the region / transfer of key stage 3 Mathematics materials into SAFMEDS cards and CRAM app.
3. Universal l Literacy Catch Up Programme - see targeted support
4. Universal Health and Wellbeing resources and programmes
1. RADY Pilot - We targeted schools in areas with high numbers of FSM/Vulnerable Leaners.
2. All schools/settings have access to Thinking Differently about disadvantaged learners as part of the professional learning offer

Wider Strategies

1. **SEAL** - In regards to universal Health and Wellbeing we purchased the SEAL license for all settings and LA's across the region. Most schools have accessed this.
2. **Trauma / ACE Informed Schools –** over 1500 attended the session and we currently have our Cohort 5 10-day Diploma. We also have 1 school with the highest number of FMS working towards the TIS benchmark /award.
3. **Talk boost** – we have up skilled both SIA's and LA staff in regards to Early Years Interventions for the development of Speech and Language via the TA's.
4. **ELSA** – we have also increased the ELSA training from our regional ALN/Inclusion group to target settings who have had no staff trained / or increase capacity, this will cover the training, resources in both languages and ongoing supervision by the Education Psychology Team in each of the LA. All schools and settings via the LA have accessed the offer.

- In many schools the RRRS grant has been allocated to support pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Additional staffing achieved through the RRRS grant have been given the opportunity for smaller groups or further targeted interventions across all Key Stages. Schools have appointed additional Teaching Assistants to work with learners on their literacy and numeracy and to support the vulnerable learners attending hubs in school. Small intervention groups are identified, and targeted support is offered through extraction groups. Literacy and Numeracy catch-up programmes delivered by trained TAs have been increased to encompass more pupils (focusing on standardised scores). Attempting to deliver this remotely has proved more difficult than whole class teaching. Learner and parental feedback strongly indicate that this additional provision is being warmly received.
- Schools have attended a range of Professional Learning opportunities, including live remote sessions and online webinars introducing a range of strategies and resources. A

cohesive support package has been in place for schools to help them improve the quality of teaching and maximise learner outcomes, especially of vulnerable learners. These resources focus on improving the following aspects:

- ✓ Basic reading and reading fluency
- ✓ Reading comprehension and vocabulary skills
- ✓ Basic numeracy and numeracy fluency skills
- ✓ Improving pupils and learning and revision strategies
- ✓ Some of the strategies and support materials were designed to be used in school and by parents at home to support their child's learning

- This has ensured well informed School Leadership Teams knowing how best to support Teaching and Learning in supporting literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils. It has also ensured that Teaching/support staff have been upskilled in the identification of literacy and numeracy needs of every learner and/whilst promoting independent learning. These resources can be found on the regional support centre - GwE Support Centre
- GwE have supported schools that have completed national tests during the autumn term to analyse the data and plan evidence based practice.
- Secondary Alliances and Primary Clusters have shared effective practice on developing pupils' interaction and social skills during live-streamed lessons e.g. interactive digital tools, effective use of breakout rooms, whole school campaign 'switch your camera on'.

Specific schools or cohorts of pupils disproportionately affected

We have worked closely with each LA to ensure all Looked After Children (LAC) have access to digital resources with evidence of ongoing dialogue with WG and its impact. The LAC PDG individual bursary was made available to support any identified gaps / additional support required. In addition, many non-teaching staff (such as Social Workers/ESW'S) attended some of the professional learning offer in regards to trauma informed practise. The cluster LAC PDG model was flexible in regards to how schools/cluster used the grant and some of the funds has been used to increase 1:1 and Play Therapy sessions/ELSA/Friends. We also adapted our professional learning offer to Designated Teachers to support the remote learning and transition back to school.

- Schools have adapted their provision and school timetable based on pupils and parents questionnaires. Further sessions have been arranged for pastoral tutors to meet with pupils in small groups to offer social interaction between peers and to discuss what has worked well and the barriers to online learning.
- In Secondary schools the use of data tracking and intervention has improved using the new 4Matrix data packs and data walls. Regular conversations about learners and their progress are taking place and allowing targeted intervention work.
- Where family / learner engagement has been low, learners from English speaking families who attend Welsh medium schools have made limited progress or have shown some regression. GwE have worked closely with LA colleagues to produce resources, provide support and to plan for recovery. This includes the appointment of a new 'Y Gymraeg' lead within GwE to ensure robust planning for recovery support and to strengthen collaboration between GwE officers and LA in supporting schools.
- Ensuring the needs of MAT pupils has stayed on school's agenda by contributing to cross-consortia info-posters with tips to help leaders, parents, practitioners and pupils themselves with blended learning. Small groups are targeted for after-school intervention to reach A*-A grades. This work has been done in conjunction with training from GwE. The introduction of Additional Maths for the most able has encouraged the development of the higher-level skills required for A*-A.

- Schemes of work in KS3 are under review to ensure engagement and challenge of all ability groups, adopting the new teaching and learning strategies highlighted in the GwE training.
- GwE have supported schools that have completed national tests during the autumn term to analyse the data and plan evidence-based practice.
- Strong structures in place to monitor pupil engagement during online learning – attendance, interaction and completing work. Schools are contacting families when there are concerns and supporting learners that have personal and social anxiety.

Specific skill areas affected

Through co-evaluation with schools, the impact on learner skills is seen to be variable across the region. Where learner engagement has been low, basic skills have been impacted upon as well as learner social skills and readiness for learning. The RRRS support for schools has been put in place to support schools in Literacy and Numeracy. The RILL (Remote Instruction of Language and Literacy) project has been established to support schools in re-igniting learning and developing basic skills, especially vulnerable learners. The project is fully bilingual and has been piloted with 15 primary schools across the region. There will be a regional roll out from this term with all primary schools, inviting engagement with their vulnerable learners. Two research officers will enable us to train all interested schools across the region and give them access to the programme, offer ongoing support and drop-in implementation sessions, provide additional support to target pupils/families over the summer holiday and to monitor and evaluate the impact of the programme.

Further support for schools in the core subjects include:

Mathematics

- Developed accelerating learning resources, guidance and support – focusing on evidence based strategies for improving fluency and recall in basic numeracy skills, and ensuring resources are accessible to all and suitable for a blended learning scenario.
    - ✓ shared overview in Heads of Maths and Numeracy Coordinators meetings.
    - ✓ offered professional learning opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants in the form of online webinars.
    - ✓ bespoke 'One to one' school support to address specific needs.

- Half termly Heads of Maths meetings, where time has been used to share GwE's Blended and Distance learning guidance, including exemplar subject specific models of effective and strategic planning for a blended learning scenario, share best practice in the region and facilitate discussions on effective, practical strategies for T&L.
- Additional professional learning opportunities has been organised for Mathematics teachers:
    - ✓ 'Teaching Mathematics to mixed ability classes' online workshop: focusing on sharing good practice, research findings, practical resources and strategies that focuses on differentiating and ensuring an appropriate level of challenge for all.
    - ✓ 'Distance learning in Mathematics' online workshop: delivered by a leading practitioner in the region, focusing on effective use of online platforms for asynchronous & synchronous teaching, sharing and modelling practical strategies for engaging all learners, and using assessment for learning to steer planning in the right direction.
- Programme of support put in place to support newly qualified teachers during the pandemic.
- Network meeting specifically for early career Mathematics teachers: focusing on sharing practical resources, guidance and additional CPD opportunities. Facilitated discussions on sharing good practice and planning for the future.

English

- Delivered subject specific training focussing on delivering elements of the English curriculum remotely – oracy and writing.
- Effective retrieval practice identified as an essential aspect in remote teaching in order to assess prior learning and make connections. Training session open to English teachers across the region and a forum to share best practice established.
- Bespoke support provided to schools in delivering key elements of the GCSE English/ Literature course remotely. This work has focussed on supporting the development of learning plans and teaching resources.
- Best practice case studies identified in English and shared regionally.
- Programme of support put in place to support newly qualified teachers during the pandemic. Seven week programme/ practical sessions focussing on effective teaching and learning particularly in remote settings.
- Literacy Intervention Programme developed based on the needs and feedback from secondary schools. Two tiered, comprehensive package of resources to support teachers and teaching assistants in developing the literacy skills of identified learners. Programme is used widely across the region /package of professional learning to support teaching assistants.
- Bespoke training provided to schools with high numbers of vulnerable learners focussing on accelerating literacy skills.
- Development of the *Herio* website and KS4 instructional videos to support learners. These can be accessed through an app or through the website
- Bespoke reading pilot introduced to 10 secondary schools across the region. Schools with our highest numbers of LAC/ FSM learners have been targeted. 'Building Reading Power' is a pilot which aims to improve the reading skills of struggling readers who also lack motivation and interest. Schools involved have been provided with the practical resources they need as well as a programme of professional learning which focuses on effective teaching of reading; building fluency; improving engagement and strengthening reading habits at home. As well as upskilling classroom teachers, we are also working with TAs and Learning Coaches. Bangor University are working with GwE on this project to monitor and evaluate the impact of this pilot. If successful, this will be shared regionally.

Science

- Development of the blended learning guidance and modelled examples, which has been shared with all Heads of Science through network meetings and with individual departments.
- Development of GCSE booklets to support learners who cannot access digitally – shared with all departments.
- Modelling of online quizzes and knowledge organisers to assess pupil progress – with key departments.
- Co-construction of schemes of learning for online delivery.
- Further development of the www.tanio.cymru website and creation of resources that have been used by both teachers and pupils from across the region.
- Programme of support put in place to support newly qualified teachers during the pandemic
- Co-construction of resources and training plan with the literacy lead to develop reading and oracy in Science. These have been used in key schools to support development of skills.
- Differentiated work booklets for GCSE pupils, identifying the key knowledge, terminology etc. have been produced and shared.
- Development of accessible assessment material (reduced reading age and complexity) /exam questions to support learners with less developed skills – both numeracy & literacy.

- Development of supporting materials and modelled examples to develop numeracy Skills in Science have been shared with key departments and training has been provided to support teachers to differentiate and deliver the numeracy.

Welsh

- Specific workshops were held for Heads of Welsh departments in the region on the blended teaching and learning of language
- Workshop entitled 'Datblygu iaith a'r meddwl creadigol trwy ddysgu ac addysgu'n gyfunol' held as part of the GwE professional learning offer.
- A series of 'Be' sy'n bosib?' (GwE) workshops were held to promote the use of Google for Education digital tools and others (on Hwb digital platform). These open workshops proved to be very popular with primary and secondary teachers alike across the region.
- Specific support provided for Welsh departments to develop their resources and their interactive use of their digital platforms so as to enable them to target specific cohorts of pupils quickly.
- Members of Welsh departments were encouraged to joint national KS3, KS4 and KS5 working groups to develop innovative teaching and learning resources to share nationally via the Hwb platform.
- 'Dysgu Carlam – Y Gymraeg' resources were created specifically in order to support whole school literacy interventions.
- 'Y Gymraeg ar Garlam' scheme was established so that literacy co-ordinators and Heads of Welsh departments in the region can share resources to support interventions that target the cross-curricular literacy skills.

In response to the need to support and develop learners' oracy skills a successful bid was made to Welsh Government to develop the 'Ein Llais Ni' oracy scheme (based on the 'Dy Lais Di' scheme which was piloted locally), and this scheme will be disseminated and embedded across the region.

How we are addressing this issue in our longer-term plans and policies

In regards to Health and Wellbeing the key areas of evidence from schools/settings are:

- Re Connecting friendship groups and relationships.
- Structure and Routine
- Targeting Physical Health – some learners have done no physical activity
- Increase in learners who are anxious
- Sleep patterns and attendance
- Speech and Language in the early years
- Digital gap in regards to tackling pupil/family poverty
- Further engagement with parents / carers
- Developing independent learners.
- Further requests for school counselling and some schools stating the need to additional school-based counsellors and CAMHS.

There is a need to build the above in to the school curriculum and planning.

The 2021-2022 Business Plans show that this aspect is an important part of our strategic objectives and regional priorities (see Section 8)

R4: Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils

- GwE are ensuring that the Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being is central to our work with schools. A recent meeting of the regional key partners agreed on the Governance and accountability for the framework moving forward.
- GwE have also been working closely with Wellbeing Leads/Healthy School across the region to ensure we are consistent in our approach in supporting schools. We are currently mapping the GwE/LA universal Health and Wellbeing across the region and this should be available before half term.
- A week of PDG workshops: Impact and Evidence based Practice - took place between March 22 and 26 and was well attended by school practitioners and educational partners. This learning and sharing week, was a week-long celebration and sharing of work from across Wales regarding provision and progress of disadvantaged learners through targeted PDG expenditure. It was designed to highlight the importance of aligning PDG to research-based interventions and development in Teaching and Learning practices to assist the disadvantaged learner and engage in face-to-face learning. During the week, consortia, schools and settings and professional partners put on a range of professional learning workshops, discussions and talks. This is available on the HWB platform with 18 hours of professional learning for schools/settings:

  https://www.gwegogledd.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Rhaglen-GDD-_-PDG-Focus-Week-Programme.pdf

- The Directors of Education across the region have identified parental engagement as a regional priority. A regional group with representation from each authority has been set up to look at a strategy to help parents / carers support their child's learning. We have worked closely with Mike Gershon, author of more than 40 books on teaching, learning and education, including numerous bestsellers in rolling out bilingual online teaching resources in supporting the role of parents / carers in helping their children to learn. The resources and website that Mike Gershon has developed is a strong starting point for supporting parents and we have been working with Mike to ensure that the website is bilingual and free to every parent in North Wales.

- GwE have also worked with an external partner (an expert in well-being, change and resilience) in running a series of wellbeing workshops ‘Looking after myself’ aimed at school and LA staff. The sessions explores the meaning of well-being and how we can create a balanced perspective about work and life. These workshops have been used in group situations or by individuals. As well as providing information and tips on wellbeing and resilience, they have been designed to give the workforce time and space to consider how well prepared they are to face the challenges of a rapidly changing external environment.

  The four workshops focus on a different aspect of wellbeing:

  Session 1: Understanding my Resilience and Reaction to Change
  - https://youtu.be/tDkLAaEoFjs

  Session 2: The Keys to Resilience-Developing Vision and Purpose
  - https://youtu.be/nuRVRi_M7c8

Session 3: The Keys to Resilience-Developing Emotional Intelligence
- https://youtu.be/vudqzc_jnMw

Session 4: Healthy Living
- https://youtu.be/37z5H73oelg

Each workshop lasts between 45-60 minutes including time build in for personal / group reflection and they can be used as a series of workshops or you can use them discretely as single sessions.

- Several school leaders have been offered a 'reflective space' to engage with an external coach to discuss any aspect of their own wellbeing. A number of Head teachers from accross the region have taken up this offer and have provided positive feedback regarding the process.

Impact of the pandemic on pupils' mental health

Schools and settings have used a range of wellbeing measures / surveys to gather evidence on the mental health of learners. LA's & Schools have used and accessed the Children's Commissioner Office Me and Coronavirus Survey in order to further target key areas within their curriculum. For example, some schools have used the Edinburgh Warwick mental Health scale. Other schools have implemented the Trauma Informed Schools I wish my Teacher Knew survey to get learners to reflect and move forward.

Some schools have used the 'Drawing and Talking' intervention with LAC as a meta emotion philosophy in regards to reflecting on feelings and developing emotional literacy. Another procured the service of a Drama Consultant to work with all learners from year 7-9 to discuss the impact of school lockdown on mental health via an art-based workshop.

GwE have also worked with the Mental Health UK Charity to support the implementation of the BLOOM mental Health school programme across the region. The curriculum resource is available in both Welsh/English - targeting learners at KS 4 and Post 16. More than half of the secondary schools attended the sessions with bespoke session in Welsh. One school implemented the programme with the sixth form with focus on:

- Building Resilience
- Exam Stress and managing pressure
- Social pressures
- Friendships

Support provided to schools so far to help them address pupils' needs

GwE have supported individual pastoral staff in both primary and secondary schools, focus has been on up skilling staff in universal approaches to supporting health and wellbeing and mental health of learners. Examples include the increase in the number of school who have accessed the professional learning offer in Trauma Informed Schools/Relational Play and also managing anxiety in children. We have also adapted our professional learning offer for Designated Person to include a section on effective strategies.

Schools have also accessed the SEAL resources in addition to our resources in the support centre.

The national PDG focus week was also about supporting vulnerable learners and strategies for schools to use.

GwE have also targeted 50 schools across the region to participate in the Adoption Cymru/WG pilot in regards to professional learning offer and membership for schools.

R5: Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design

During the COVID period GwE has continually reflected on the effectiveness of the work. Both internal and external resources have been used to ensure that we have a balanced perspective on the quality of the work. This has included working with the Education Development Trust and Steve Munby to develop the organisation and plan our future infrastructure. GwE hava also worked on a weekly basis from the beginning of spring 2021 with Professor Graham Donaldson to develop its own staff to effectively support schools with the new curriculum.

Reports to GwE Joint Committee have included:

- Transition back into school
- Wellbeing
- Blended learning Resources
- Re-starting learning model for North Wales
- GwE work programme and Regional Priorities
- Qualifications
- Annual Report 2019-20
- Professional Learning - GwE offer to schools Summer Term 2020
- Accelerated Learning Programme
- ALN Transformation
- Schools in category
- Budget monitoring
- Annual Budget
- Supporting Schools
- Reform Journey & Professional Learning
- Distance / Remote Learning and parent / carer engagement
- Developing Accelerated Learning programmes for the Welsh language
- Estyn Thematic Review
- Governance Arrangements: Internal Audit
- Internal Audit Reports
- Risk Register

The current work programme for SIAs with every school involves working in partnership self-evaluating the school's provision during the past year. This includes evaluating the impact GwE's support during the period and also future support needs for schools and clusters. The regional priorities and areas for improvement are based firmly on the findings of our internal self-evaluation processes, external reviews on our current practice and direction of travel, and through consultation with headteachers and the Local Authorities (see Section 8 on 2021-22 Business Plan Priorities).

The lessons learnnt from the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and to support schools with the new curriculum is addressed in Section 6 below.

6. SUPPORT DURING THE PANDEMIC THAT HAS PROVIDED GROWTH POINTS IN PREPARATION FOR THE NEW CURRICULUM

The response to COVID-19 has of course had a significant impact on schools and is likely to have disrupted some of their plans for preparation and implementing the new curriculum. However, the education reform programme in Wales, built around the new *Curriculum for Wales* (*CfW*), provides a positive way forward as we emerge from the restrictions of the last year. It has at its heart a number of guiding ideas:

- That the curriculum and associated teaching, learning and assessment should flow from four clear purposes agreed nationally and pursued locally.
- That those purposes should encompass helping all of our young people to become: **ambitious and capable learners; enterprising and creative contributors; ethical and informed citizens; and healthy and confident individuals.**
- That young people's learning should build progressively towards those four purposes across their time in school education.
- That teachers and schools should have greater freedom to realise those purposes in ways that can meet the needs and characteristics of the young people and the communities that they serve.

These basic ideas give rise to a number of important implications:

- That the national curriculum framework should establish necessary national consistency of purpose and approach but leave wide scope for local decision making about key aspects of learning and teaching.
- That curriculum making is a process that should involve collaboration amongst teachers, schools and wider interests.
- That accountability should not inhibit the quality or narrow the scope of learning. Wherever possible it should pursue quality enhancement rather than narrow quality assurance.
- The success of the reform programme should be judged against the extent to which it leads to better and more relevant learning for young people and to higher standards of achievement. Both the quality of the learning and the nature of standards should relate to the extent to which the agreed purposes are being realised in practice for all young people.

The impact of the pandemic has naturally influenced how schools and settings can move forward with the reform. They need to re-establish the relevance of its four guiding purposes for Wales's young people. In many ways the pandemic has made those four purposes more relevant than ever as schools seek to build the confidence of their young people and rekindle their desire to learn. Schools have had to think deeply about what matters in learning during periods of interrupted schooling and the four purposes of the new Curriculum for Wales stand up well to that examination. The pandemic has also required changes to the nature of the teaching and learning process, not least in the ways in which digital technologies can enhance possibilities for more independent learning.

How schools and settings will continue to be supported on their journey to implementing the new curriculum from September 2022

Our regional priorities for 2021-22 are a combination of improving school provision, leadership and outcomes, as well as delivering the reform journey and the new curriculum. Our approach to the reform journey has been integrated in all aspects of our work from the beginning. Not one element of the reform journey can stand alone. It is viewed from the need of learners and

the baseline of individual schools and clusters to deliver change according to agreed expectations.

The four purposes outlined in the '*Curriculum for Wales'* guidance should be the starting point and aspiration for schools as they prepare to design the new curriculum and support their learners to become:

- 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; and
- Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The regional priorities are aimed to support schools and settings as they work towards those four purposes. All regional work aligns with the document '*Journey to 2022*' which was published in October 2020 and co-created by Estyn, the 4 regions and Welsh Government (see *Appendix 3*). This document identifies a series of phases that schools will undergo as part of their preparations for the new Curriculum for Wales and these include engagement, design, trialling and planning and finally evaluating and preparing for first teaching.

As part of the support to schools for the new *Curriculum for Wales*, GwE has worked with the other regional consortia to develop a national professional learning offer that integrates all aspects of the wider reform including Schools as Learning Organisations, *Y Gymraeg* (towards a million Welsh speakers by 2050) and the Additional Learning Needs Transformational Bill. This cross regional offer is aimed at supporting all school practitioners, and focuses initially on Senior Leaders with the following themes:

- Leading Change
- Leadership for the new curriculum
- Developing a Shared Vision
- Planning for Curriculum Change – to include curriculum design, progression and assessment
- Leading Pedagogy
- Time and Space for Professional Learning

This professional learning offer was originally scheduled to begin in spring term 2020, however was naturally paused due to the priorities of the Covid-19 pandemic. In discussions with Head teachers across GwE, the professional learning resumed virtually in January 2021 with the Leading Change session. The planned sequence of professional learning available to schools is outlined in *Appendix 4*. These sessions across the region are cluster-based and enable smaller groups of primary schools and their local secondary school to discuss the new *Curriculum for Wales* across the 3-16 learning continuum. Across the region, 832 Senior Leaders attended these Leading Change sessions, of which 170 were from Flintshire. In recognition of the re-opening of schools to all learners in March and April, the Professional Learning sessions were again paused in March 2021.

Following discussions with the Directors of Education through the GwE Management Board, a series of consultative workshops were held in April 2021 in each Local Authority to listen to feedback from Head teachers on the professional learning offer and how best to re-engage. Over 300 Head teachers attended the consultations, with all Headteachers from Flintshire attending.

Feedback indicated:

- Head teachers of both primary and secondary sectors recognise the importance of continuing to collaborate across the sectors to support the 3-16 continuum;

- All leaders recognise the importance of maintaining the momentum of the professional learning but acknowledge the challenge of timing given current pressures and challenges;
- Leaders are keen to work with GwE and to draw on the input of external experts where appropriate;
- Leaders recognise that flexibility in engaging with the professional learning offer is key to ensuring effective engagement.

To support re-engaging with the Curriculum for Wales work, a further leadership planning session has been planned for each individual cluster across the region to build capacity of clusters to collaborate across the requirements of the reform journey as a whole and form an agreed action plan for each cluster. As part of this, all Supporting Improvement Advisers have facilitated sessions where schools within a cluster have the opportunity to work collaboratively to strategically plan for the implementation of the curriculum. Adopting a flexible and sensitive approach to the timings of these sessions has been a key aspect of the discussions between GwE, the local authority and schools. Activities to support preparations for the new curriculum at school and cluster level have been identified within School Development Plans.

Examples of planned activities in Flintshire schools include:

- identifying further opportunities for senior leaders to work on developing shared vision;
- collaborating across schools to develop common approaches to teaching and learning and share common language;
- identifying opportunities for teachers to collaborate to unpack and sense-make together within a specific *Area of Learning and Experience*.

The use of technology to collaboratively develop cluster plans and websites ensure that the dialogue is ongoing and Senior Leaders are able to continue this work, following discussions back at individual school level.

In addition to the Professional Learning offer, additional support from GwE is available to schools as they prepare for *Curriculum for Wales*. This support will be accessed at both cluster and individual school level, including tailored bespoke support where needed.

Further support available to schools also includes a series of ‘Think-Pieces’ which have been written by the GwE team as part of the weekly reform sessions with Professor Graham Donaldson. These papers, which cover key aspects of the curriculum reform journey including leadership, vision, pedagogy, assessment and curriculum design, have been shared and refined through consultation with wider partners in Local Authorities, Estyn and Bangor University. All senior leaders have been invited to attend a webinar in May 2021 to explain and share this work on the Think Pieces. These are included in *Appendix 5*.

A key aspect in moving forward will be supporting schools to develop networks across all six *Areas of Learning and Experience* (AoLE). As part of business plan priorities, GwE will invite and facilitate opportunities for school practitioners to engage with peers to consider planning and curriculum design within and across AOLEs to meet the needs of all learners to realise the four purposes of the new curriculum.

Working in collaboration with partners in Higher Education Institutes is a further priority for the region as GwE supports schools to develop the role of enquiry within the new *Curriculum for Wales*. This work is an important aspect of the wider work on developing effective teaching and learning, which in turn builds on the work of developing assessment for learning. For this purpose, GwE have worked with schools across the region over the last three years to develop and share effective practice in formative assessment using evidence based learning. There

are 360 schools across the region participating in this work including 75% of the schools in Flintshire.

In supporting schools in their readiness for implementing the curriculum in September 2022, GwE are working with schools and wider partners to develop a wide range of qualitative indicators which will allow schools to reflect on how they are implementing the four purposes of the new curriculum. Furthermore, schools have access to a series of milestones within the regional information management system that allows them to reflect on their progress. Prior to the initial lockdown period in March 2020, over 90% of schools indicated that they were either partly on track or better in their knowledge and understanding of the new curriculum framework. Nearly all schools indicated that they were partly on track or better with their engagement and participation in cluster work for preparing for the new curriculum.

7. BUSINESS MATTERS

Staff Development

The consistency and quality of challenge and support to schools is good. Regular training, support and discussions ensure that Supporting Improvement Advisers' knowledge and understanding of national and local developments, and the implications of this on their roles, is good.

Quality Assurance processes continue to develop and evolve in line with national developments and principles. Messages and information are communicated clearly and on a regular basis to all employees. Generic, purposeful and effective support programmes are offered. Full and sector team meetings offer regular opportunities for collaboration, consultation and contributing to discussions and decisions regarding GwE's direction of work during a period of considerable change.

Performance Management and Accountability

The clear and robust accountability framework in a key strength in GwE. Detailed business plans on all levels of planning address all aspects of the work of GwE, and clearly note the contribution of the service to the transformation agenda. Plans are fully costed, with clear success criteria and milestones for delivering objectives.

There are detailed self-evaluation arrangements. Plans are reviewed on a quarterly basis, evaluating progress and impact. Staff on all levels fully understand their responsibility for continued improvement and accountability.

Each Local Authority has a detailed business plan agreed upon by the head of service and the core adviser. Progress towards agreed outcomes on a local authority level is monitored on a quarterly basis and discussed regularly in meetings between the lead adviser and Local Authority. Ongoing issues are referred to GwE Senior leaders in a timely manner.

Self-evaluation is a strong feature in GwE and the self-evaluation process is cyclical and ongoing. Great emphasis is placed on accountability and continuous review, and there is consistent emphasis on progress in line with priorities. Consequently, GwE leaders accurately identify areas of good performance and areas for development, or areas where there is an element of risk in terms of improving experiences and educational outcomes for learners.

Value for Money

The consortium has effective financial management processes in place. Communication and consultation on financial arrangements is effective, and GwE staff, the host local authority and Joint Committee all review the core funding and grant expenditure on a regular basis.

A robust financial analysis supports the work of delivering the business plan. A medium term financial plan and workforce plan are both aligned with the business plan. Through increasingly effective use of data to identify key priorities, the link between the business planning process and decisions regarding financial planning is strengthened as the work streams that underpin the business plan clearly note the resources to be used.

A formal framework was produced to assess the wider value for money provided by GwE. The judgement is now consistent across all stakeholders on how to measure the value for money of GwE activities within the structure and objectives of the business plan.

Risk Register

There are rigorous and comprehensive arrangements in place to accurately identify and manage risks on a local, regional and national level. The risk register is a live document, which is updated on a regular basis in order to identify increasing risks or risks which are no longer deemed as high level. It is reviewed every month in a senior leadership meeting and the Management Board and the Joint Committee review the register on a quarterly basis.

Through effective management of risks to the region, GwE is able to support the region's objectives, make effective use of resources and meet the outcomes as intended.

8. BUSINESS PLAN PRIORITIES 2021-2022

The regional priorities and areas for improvement are based firmly on the findings of our internal self-evaluation processes, external reviews on our current practice and direction of travel, and through consultation with headteachers and the Local Authorities. The Business Plan also addresses Welsh Government and the Local Authorities strategic priorities that fall within the remit of the work of GwE.

Additionally, GwE will work in partnership with Local Authorities to support additional local priorities, as appropriate. It also takes into consideration the views and priorities of other middle tier partners such as Estyn, Qualifications Wales, WJEC, National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL), Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Education Workforce Council (EWC).

Our priorities are a combination of improving school provision, leadership and outcomes, as well as delivering the reform journey. Our approach to the reform journey has been integrated in all aspects of our work from the beginning. Not one element of the reform journey can stand alone. It is viewed from the need of learners and the baseline of individual schools and clusters to deliver change according to agreed expectations.

GwE has encouraged schools to collaborate through sharing practice and co-constructing areas that need improving and the challenges of the reform journey. We have invested in various cluster models and encouraged schools to find a range of appropriate partners to deliver improvement and changes. The region has also looked outward for good practice in terms of identifying effective peer review models as well as encouraging our schools to develop and evolve their own practice. GwE believe that peer engagement should closely complement the dimensions identified within the OECD publication '*What Makes a School a Learning Organisation*'.

Our focus is on support and on capacity-building for a self-improving system. Challenge Advisers have become 'Supporting Improvement Advisers' and this is more than a name change – it signals a determination to build trust with key stakeholders and to move away from a top-down approach to school improvement, developing a more long-term, supportive and sustainable strategy.

In partnership with stakeholders, GwE has developed a long-term supportive and sustainable strategy which is successfully building capacity across the region to meet the challenges of the wider reform. The integrated approach has focused on developing collaborative opportunities across clusters of schools. To further support schools, GwE has developed the concept of creating termly milestones through the information management system G6. These offer all schools an opportunity to reflect and through continuous professional dialogue with SIAs, activity and its impact along with identification of next steps are shared.

Professional learning will be central to ensuring that all school staff have the professional knowledge and skills to deliver on the education reforms that are well underway in Wales. Taking into consideration the system expecations and working in collaboration with partners, a clear framework for themes for professional learning has been identified for practitioners within schools.

Our **strategic priorities** for improvement for 2021-2022 are:

Our strategic objectives	
1	**Curriculum & Assessment -** Supporting a national curriculum with equity & excellenc its core that sets high standards for all learners
2	**Developing a high-quality education profession -** improving the teaching & learning our schools
3	**Leadership -** supporting inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standard Includes future leadership & professional networks
4	**Strong & inclusive schools** committed to excellence, equity & well-being
5	**Supporting a self improving system -** supporting a system in which the educa profession have the skills, capacity & agency to continually learn & improve their pract
6	**Business -** ensure that GwE has strong governance and effective business operational support that provides value for money.

The four purposes as outlined in the *Curriculum for Wales* guidance should be the starting point and aspiration for schools as they prepare to design the new curriculum and support their learners to become:

- 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; and
- Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Our **regional priorities for 2021-22** are outlined below are aimed to support schools as they work towards those four purposes.

These priorities are supported by the service's detailed plans, outlining how and when the aspects of each priority will be delivered and setting expectations for the next steps in delivering the reform journey. Also, each Local Authority has a detailed business plan agreed upon by the head of service and the core adviser.

1. Curriculum & Assessment - Supporting a national curriculum with equity & excellence at its core that sets high standards for all learners
1.1 - Reform Journey ➢ Provide professional learning and bespoke support and guidance to schools and settings to help them realise the Reform Journey and prepare for the new curriculum. ➢ Develop a regional qualitative framework for holistically capturing and evaluating progress in a school.

2. Developing a high-quality education profession - improving the teaching & learning in our schools
2.1 - Remote learning and Learning Design ➢ Support schools and settings to ensure that their remote learning provision is designed to provide a high quality learning experience for their pupils. ➢ Continue to share regionally developed exemplars – modelled approaches for teaching and learning as part of remote learning. ➢ Support schools and settings to evaluate current practice for remote and blended learning, identifying strengths and areas for development. ➢ Support schools and settings to evaluate pupil's progress and to identify the next steps for their development.
2.2 - Y Gymraeg ➢ Provide support for schools and settings who teach through the medium of Welsh as their first language to improve the Welsh First Language skills of their learners, and especially those from non-Welsh speaking homes.

3. Leadership - supporting inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards. Includes future leadership & professional networks
3.1 - Leadership ➢ Ensure that all learning organisations have the leadership capacity at all levels to inspire, coach, support, share practice and collaborate at all levels to ensure all learners' achieve their potential. ➢ Ensure that the principles of distributive leaderships are embedded in all learning organisations across the region.
3.2 - Supporting the qualifications process ➢ Support schools and settings to implement the recommendations of the Design and Delivery Board for the awarding of qualifications in 2021 and 2022.

4. Strong & inclusive schools - committed to excellence, equity & well-being
4.1 - Wellbeing and Learning ➢ Continue to work closely in partnership with Local Authorities to provide wellbeing support for practitioners and learners in schools and settings. ➢ Continue to provide support to school leaders on the identification, engagement and support for specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners including those who have been disproportionality affected by school closures.
4.2 - Parental support strategy ➢ Develop a parental support strategy to help parents and carers on how to best support their child's learning.

5. Supporting a self improving system - supporting a system in which the education profession have the skills, capacity & agency to continually learn & improve their practice
5.1 - Incentivising collaboration to self-improve ➢ Further strengthen the culture, behaviour, systems and processes so that leaders and teachers are incentivised to adopt a collegiate approach to school improvement. ➢ Continue to work closely with schools and settings in order to continue to deepen the peer work already established, and to identify the aspects that schools could offer to other schools to develop specific aspects of Professional Learning. ➢ Provide professional learning to further develop peer review.
5.2 - Schools Causing Concern ➢ Intensively support secondary schools in statutory category, and those causing concern, to improve performance. ➢ Provide bespoke support to schools and settings in line with agreed school improvement priorities that reflect the current situation and positions of schools and settings.
5.3 - Schools developing and sharing successful practice ➢ Provide access to a range of regional and national professional learning, including access to coaching and mentoring, for all educational practitioners in schools and settings that is appropriate to their role and responsibility in line with professional standards. ➢ Continue to work with clusters/alliances in the region to collect, collate and make available blended learning resources as part of an online resource library. ➢ Continue to facilitate cluster/alliance working and peer to peer support to ensure the continuity of learning and sharing of effective practice and lessons learned from a range of schools and settings for remote and blended learning.

6. Business
6.1 - Ensure that GwE has strong governance and effective business and operational support that provides value for money.

Mae'r dudalen hon yn wag yn bwrpasol

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Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19

Update report from June to November 2020

January 2021

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- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- primary schools
- secondary schools
- special schools
- pupil referral units
- all-age schools
- independent schools
- further education
- independent specialist colleges
- adult community learning
- local authority education services for children and young people
- teacher education and training
- Welsh for adults
- work-based learning
- learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- reports to Senedd Cymru and provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the Welsh Government and others
- makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

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Contents

	Page
Introduction	**1**
Background	**1**
Main findings	**4**
Recommendations	**6**
Leadership	**7**
Decision-making and governance	7
Working together to support schools and PRUs	7
Delivering ongoing priorities	9
Promoting learning	**10**
Supporting schools and PRUs to reopen to all pupils	10
Identifying and addressing regression in learning	11
Supporting Welsh language skills	13
Promoting broad curriculum experiences	14
Promoting more effective distance and blended learning	16
Professional learning	18
Supporting vulnerable pupils	**21**
Preparing for pupils to return in September	21
Supporting wellbeing	24
Supporting vulnerable pupils	28
Appendix 1: Evidence base	**32**
Appendix 2: Survey quantitative feedback	**33**
Appendix 3: Estyn publications	**38**
Appendix 4: Timeline	**40**
Glossary	**45**
References	**46**

Introduction

This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Minister for Education in July 2020. It provides an overview of how local authorities and regional consortia have worked with schools and pupils referral units (PRUs) to promote learning and support vulnerable pupils during the COVID-19 period between June and November 2020, that is the period after the initial lockdown when schools were reopening. It captures the ways local authorities and regional consortia have adapted their work to respond to the challenges resulting from COVID-19. The work was carried out before all schools returned to remote learning in January 2021 but will be helpful to inform current ways of working.

The intended audience for this report is the Welsh Government, local authority and regional consortia officers and staff in schools and PRUs. It draws on the evidence base in appendix 1 including interviews, survey feedback and documentary evidence. Due to restrictions associated with COVID-19 we were unable to visit schools and PRUs to gather first hand evidence about the quality of provision. The quantitative feedback from the surveys issued can be found in appendix 2. We have also provided detailed feedback to individual local authorities and regional consortia to support their own self-evaluation for improvement. The report is part of a series of publications by Estyn to share learning and support the education system's continued response and recovery (Appendix 3).

The report features 'cameos' from local authorities and regional consortia. These are not case studies as we are unable to evaluate the impact of the work because of restrictions on our activities due to COVID-19. The cameos are included to exemplify points raised in the report, giving a flavour of the work that has taken place across Wales.

Background

In the foreword to his Annual Report 2019-2020, Meilyr Rowlands HMCI (Estyn, 2020, p.4) stated that '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'. His foreword offers an initial account of how schools and other education and training providers coped with the initial lockdown period and strived to support pupils while providing continuity of learning for them remotely. For further information on this initial lockdown period see the Annual Report 2019-2020.

This thematic report focuses on the period from late summer to late autumn. A timeline of significant events during this period can be found in appendix 4.

In late June, nearly all schools reopened to pupils to provide an opportunity for them to 'Check in, catch up and prepare for summer, and September'. In July and August, the Welsh Government published guidance to support schools to reopen to all pupils, on supporting learning and on supporting vulnerable learners (Welsh Government 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Schools and PRUs reopened to pupils in September, with a transition period leading up to all pupils attending by 14 September 2020. Almost immediately, schools began to experience their first positive COVID-19 cases among pupils and staff, reflecting the situation in their communities, and the first of a series of local restrictions to reduce transmission was announced. During September and October, individual pupils, classes or whole year groups were required at times to self-isolate, leading to the need for remote learning provision. The length of self-isolation periods varied from one day to 14 days depending on the reason and personal circumstances[1]. Positive COVID-19 cases continued to rise and the Welsh Government announced a two-week firebreak lockdown from 23 October 2020. Schools and PRUs were closed for half-term during the first week of the firebreak. During the second week primary schools re-opened for face-to-face learning while many secondary-aged pupils reverted to distance learning from home.

In early November, around 90% of pupils were in school. The proportion of pupils in school fell to around 80% by the end of November and to around 70% by mid-December, as increasing numbers of pupils were required to self-isolate or their school was closed due to an insufficient number of staff available to supervise pupils on site. Towards the end of the autumn term, an increasing number of parents chose not to send their children to school, even if their school remained open, often due to concerns about being able to meet family or friends at Christmas. The national attendance figures mask considerable variation across schools and local authority areas, as in the local authorities worst affected by COVID-19 only around 50% of pupils were in school towards the end of the term. The national figures also mask considerable variation across age groups, with older secondary school age pupils having the lowest attendance at school.

The scope of this thematic report includes the extent of the support provided to schools and PRUs by local authorities and regional consortia during this period. Although the scope does not include post-16 or pre-school providers, we refer to aspects of these sectors' work where helpful. The report focused specifically on two aspects:

- Promoting learning – the quality of the learning offer and how has this been supported through further guidance and professional learning?
- Supporting vulnerable pupils – how did the local authority targeted services and support to vulnerable pupils to support them to engage in learning? What barriers still exist?

[1] The maximum self-isolation period was reduced to 10 days from 10 December 2020.

We also considered the early planning and implementation for the 'Recruit, recover and raise standards programme' grant across schools and PRUs and the next steps for this work.

At the time of our engagement with schools in October, very few pupils needed to receive blended learning. Most pupils were able to attend school and benefit from face-to-face teaching. Where pupils were required to isolate or shield, schools provided distance learning until they were able to return. A blended learning approach would involve a cohesive, intentional plan for pupils' learning to involve a combination of learning in school and at home which was not required in most schools during the autumn term. At the time of publication in January 2021, all schools have returned to providing remote learning for pupils, with some face-to-face provision in school for vulnerable pupils and those with parents who are key workers.

Main findings

1 Local authorities and regional consortia have worked closely together and with the Welsh Government to respond to the evolving context caused by the pandemic. Through the Association and Directors of Education Wales (ADEW), senior leaders have provided good support for each other and collaborated to create shared approaches and resources.

2 Local authorities provided valuable support to enable their schools and PRUs to reopen successfully to all pupils in September. Particular strengths were the practical support around health and safety and on communicating with parents and learners. For example, local authorities, working with health care partners where appropriate, supported risk assessments, including for vulnerable pupils and developed welcome packs providing information for parents, carers and pupils. School leaders welcomed the direction from local authorities and regional consortia to focus on pupil wellbeing and felt this was appropriate.

3 During the initial lockdown and the autumn term, local authority services had to respond rapidly to support the wellbeing of all pupils, and particularly those known to be vulnerable. Where local authorities already had effective joint working across services and external agencies, this was evident in the efficiency with which they responded to these needs. In other local authorities where collaboration is less well established, the pandemic has been a catalyst to strengthen joint working. The enhanced use of digital communication also contributed to more efficient multi-agency working within local authorities.

4 During the initial lockdown, teachers had to respond quickly to the need to provide distance learning materials for pupils. This provision improved though the summer term. As the need for a number of pupils to learn away from the classroom continued in the autumn term, it remained a priority to further improve and embed distance and blended learning provision. Regional consortia and local authorities have developed helpful guidance, playlists of videos featuring good practice and a range of professional learning. However, schools', local authorities' and regional consortia's oversight of the quality of provision is underdeveloped.

5 Pupils' learning experiences in the autumn term varied widely across and within schools. This is partly due to the varied impact of the pandemic in different areas and also as a result of the different policies and practices adopted by local authorities in relation to close contacts and the different ways that schools have organised groups and cohorts of pupils. These factors have resulted in considerably unequal learning experiences for pupils who have received most of their autumn term education in school and those who have been taught at a distance for extended periods.

6 In his recent Annual Report, the Chief Inspector's noted that '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.' The barriers to learning at home identified in the summer term, including access to digital technology, remained in the autumn term.

7 The pandemic has had a greater impact on certain groups of pupils and magnified challenges that already existed. For example, school leaders have told us that pupils eligible for free school meals made slower progress in their learning during the initial lockdown than their peers, with some pupils returning to school with weaker language and numeracy skills than before the initial lockdown started.

8 The pandemic has exacerbated some challenges that local authority and regional consortia had already been working with schools to address. Pupils across Wales have experienced the pandemic in very different ways as a result of their home circumstances. The necessity for pupils to work at home for periods of time in the autumn term has highlighted the need for pupils to be able to work independently successfully and for schools to focus on supporting pupils to improve learning resilience.

9 Local authorities and consortia have recognised the potential longer-term impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of children and young people. All have offered enhanced professional learning for staff from schools and PRUs on supporting wellbeing, including on bereavement and adverse childhood experiences. Children and young people already challenged because of adverse childhood experiences prior to the pandemic have faced further challenges. Children and young people in stable family environments with very few or no prior adverse childhood experiences may also have been affected by the pandemic. For example, time away from friends caused by lockdowns, isolation periods or having to remain in tight bubbles at school can have an adverse impact on pupils' social development and their mental health.

10 In most cases, local authorities have ensured that statutory processes for pupils in relation to special education needs (SEN), including assessments and annual reviews, have continued during the autumn term. Where there have been delays, this has most commonly been due to the capacity of educational psychology services and other specialist services, caused by staff absence or challenges in delivering services remotely.

11 Regional consortium and local authority officers continued to support teachers' and school leaders' digital competence during the autumn term. The increased effective use of digital communication has had positive consequences for facilitating more agile, efficient and frequent interactions between and within learning communities across Wales. School and PRU leaders have valued the flexibility of online professional learning opportunities provided by local authorities and regional consortia.

12 School leaders across Wales have mixed views about the effectiveness of support they have received from their local authority and their regional school improvement consortium during the pandemic. School leaders in south west Wales are most satisfied with the support they have received from their local authority, while school leaders in north Wales are most satisfied with the support they have received from their regional consortium.

13 Local authorities made appropriate early adaptations to the governance arrangements but a few local authorities were too slow in resuming their scrutiny functions. By the middle of July 2020, most councils had begun to hold Cabinet meetings online, but only half of councils had held virtual meetings of their scrutiny committees. As a result, decisions about re-opening schools and providing support for learners in the summer were not scrutinised in half of councils. By the autumn, all council Cabinets were meeting online, and scrutiny committees in most councils were also meeting online.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers to:

R1 Urgently address barriers to learning at home, particularly where this is due to a lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity

R2 Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs

R3 Develop a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionally affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals

R4 Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils

R5 Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design

Leadership

Decision-making and governance

14 Local authorities and regional consortia have worked closely together and with the Welsh Government to respond to the evolving context caused by the pandemic. Through ADEW – the Association of Directors of Education in Wales – directors of education have worked co-operatively to support each other through the pandemic. Directors have reduced the burden on themselves, their officers and staff in the regional consortia by identifying aspects of work that they can agree to work on collaboratively or on behalf of each other. ADEW has supported national work with Welsh Government such as guidance relating to the continuity of learning.

15 Audit Wales has published several reports on how councils' governance arrangements have been affected by the pandemic. Early during the initial lockdown period, councils had to use emergency governance arrangements, meaning that typically 'responsibility for decisions about how councils use public money and provide services fell to senior council officers in consultation with a much smaller number of senior councillors than would usually be involved in decision-making – sometimes just the leader of the council.' (Audit Wales, 2020).

16 Some councils were slow to use new regulations that came in to force in April 2020 that made it easier for councils to meet virtually. As Audit Wales noted, 'in some of those councils there is no comprehensive record available online of the decisions taken since lockdown. This makes it difficult for the public to see and understand the decisions their council has taken during lockdown, and who is accountable for them' (Audit Wales, 2020).

17 By the middle of July 2020, most councils had begun to hold Cabinet meetings online, but only half of councils had held virtual meetings of their scrutiny committees. As a result, decisions about reopening schools to all pupils and providing support for learners in the summer were not scrutinised in half of councils. By the autumn, all council Cabinets were meeting online, and scrutiny committees in most councils were also meeting online.

18 When important decisions are being taken about education services, local authorities should usually take account of the views of school leaders as well as other stakeholders where relevant. Our survey of school leaders across Wales carried out in October 2020 found that the majority of them agree that their local authority involves them effectively in discussions about local education services. However, a few school leaders do not feel involved enough. Local authorities have continued to build on the range of fora they have with school and PRU leaders to communicate, consult and in a few cases, co-construct approaches.

Working together to support schools and PRUs

19 School and PRU leaders in south-west Wales were considerably more positive about the work of their local authority than leaders were about their local authority in the

other three regions. For example, they were more positive about the timeliness of advice and guidance from the local authority, how well their local authority communicated with them, and the support provided to enable their school or PRU to re-open successfully to all pupils in September 2020. They were also more positive about how well their local authority involves them in discussions about education services. South-west Wales is the only region where challenge advisers are directly employed by local authorities, rather than by regional consortia, and this may partly explain why leaders are more positive in this region.

20 School leaders' views of the support they receive from their regional consortium varies considerably. A majority of leaders agreed that GwE had provided effective support and guidance to support learning in their school or PRU. Nearly half of leaders agreed with this was the case with EAS, but only a minority agreed this was the case with CSC and ERW. A majority of leaders also agreed that GwE had provided useful information on the differences between, and approaches to, distance and blended learning. Just over half of leaders agreed with this was the case with CSC and EAS, but only a minority agreed this was the case with ERW.

21 Just over half of school leaders told us that they feel that their local authority cares about their wellbeing. This indicates that there is room for improvement in the relationship between some local authorities and their school leaders. A majority of teachers and most support staff told us that their school cares well for staff wellbeing.

22 During the initial lockdown, local authority services had to respond rapidly to support the wellbeing of all learners, and particularly those known to be vulnerable. Where local authorities already had effective joint working across services and external agencies, this was evident in the efficiency with which they responded to needs. For example, in Bridgend, the 'early help locality service model' already meant that multi-disciplinary teams worked out of three bases in the county, working in an integrated way to support families with vulnerable children and young people. These teams were well placed to work collaboratively and provide support through the pandemic. In other authorities where collaboration is less well established, the pandemic has been a catalyst to strengthen joint working. For example, Anglesey and Gwynedd's education psychology service has collaborated with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service to develop a new approach to supporting pupils who are absent from school because of their emotional wellbeing.

23 Local authorities have sought to support school leaders in preparing for various scenarios in the face of uncertainty about how the pandemic may affect schools through the autumn and into 2021. A majority of school and PRU leaders told us in our survey that their local authority provides effective guidance to support them to develop flexible plans in the event of further spikes in infections.

Cameo: School Business Resilience Planning

Prior to the increased operation of schools, the Corporate Director for Education and Family Support in Bridgend required all schools including the PRU to produce a business resilience plan. The local authority provided a plan template. Settings were asked to consider a range of possible scenarios and the actions they would take to ensure the continuity of learning. The local authority quality assured the plans and, where necessary required further clarification. Possible scenarios included; the self-isolation of pupils, either individually or as whole year groups; the self-isolation of staff; planning to ensure continuity of leadership. Possible solutions may include the strategic planning and mapping of blended learning; developing the capability and capacity of staff and pupils in using online platforms to support blended learning; producing pre-prepared emergency learning packs for all groups of pupils; use of Welsh Government's 'Recruit, recover and raise standards programme' grant and cover arrangements.

Delivering ongoing priorities

24 Local authorities have tried sustain as much 'business as usual' as possible while dealing with the various added needs of schools and PRUs associated with the pandemic. For example, wherever possible, work has continued to reorganise schools and improve school facilities as part of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme. The workload associated with responding to the pandemic has undoubtedly slowed progress in some areas. For example, at the end of March 2020, Neath Port Talbot left the regional school improvement consortium, ERW, and three of the remaining five authorities gave notice of their intention to leave at the end of March 2021. The lack of a clear plan for school improvement services in south west Wales from April 2021 is a significant concern. Elected members and senior officers across all local authorities in the region have been slow to demonstrate that there is a clear vision and plan for how high quality school improvement services that meet their needs will be provided to schools and PRUs from April 2021.

25 Planning and professional learning activities focused on preparing for Curriculum for Wales that schools, local authorities and regional consortia had planned for this year have inevitably been disrupted by the pandemic. From September, we had originally planned to begin discussions with all schools in Wales about their early preparatory work to implement Curriculum for Wales from September 2022. Instead, our discussions with schools in the autumn mainly concentrated on how they are responding to the pandemic. Despite the disruption to preparatory work for Curriculum for Wales, our Chief Inspector noted in our latest annual report that the pandemic 'has presented providers with the need and the opportunity to evolve and innovate … 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' (Estyn, 2020, p.9).

Promoting learning

Supporting schools and PRUs to reopen to all pupils

26 Prior to September, many pupils had spent only a few days in school since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, with some not having spent any time in school. In July, Welsh Government (2020c) issued guidance to schools and settings to support the full return to school in September. This set out priorities for learning emphasising the health and wellbeing of pupils and the importance of outdoor learning. Officers from local authorities ensured that they adopted the same priorities in their work with schools at the start of the autumn term. Local authority officers recognised the pressure that school leaders were under as they planned the reopening of schools and the amount of their time that they needed to give to operational matters including keeping staff and pupils safe. In order to support headteachers, most local authorities and regional consortia distilled the guidance about learning and brought relevant information together in one place, as in Carmarthenshire where officers established Y Porth website for this purpose. Many of the headteachers who responded to our survey said that they had sufficient support from their local authority to help them to re-open their school or PRU successfully. Many agreed that their local authority had provided guidance in good time. This contrasts with what school leaders told us about the guidance in the spring and summer terms, when many felt that it was received too late and that they had to put processes in place to support pupils' learning prior to receiving guidance.

Cameo: Supporting pupils' return to school

GwE developed a regional model in line with Welsh Government guidance, with local authorities and schools, to ensure that the individual needs of pupils were met, with consideration to their local context. The model evaluated the school's preparedness and approach to ensure learning for all pupils continued. It focused on three inter-related components that assess pupils' fitness for learning. These include their emotional and mental wellbeing; their health and physical fitness; and their core skills of numeracy, literacy, independence, and readiness for new learning.

The aim of the model was to support schools to assist pupils to return to 'learning fitness' and to promote learning which allows pupils to continue to make progress. Ensuring coherence for pupils between in-school and remote learning is another key element of the model including developing appropriate learning while current curriculum requirements were temporarily disapplied.

27 Through the school summer break and into the autumn term, regional consortia and local authorities built on the work during the initial lockdown to provide support and guidance to schools for ensuring the continuity of pupils' learning. In some instances, resources provided earlier in the pandemic were revised and updated to make it easier for school leaders and teachers to engage with them. For example, in

the EAS, officers listened carefully to the views of headteachers about the playlist of videos showing effective practice that officers had begun to compile at the start of the pandemic. In the summer term, schools had found the playlist useful as it drew together the national and local guidance about distance learning in one place. As the volume of materials increased, school staff found it more difficult and time-consuming to use the resource and officers responded well to this by streamlining the content into an easier to use web-based resource.

Cameo: 'Supporting Our Schools' website

In response to feedback from stakeholders, the EAS have created a new website to house their support for schools resources. The new website is easier to navigate than the playlist that the service used previously. Resources are clearly labelled and easy to scan. The website contains sections covering different topics such as governance, school improvement, guidance on using the accelerating learning grant funding and curriculum support. The website also contains a link to another new website that houses all resources related to distance and blended learning. These resources are also clearly organised under themes and there are several examples of informative case studies and presentations from schools, as well as links to helpful external resources. In order to make it easy for leaders to identify any new resources, these are signposted each week in a separate section, before being moved to the relevant themed section. The EAS staff are providing online introductory sessions to the new websites. These well-attended, informative sessions are sector specific and available through both English and Welsh. In addition to providing a demonstration of the websites, these sessions also include a choice of breakout sessions involving presentations from schools and an opportunity for discussions in small groups.

Identifying and addressing regression in learning

28 Early in the autumn term, schools leaders started to plan how they could best use the funding from the Welsh Government for the 'Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards' programme. The Welsh Government (2020e) issued guidance for schools to support the use of the grant using the work of national and international organisations including the Children's Commissioner and the OECD to identify the impact of the pandemic on pupils' progress in learning. The government acknowledged that, while many pupils had not progressed as much as they could, there were groups of pupils for whom the impact of the pandemic was greater. These included pupils in year groups preparing for examinations, pupils who had made the transition from primary to secondary school and vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils. Local authorities and regions supported schools to plan for the use of the grant. For example, in GwE, officers worked with schools to try to ensure that headteachers used the funding in a sustainable way and aligned its use to local priorities, including the Welsh language strategy, to benefit pupils in the longer term. Across Wales, many schools found it difficult to recruit staff using the grant because they were drawing on a limited number of available people. A few schools employed a teacher or teaching assistant on a shared basis and many schools used the funding to increase the hours of existing staff. In smaller schools, funding was often not sufficient to be able to support recruitment. Although, it is too early for schools and local authorities to

monitor the impact of the grant on addressing pupils' skills deficits, officers from local authorities and consortia have plans in place to do this. Officers in Powys local authority provided helpful advice for governors about how to evaluate schools' use of the funds on pupil progress.

29 The impact on pupils' learning and skills from the initial lockdown period differs widely across Wales. In their study into 'Schoolwork in Lockdown', researchers from UCL (Green, 2020) found that children across the United Kingdom spent an average of 2.5 hours each day engaging in learning. Their research shows that 20% of pupils engaged with learning for less than an hour each day and only 17% worked for more than four hours (Green, 2020, p.2). This means that between March and September 2020 nearly all pupils across the UK spent considerably less time than usual learning during the pandemic. In Wales, the number of pupils engaging with learning was lower than the averages for the UK as a whole. The study found that 20% of pupils in Wales were doing no schoolwork at home or less than an hour each day (Green, 2020, p.19). Only 15% of pupils were learning for four hours each day (Green, 2020, p.19). The report highlights substantial inequality linked to deprivation and social groups. Our findings from engagement calls to schools in the October 2020 mirror these findings. Headteachers from schools in areas of social deprivation say that teachers found it more difficult to engage pupils and families with learning through the summer term. We reported on the reasons for this, including access to technology for learning and support from parents in the thematic section of the Annual Report 2019-2020 (Estyn, 2020).

Cameo: Assessing the level of learner engagement in the Vale of Glamorgan

Prior to reopening to all pupils, officers from the local authority, in collaboration with the CSC and schools, developed a matrix to assess the level of engagement of pupils and their wellbeing. Through conversations held between improvement partners and headteachers, information was collected from 55 out of 56 schools in the Vale of Glamorgan. The useful report summarised the key findings, the barriers and challenges encountered by schools and effective practice across the region, and concluded by highlighting ways forward. The information gathered has been used to inform local policy and share effective practice across the local authority through a collection of case studies. In addition, support was provided to schools to help strengthen areas such as increasing the engagement of vulnerable pupils.

30 As pupils returned to school in September 2020, leaders and teachers put in place processes to identify the impact of the school closure period on pupils' learning and skills. Many schools used the national online personal assessments for reading and numeracy with pupils in Years 2 to 9 to supplement teachers' own assessments of pupils' skills. Identifying pupils' skill levels following the school closure period was a particular challenge for secondary schools as pupils moved from Year 6 to Year 7. To help schools to identify a baseline for these pupils in secondary schools across the south-east region, the EAS provided schools with funding to support pupil assessment. Generally, local authorities report that pupils have fallen behind with reading and writing skills, and headteachers reported in early October that there has also been a negative impact on the speaking and social skills of younger pupils in the

foundation phase. Local authority and consortia officers are working with schools to address these skills deficits, and are mindful of the need to ensure that schools do not focus on these core skills to the detriment of the wider curriculum.

Supporting Welsh language skills

31 An issue identified during the summer term was the learning of pupils in Welsh-medium schools from English-speaking homes, as many of these pupils had not had the opportunity to hear or practise the language. Addressing this issue was one of the aims of the Welsh Government's 'Recruit, recover and raise standards programme'. As the pupils affected by this issue returned to school in September, staff were particularly concerned about the levels of pupils' speaking skills. Local authorities put a number of initiatives in place to support schools and pupils. For example in Neath Port Talbot, the Welsh advisory service developed useful resources and collaborated with Menter Iaith and the Urdd to provide support for schools. In Wrexham, officers ensured that pupils from Welsh-medium schools who have needed to self-isolate since September have received resource packs and weekly face-to-face sessions or online sessions including podcasts. Several local authorities, including Conwy and Bridgend, used their immersion facilities to provide additional support for these pupils and Cardiff increased its provision in this area to help cope with demand. Officers in the regional consortia also provided support for schools. The EAS placed members of its Welsh support team in Welsh-medium primary schools across the region during the autumn term to support staff and pupils to address the deficit in pupils' skills. In our discussions with headteachers from English-medium primary schools, many said that they valued the support for teaching Welsh from local authorities and regional consortia, in particular the resources produced by Welsh advisory team staff to support provision in school.

Cameo: Supporting pupils who are new to the Welsh language

One example of the close alignment of the work of Gwynedd and GwE is their approach to supporting schools to develop pupils' Welsh language skills. The challenge of catering for their linguistic needs when schools reopened for all pupils in September was compounded by the difficulties in running Welsh language units in their traditional form. To support primary schools, the local authority arranged for the specialist teachers to provide an outreach service on a cluster basis, while the cluster's improvement support officer worked with the schools to create and adapt Welsh schemes of work.

32 Around 1,000 parents responded to our survey question about support for pupils in Welsh-medium schools. Many of these said that they were happy with the support provided by the school to help their children make progress with their Welsh. Very few parents felt that this was not the case, but those that did said that there was a lack of support for parents who do not speak Welsh and a lack of bilingual resources to enable parents to provide support for their children at home. Most of the pupils who responded to our survey agreed that they are getting good support to help them with their Welsh language skills.

Cameo: Supporting pupils' Welsh language development

In Carmarthenshire, officers identified the need to support pupils to maintain their engagement with the Welsh language from early in the pandemic. The Welsh advisory team adapted and refined their existing resources to provide schools and PRUs with activities to share with pupils and parents. In addition, they created extra-curricular activities and micro-lessons for pupils to recall previous learning, revise grammar, and to develop their reading skills and numeracy skills. They provided worthwhile tasks based on Welsh poetry as a stimulus to learning as well as providing activities to develop pupils' Welsh-speaking skills through the 'Cynllun Clonc' and Flipgrid activities.

Social media was used well to promote Welsh language activities, for example scientific activities for the outdoors and activities on history of the local area. Homework booklets were also distributed to enable parents to support their children with work through the medium of Welsh. Local authority officers and teachers in a number of its secondary schools worked with regional consortia staff to create a wide range of valuable Welsh language resources to support pupils in Welsh-medium and English-medium schools. Officers continued to develop resources for schools throughout the autumn term to support schools to improve pupils' Welsh language development.

Promoting broad curriculum experiences

33 Through Modification of Curriculum Requirements in Wales Notices, the Welsh Government temporarily modified the requirement for schools and funded non-maintained nurseries to provide the basic curriculum and associated assessment arrangements. In practice the curriculum narrowed in many schools in the autumn term. Whether the result of their own risk assessments or a misunderstanding of Welsh Government operational guidance, lots of schools determined the need to sanitise resources between uses. In schools where this was the case, it has had an impact on the youngest and the oldest pupils in schools in particular. For example, in the foundation phase pupils have had to access a limited range of resources in their continuous and enhanced provision. In secondary schools, pupils' access to equipment in practical subjects such as art and science has also become more difficult for teachers to manage.

Cameo: Supporting science teaching

ERW subject teams shared clear and helpful guidance which reassured and supported science teachers in the region. For example, the ERW science team gave examples of online sites that included video demonstrations of experiments, and useful and engaging resources that teachers could use for distance learning.

34 In a few local authorities, the delivery of shared services to schools, for example peripatetic music tuition for pupils stopped. In other local authorities, including Caerphilly and Cardiff, officers found new ways of providing these services. In Ceredigion, the authority's information technology team provided support to the

music service to enable them to teach virtually. This has enabled pupils to continue to receive instrumental lessons. This way of working has removed tutors' travel time and contributed to maintaining pupils' standards.

Cameo: Caerphilly music service

Local authority officers have worked to ensure that the schools' music service was able to resume its work more fully from September 2020. The local authority has provided clear guidance to music service staff and schools on how this service can be delivered safely in schools. It has also provided detailed guidance and protocols on how the service can be delivered remotely. The guidance covers a range of issues and scenarios, including lessons for individuals and classes, live and recorded sessions and safeguarding considerations. The guidance also provides clear information as to how the Welsh Government's guidance should be followed in the context of the Caerphilly music service.

35 In November 2020, the Minister for Education confirmed that, for qualifications in 2021, there will be no end of year examinations for pupils taking GCSE, AS level or A levels. The Minister established a Design and Delivery Group to advise on the process of awarding qualifications without examinations. Plans for this process were again being reviewed as term started in January 2021 with all pupils learning from home due to another national lockdown. Although it is understandable and necessary that plans for awarding qualifications have had to change again this year, these changes, especially in-year changes, can cause great stress and anxiety for pupils, as well as teachers.

36 Pupils in key stage 4 following alternative curriculum courses are a particular concern to many schools. There is a great deal of variation in how easily these pupils can access their alternative and off-site provision and this has proved to be a considerable timetabling challenge for schools. A large number of more practical courses such as hair and beauty have not been able to run. As a result, a few pupils who usually access provision of this kind, particularly those who were previously at risk of exclusion, are displaying challenging behaviour or are disengaging. Even when these courses are accessible, often it is with a reduced timetable because the provider cannot allow pupils from one school to mix with another. In Powys, officers engaged with all post-16 pupils through the Powys Learning Pathways website during the summer holidays. This helped pupils to feel supported and engaged after a period of disruption to their learning. At the same time, local authority officers made helpful bridging units available to pupils about to start post-16 courses. These units together with the contact have helped pupils transition to their post-16 studies. During the autumn, pupils had to remain at their own school for all learning as it was not possible to visit other campuses, even if their subject teachers were based elsewhere. Supported by officers in the local authority, subject teachers streamed lessons live so that all pupils could access them. As the local authority had already used remote learning through their 'e-sgol' programme, the transition to online learning was comparatively seamless and schools and pupils are familiar with how to make the best use of it.

37 Providers of post-16 education have developed contingency plans for local lockdowns or outbreaks of COVID-19 and continue to amend aspects of the delivery of teaching, training and assessment across the sectors. Where venues for pupils to receive face-to-face teaching or training have had to close, the restrictions on access to pupils' workplaces continue to be a major barrier to learning. Providers offer online activities to maintain learner engagement and interest, however a key challenge on vocational programmes and courses is maintaining the engagement and motivation of pupils during periods of lockdown or self-isolation. These pupils selected practical-based courses and with the current crisis this aspect is often paused or significantly reduced. Providers report that higher level pupils on higher level programmes, even those undertaking academic courses and programmes, may not make the progress that was initially expected due to family reasons such as childcare restricting their study time.

Promoting more effective distance and blended learning

38 In her research commissioned by the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee, Dr Sofya Lyakhova of Swansea University (2020) found that, although many pupils fall behind in their academic learning without access to teachers and support from their parents, a small proportion may make gains in learning, particularly in reading. These are pupils who have the ability to self-regulate or as John Hattie (2020) says, 'they know what to do when they do not know and there is limited help available'. Lyakhova's research emphasises the need for pupils' emotional health and wellbeing to be strong in order for them to be able to able to learn independently. School improvement advisers have noted that building resilience and developing independent skills have become more evident as school priorities since pupils returned to school in the autumn. Local authority and regional consortia officers are aware of the need for a greater focus on teaching and learning strategies that accelerate the development of pupils' abilities in these areas.

39 The need for schools to act quickly to address the need for pupils to learn at home became more urgent as the autumn term progressed. It became clear in September 2020 that schools were going to be affected by positive COVID-19 cases and that pupils would be required to self-isolate at home for periods of time. In our survey, many governors said that their schools and PRUs had sound plans in place to ensure that teaching could continue if pupils were away from school because of another lockdown or the need to isolate. A majority of headteachers agreed, saying that local authorities had provided effective guidance to support schools and PRUs to develop flexible plans to deal with further outbreaks of COVID-19 infection. In practice, pupils' experiences as a result of these outbreaks have varied widely across Wales due to the varied impact of the pandemic in different areas and also the different policies and practices adopted by local authorities in relation to close contacts and the different ways that schools have organised groups and cohorts of pupils. This has resulted in further inequity in the learning experiences between pupils who have received their autumn term education in school and those who have been taught at a distance, in some cases for a significant proportion of the term. Where this happens, the barriers to learning at home identified in the summer term, including access to digital technology and parental support, remain. When we surveyed school leaders in October 2020, many headteachers felt that local authorities had been proactive in providing information technology resources and internet connectivity for those pupils

without access to these at home. Teachers and governors were less positive about this support. Around half of governors said that local authorities had provided effective support in this area. Although many teachers from primary schools and PRUs and a majority of those from special schools said that schools were helping pupils to overcome barriers to learning at home, only around half of the secondary school teachers and a minority of the teachers from all-age schools who responded to our survey agreed with this.

40 In November 2020, the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) spoke to pupils from Years 9 to 13 to identify any differences in their learning experiences between the summer and autumn terms, in particular the period where all pupils in these year groups were working at home because of the national firebreak. The pupils involved in this work said that there had been improvements in their experiences of distance learning. Their days were structured in a similar way to a school timetable, and teachers had checked that all pupils had access to digital devices and were provided with feedback on their work online in a timely manner. In some schools, pupils had been asked to complete surveys about their learning experiences and, as a result, teachers had made adjustments to suit pupils. For example, some schools provided recordings of lessons that pupils could use at a time that suited them. The issues raised by pupils included the amount of work provided, which meant that they were working long hours, and the inconsistency of provision between different subject areas. They also shared concerns about the lack of support from parents who do not have the skills to support them and the lack of digital skills of some teachers. Many said that they missed interacting with teachers and other pupils and that, although the distance learning offer had improved, it still does not compare well with learning at school. The importance of remote peer interaction was one of the findings from the EEF's Rapid Evidence Assessment (2020). Across the studies that EEF researchers reviewed, they found a range of strategies to support peer interaction, including peer marking and feedback, sharing models of good work, and opportunities for pupils to participate in live discussions of content. The evidence from pupils and schools indicates that this is an area of distance learning that needs development.

41 Across Wales, regional consortia and local authority officers have seen the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to focus on developing the ethos and principles of the Curriculum for Wales, for example the focus on health and wellbeing in schools at the start of the autumn term. In Powys, challenge advisers are promoting the use of the pedagogical principles to enrich pupils' learning. In Flintshire, officers provided training on using the outdoor environment as a way to develop pupils' resilience and perseverance in problem-solving. The training was provided for non-maintained settings, nursery and primary schools and PRUs with pupils of primary school age. Across the GwE region, officers recognise that many secondary schools have had to change their approach and plan lessons in thematic blocks due to pupils being in 'bubbles'. Officers and elected members see this as a strength as it links clearly with the authority's vision for implementing the Curriculum for Wales. Many secondary schools have made use of resources provided through GwE's new online 'support centre', including multi-disciplinary units of work that fit well with the principles of the Curriculum for Wales. Despite this positive work, there is also a recognition that the pandemic has slowed the progress that schools were making in addressing the implementation of the new curriculum.

Professional learning

42 Regional consortia and local authorities increased the range of professional learning opportunities to address the additional need caused by the pandemic. Much of their work in the autumn term focused on supporting schools to understand and develop approaches to distance and blended learning, building on the work they started in the initial lockdown. As schools identified pupils' needs on their return to full-time schooling, officers in local authorities and regional consortia responded by tailoring their learning offer to support teachers to address pupils' specific needs. GwE offer a wide range of opportunities for schools to participate in specific professional learning opportunities to improve pupils' literacy, numeracy and accelerated learning strategies. In Swansea, officers adjusted their learning offer as their understanding of the impact of distance learning on pupils developed. They worked with schools to provide the best fit model for individual circumstances. For example, the local authority supported teachers to design paper materials for distance learning following evidence that pupils do not learn as well in front of a screen when compared with on paper. Officers in Swansea also provided support for schools to develop their approach to assessing pupils' work through virtual platforms. They offered virtual training on approaches that include using mini quizzes, giving feedback using the live-chat facility on platforms like 'Microsoft Teams', using video recordings to explain new tasks and to identify misconceptions and offering whole-class feedback on common misconceptions. A few local authorities, including Cardiff, collaborated with organisations such as the Open University to support professional learning in schools. In Cardiff, schools and the Cardiff and Vale College worked with the Open University to deliver a programme of interactive online workshops, focused on pedagogy and effective learning design.

Cameo: Using evidence from communication with schools to inform professional learning

Officers in Swansea carried out a survey with primary headteachers, seeking information on specific training needs during the pandemic. They analysed the responses and came up with a list of items for future webinars. These included developing the use of live sessions, how to use the tools available via Hwb and other useful platforms/apps and suggestions for easy-to-use tools for teachers to help them when designing online/distance learning activities. As a result, the local authority produced a comprehensive programme of webinars to address these.

43 Officers from local authorities and regional consortia used the initial lockdown period to engage with national and international research, to identify effective practice to share with schools. In Bridgend, school improvement partners collated evidence about learning from the Education Endowment Foundation (2020) whose findings include that the quality of teaching is more important than how it is delivered. This has helped schools in the local authority to think about their approaches to distance and blended learning. In Carmarthenshire, officers used the work of Michael Fullan as a basis for moving learning from a distance learning model used during the school closure period to a model that could be used as schools re-opened fully for the autumn term. In the EAS, officers adapted the approach of Simon Brakespear to help school leaders to see their response to the pandemic in phases and to identify what was important and different at each phase.

44 Officers from local authorities and regional consortia have started to put plans in place to evaluate the impact of their support for schools on pupils' learning. In Gwynedd, officers recognise that it is not yet possible to draw meaningful conclusions about schools' approaches to distance learning. However, following the first case of a school having to send home a significant cohort of pupils in the autumn term, officers evaluated the distance learning provision. They created a case study for other schools, outlining the implications and the factors that leaders and teachers need to consider when planning for pupils to learn remotely. Following cluster meetings with the regional school improvement service to discuss distance and blended learning, one school in Wrexham trialled using a digital distance learning approach while pupils were in class. One group of pupils completed activities and tasks online while the teacher used direct instruction with other pupils. This allowed teachers to support pupils to use software and upload work to a digital platform while they were in school. It also allowed the school to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the activities and tasks set as distance learning. The school is adapting its approach following feedback from this process. The EAS carried out a survey to gain leaders' perceptions of their learning offer. Local authorities within the region are using this information to help them to develop an overview of their schools' provision. Across Wales it is too early to be able to evaluate fully the impact of this work on schools and pupils as processes to evaluate the quality of learning offers including distance learning are in the early stages of development.

45 Training to support teachers' digital competence continued in the autumn term. Officers in ERW provided a series of webinars for primary, secondary and special schools and PRUs that give an overview of the tools available through Hwb to support blended and distance learning, complementing their earlier work. The sessions included specific themes for school leaders, such as what to consider when experiencing individual year group isolation. These webinars also included recordings and live discussions with school leaders from around the region, which school leaders found reassuring when considering how best to implement their own plans. In addition, the team shared online safety and self-review tools, as well as curriculum support for specific areas, for example to develop teachers' practice with coding. A Google Classroom set up specifically for teaching assistants to develop their online skills has attracted over 200 participants. In our engagement calls with schools, headteachers identified the improvement in teachers' ICT skills and their confidence in the use of technology to support pupils' learning as a positive impact of the pandemic on schools. The need for teachers to put what they had learned into practice quickly made the professional learning immediately relevant to their needs.

46 Most consortia and local authorities found that, as professional learning moved online, more practitioners have taken up learning opportunities as they no longer involve full days out of school and materials can be accessed at any time. A majority of the support staff who responded to our survey said that they had received effective professional learning to support them to make a successful return to school. Despite the opportunities available for professional learning, our survey also found that 22% of teachers who responded do not feel that they have had sufficient opportunities to support their understanding of distance and blended learning.

47 The period since March 2020 has delivered many challenges for local authorities and regional consortia in their work to support schools. It has also provided opportunities

to think differently and to work in different ways. Officers are aware of the need to learn from the experience and are keen to maintain and build upon the new ways of working that have had a positive impact. The use of digital platforms to hold meetings and as a way of delivering professional learning has been both time and cost effective and has enabled more education staff to participate in these more frequently. In the spring and summer terms 2020, teachers had to respond quickly to the need to provide distance learning materials for pupils. This provision improved though the summer term and as the number of pupils needing to learn away from the classroom has increased in the autumn, the need to further improve and embed distance and blended learning provision remains a priority. The pandemic has reinforced issues that local authorities and consortia had already been working with schools to address. These include the impact of poverty on families and in particular on children's learning. Pupils across Wales have experienced the pandemic in very different ways as a result of their local and home circumstances. The initial lockdown period and the necessity for pupils to work at home for periods of time in the autumn term have highlighted the need for pupils to be able to work independently successfully and for schools to focus on supporting pupils to improve learning resilience.

Supporting vulnerable pupils

Preparing for pupils to return in September

48 Having briefly welcomed pupils back to their school or PRU at the end of the summer term, leaders' attention turned to supporting vulnerable pupils during the summer holiday as well as preparing for the autumn term. Local authorities organised various summer activities, often led by youth workers. These usually targeted the most vulnerable pupils, such as children looked after by the local authority and those whose behaviour in their community was a concern, and provided a range of useful activities to support personal and social skills as well as their wellbeing.

49 Many support services for vulnerable pupils continued through the summer holiday too, such as online counselling, welfare visits to families in need, helplines for those needing support. In Merthyr Tydfil, a local authority officer maintained contact through the summer holiday with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and their families to support them to remain engaged in learning, with schools reporting that a good proportion of these pupils returned to school in September 2020. In Torfaen, education welfare officers identified pupils who did not engage with the 'Check in, catch up, prepare for summer and September' sessions in schools at the end of the summer term (Welsh Government, 2020d). The officers then worked closely with families to support pupils to return to school in September.

Cameo: Re-engaging pupils through summer activities

Officers in Denbighshire recognised that some vulnerable pupils would benefit from additional input in order to successfully re-engage with learning. They secured grant funding to deliver engaging and enriching activities to target vulnerable young pupils and those from economically disadvantaged areas. The Education and Children's Services worked in partnership with the Youth Service and external partners to provide a summer holiday activity programme over five weeks. This helped to bridge the gap between the initial lockdown period and the full reopening of schools to all pupils in September by inspiring young people through sport, music, drama, team building and craft activities. Activities included lessons on African drumming, a drama workshop hosted by a West End star, and team games on a beach. All participants received free lunch and bus passes in order to facilitate attendance.

50 While scientists warned of the potential for a 'second wave' of COVID-19, this was unpredictable both in terms of timing and scale. The Welsh Government committed to returning all pupils full-time in the autumn, with scope for a staggered start in September. Local authority officers, and sometimes regional consortium officers, worked closely with school and PRU leaders across Wales to ensure that school sites were safe for pupils. In some cases, health and safety officers jointly carried out risk assessments with school and PRU leaders. In other cases, leaders carried out their own assessments and these were sent to officers to be checked. Local authorities have helpfully held drop-in online meetings or used a digital forum for headteachers to discuss health and safety issues with officers.

51 Where relevant, individual risk assessments were carried out for vulnerable pupils with special educational needs and those requiring extra support, and often local authority officers supported this process and assisted with any resulting concerns. For example, officers in Caerphilly worked with parents and school staff to discuss the use of PPE when a child with autistic spectrum condition spits when distressed. Officers provided staff in another school with surgical respiratory protection masks for when working with pupils who require aerosol or suctioning procedures.

52 Schools and PRUs across Wales prioritised pupils' wellbeing at the start of the autumn term. Regional consortia and local authorities provided professional learning, guidance and resources to help staff think through the potential issues. Much of the professional learning offered to leaders, teachers and support staff across Wales focused on understanding how trauma can affect children and young people, and how staff can identify those who are struggling and support them. For example, GwE offered a 'Return to school trauma-informed schools programme', which included practical strategies and key teaching and learning principles and models. In EAS, teaching assistants were offered training in delivering a 'coping and connecting' six-week intervention programme to support targeted vulnerable pupils settle back to school life. In Powys, existing school-to-school support continued, with staff at the PRU training school staff across the local authority on supporting pupils' behaviour and readiness to learn on their return to school.

53 Professional learning also focused on the importance of relationships, with schools and PRUs encouraged to give time to this at the start of the autumn term. For example, CSC purchased access to the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) for all schools, and ERW commissioned Professor Robin Banerjee to deliver professional learning to develop staff understanding of self-efficacy and connection as key to supporting wellbeing.

54 Some local authorities provided parents and carers with information and advice to support pupils' return to school. For example, Carmarthenshire created a 'Welcome back' pack that explained what pupils might experience when using school transport and practical suggestions on how to support their child's wellbeing.

Cameo: Supporting vulnerable pupils' wellbeing needs in preparation of the return to school

In collaboration with the Educational Psychology team, leaders and teachers in Neath Port Talbot provided a 'One Page Profile' via Microsoft Forms for all pupils to complete before the 'Check-in, catch-up, prepare for summer and September' period. This was an effective approach to gain direct, individual information from pupils regarding their wellbeing during the initial lockdown. This information served as a guide for teachers to plan more diverse and bespoke provision on their return, especially for specific vulnerable groups such as pupils with SEN.

55 Most pupils were happy to return to school in September 2020, for the social contact with friends as well as to progress their learning. Many headteachers we contacted commented on how engaged most pupils were, and how positively they were accepting new routines and procedures. Our survey of pupils in October 2020 found

that 77% agreed or strongly agreed that felt safe in school. Prior to the pandemic, 89% of pupils, on average, told us they felt safe in their school when they surveyed as part of their school inspection. This indicates the anxiety that a few pupils were feeling on returning to school, despite the protective measures that were in place. In particular, pupils expressed concern about the unsafe behaviour of a very few pupils who did not follow their school's rules and put others at risk. Some school leaders have noted that enforced changes to how the school operates, such as staggered break times, zones for different year groups and one way systems, have had a positive impact on pupils' behaviours and they are considering which changes may be useful to continue when the pandemic is over.

56 Pupils who were moving to a new class within their school or PRU or a new school or PRU in September 2020 had missed out on usual transition activities, including visits to familiarise themselves with the site and staff. Schools and PRUs made up for the lack of visits and opportunities to meet new staff in the summer term through helpful video tours and staff introductions alongside information on websites to help pupils prepare for their transition. In our survey, 92% of pupils moving to a new class in September felt that teachers helped them settle, with only a very few disagreeing.

57 Some primary schools have commented that young children starting school for the first time in September 2020 are less ready for school than is usually the case. They also noticed that children that who had their first year in school disrupted by the initial lockdown had regressed in their readiness for learning. For example, schools identified weaknesses in the development of these pupils' social and communication skills, and more children than normal are unable to toilet and feed themselves. This is making it harder for young pupils to settle, and is stretching the resource of staff to support them.

Cameo: Sharing a school's approach to supporting skills in the early years across Monmouthshire

One primary school in Monmouthshire noticed that the sudden ending of school in March had a significant negative impact on pupils in the reception class. From March, many of these young pupils made less progress in relation to their personal, social and learning skills than would have normally been expected. To help address this, leaders, teachers and support staff worked with parents to create a framework of skills to tackle this deficit. The local authority noted that the school's strategy seemed to be successful and shared the learning from this with other schools..

58 While almost all pupils returned to school or PRU in September 2020, a very few did not and some parents opted to educate their child at home. The number of pupils being educated at home has been steadily rising in recent years, but there has been a sharper increase this year. Around half of local authorities report that the number of families choosing to educate their children at home has increased as a result of the pandemic.

59 The Welsh Government postponed the introduction of statutory guidance and regulations on elective home education due to COVID-19, so local authorities

continue to have limited responsibilities and powers in relation to ensuring that every child's right to an education are upheld. Local authorities have varying degrees of success in their efforts to encourage these families to engage voluntarily. For the large proportion of families that are willing to engage, local authorities offer varying extent of support to parents and carers of children educated at home. For example, in Anglesey, officers established an elective home education forum to help to strengthen the procedures around home education and in Neath Port Talbot inclusion officers worked with schools to provide guidance to parents of pupils with a statement of special educational needs.

60 A very few pupils did not return to their school or PRU because of specific health and safety concerns that meant the risk to themselves or staff was too great. This included, for example, pupils with severe health conditions and those with extremely challenging behaviour. In these rare instances, local authorities have worked with schools and PRUs to ensure that these pupils can continue to learn from home as much as possible.

61 Local authorities often proactively supported vulnerable young people to return to school in September 2020. For example, in Ceredigion a team of youth specialists was attached to each secondary school. Youth workers, specialist behaviour workers and youth justice workers supported pupils who were known to be at risk of not engaging in their education. This support, in addition to that provided by the schools themselves, contributed to high attendance rates for these pupils.

Supporting wellbeing

62 For children and young people already challenged by several adverse childhood experiences, the pandemic may have magnified the challenges they face and taken a heavy toll on their wellbeing. Even children and young people in stable family environments with very few or no prior adverse childhood experiences have been significantly affected by the pandemic. For example, time away from friends caused by lockdowns, isolation periods or having to remain in tight bubbles at school can have an adverse impact on pupils' social development and their mental health. Indeed, schools and local authorities noted that some of the pupils they had become concerned about were not pupils that they would previously had recognised as vulnerable.

63 During the initial lockdown, schools and local authorities refined their approaches and systems for identifying and monitoring vulnerable pupils and sharing information between agencies. In Cardiff, for example, the local authority set up a new data system for collecting information on vulnerable pupils. The information was reviewed weekly by a 'joint vulnerable pupils panel', which planned a co-ordinated response across services.

64 During the initial lockdown, local authority services had to respond rapidly to support the wellbeing of all pupils, and particularly those known to be vulnerable. Where local authorities already had effective joint working across services and external agencies, this was evident in the efficiency with which they responded to needs. In authorities where collaboration is less well established, the pandemic has been a catalyst to strengthen joint working. For example, Anglesey and Gwynedd's

education psychology service has collaborated with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service to develop a new approach to supporting pupils who are absent from school because of their emotional wellbeing.

Cameo: Multi-disciplinary working – sharing information and providing solutions

A key feature of Bridgend's ability to adapt and respond quickly to the needs of children and young people, particularly those identified as vulnerable, has been the strong connections that exist across and within service areas. For example, the pre-existing 'early help locality service model' across the borough helps to ensure that professionals share relevant information with one another. Multi-disciplinary staff are co-located at three sites across the borough. Discussions and solution-focused work with families involve different specialist services. This integrated approach helps to ensure also that support is prioritised and allocated appropriately.

The development of the multi-agency safeguarding hub, in place for the past two years, has also contributed to a sharing of intelligence around safeguarding concerns for individuals. Colleagues from South Wales Police, the local health board and local authority are co-located and provide a single point of contact for agencies to refer into.

65 In the summer term 2020, school leaders often noted that they had been inundated with information, guidance and suggested resources and activities to support pupils' wellbeing and to support vulnerable pupils. This was a reflection of how all agencies, including local authorities, regional consortia, health services, police and justice services, local and national voluntary organisations, were keen to support children, young people and their families. Taking account of feedback from senior leaders, agencies helpfully rationalised their communication with schools during the autumn term.

66 In most cases, local authorities have ensured that statutory processes for pupils in relation to special education needs (SEN), including assessments and annual reviews, continued during the autumn term. Where there have been delays, this has most commonly been due to the capacity of educational psychology services and other specialist services, caused by staff absence or challenges in delivering services remotely. In Wrexham, the local authority has employed a locum educational psychologist to boost capacity in their service and help complete outstanding assessments. Local authority services, schools and PRUs have adapted so families and professionals involved with their child's education can meet online where necessary to facilitate statutory processes. During the autumn term, services gradually resumed face-to-face work to support assessment of pupils with SEN, although headteachers were frustrated by inconsistent approaches across agencies to returning to face-to-face work.

67 Local authority services to support pupils with special educational needs have found ways to continue support for pupils. For example, in Caerphilly, the regional SENCOM service for pupils with sensory difficulties has worked remotely with pupils through video conferencing technology and provided bespoke training to school staff so that they can support pupils with hearing or visual impairments.

68 Our survey of parents and carers in October 2020 found that the majority of those with children who receive additional support agreed that the school or PRU is considering their child's needs and providing appropriate resources, support and guidance for them. A similar proportion felt that the school or PRU makes appropriate arrangements for their child to discuss their feelings, health and wellbeing or concerns. On both matters, a few parents disagreed. Where parents and carers had concerns, these related to poor communication about how their child's needs would be met, support outlined in a statement for special educational needs not being provided, reduced support for pupils with autistic spectrum condition, and general concerns about the usual support not being provided.

69 The Welsh Government gave local authorities additional funding this year to increase the capacity of counselling services. These services are provided directly by some local authorities, although more commonly the service is commissioned from an external provider. In some cases, the funding has been used to extend access to Year 4 and Year 5 children as local authorities are only required to provide a service for Year 6 children in primary school. In the Vale of Glamorgan, the local authority has employed a play therapist to provide support to younger children in primary schools, to complement the counselling service. Lots of counsellors have completed additional training in counselling online. While some counselling services resumed face-to-face sessions with children and young people during the autumn term, others continued to provide sessions online or over the telephone as they did during the initial lockdown. Young people around Wales have mixed views about counselling via video or telephone calls: some find it easier to talk to a counsellor this way whereas others have not engaged and are waiting for face-to-face sessions to resume.

70 Some local authorities and consortia are supporting schools to use their 'Recruit, recover, raise standards' programme grant from the Welsh Government to increase capacity to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of pupils. For example, in Ceredigion, schools have used the funding to increase the hours of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants, working under the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service 'In-Reach' pilot.

71 Safeguarding work with children, young people and families continued online through the autumn term when circumstances meant that this was the best option. While the rate of children placed on the child protection register was a little lower than usual during the initial lockdown period, the rate rose through August 2020 and peaked in September before dropping again through the autumn term. The peak rate was not a significant increase compared to typical fluctuations or the long term trend for rising numbers of children being placed on the register nationally. There is no clear correlation between the local authorities seeing the highest increases in the rate of children placed on the child protection register and the incidence of COVID-19 in the community.

72 Young people have often spent more time online than usual due to periods of self-isolation and restrictions on activities that they would usually be involved in. In Monmouthshire, the local authority recognised the increased safeguarding risk associated with this. Local authority officers worked with their schools, the PRU and the Home Office to hold more frequent Channel Panels to review concerns about pupils relating to extremism or radicalisation.

73 School attendance was understandably affected by COVID-19 in the autumn term. After pupils gradually returned at the start of September 2020, attendance peaked at 88% at the start of October. Attendance dropped through October as the incidence of COVID-19 began to rise sharply in some parts of Wales. Attendance was 90% in the first week after the firebreak in November, which included half-term, before dropping through the rest of the autumn term. Attendance in the autumn term is highest for pupils in primary schools, with the exception of nursery pupils. Pupils in Years 11, 12 and 13 have the lowest attendance. Much of the absence is explained by pupils having to self-isolate. Although recorded as authorised absence, schools provide distance learning for these pupils, although for logistical reasons there is often a delay of a day or so before the full distance learning offer is in place for self-isolating pupils. School leaders report that pupils often make slower progress in their learning when self-isolating.

74 There is a close correlation between school attendance rates and local COVID-19 rates. Through the autumn term, pupils were affected unequally as enforced self-isolation due to close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case affected certain parts of Wales more than others. Some pupils experienced several weeks of distance learning during the autumn term due to self-isolation, whereas other pupils were in school every day.

75 The 'Test, Trace and Protect' (TTP) strategy in Wales is a partnership between the Welsh Government, local authorities and NHS organisations. The purpose of the strategy is 'to enhance health surveillance in the community, undertake effective and extensive contact tracing, and support people to self-isolate where required to do so' (Welsh Government, 2020f). The strategy appears to have been implemented slightly differently across Wales when a positive COVID-19 case has been confirmed in a school. In some local areas, much larger groups of pupils have been regarded as a close contact compared to other areas despite schools having similar protective measures in place. This has particularly affected older pupils in secondary schools, with some of these pupils having several weeks away from school in self-isolation during the autumn term. The local variation in implementation of the TTP strategy has impacted pupils' progress and wellbeing unequally across Wales.

76 When pupils are required to self-isolate, some local authorities work with schools to share this information across services and with partners so that vulnerable pupils can be offered additional support. For example, in cases where a pupil is on the child protection register in Denbighshire, officers make contact on the first day of self-isolation to ensure that support is in place. When several hundred pupils from a school serving an area of high deprivation were required to self-isolate, Denbighshire's Youth Support Team worked constructively in partnership with local police officers to support young people who were gathering outside during the day instead of self-isolating.

77 Schools, PRUs and education services sometimes reported that they had noted a rise in concerns about pupils' mental health. All local authorities have sought to ensure that schools and PRUs are aware of all the support that is available for pupils struggling with their mental health.

Cameo: Guidance on supporting learners' mental health and wellbeing

From the outset, Swansea has prioritised the health and wellbeing of learners and staff. The improved sharing of information across the local authority and with external agencies during the pandemic, allowed officers to focus on common issues affecting learners across Swansea. In particular it became evident that there could be an increase of learners self-harming, suffering from anxiety and depression or attempting to take their own lives. As a result, the local authority produced timely guidance for schools to support their learners and information on where to seek further help. The guidance was also shared with a neighbouring local authority to help support their learners.

Supporting vulnerable pupils

78 Schools have found it particularly challenging to support all their vulnerable pupils. Our survey of support staff found that many of them feel that they have been providing effective support to vulnerable pupils, with hardly any disagreeing. In the same survey, just over half of teachers felt that they were able to meet the needs of their vulnerable pupils, with around two-in-ten teachers disagreeing.

79 Children and young people who are Gypsy, Roma or Travellers often miss more school than most pupils for cultural reasons. Local authorities have worked hard to maintain contact with families and encourage them to return to school in September. For example, officers in Carmarthenshire used an existing WhatsApp support group to keep families engaged and as a platform for offering support where needed. This authority is also providing these families with access to a tailored package of activities to support language skills as this was identified as a common concern.

80 Pupils with English or Welsh as an additional language are particularly vulnerable to making little progress when they are expected to learn from home, as was the case during the initial lockdown and periods of self-isolation in the autumn term. Often these pupils' parents or carers do not understand English or Welsh and therefore find it difficult to support their child's learning. In Newport, the Gwent Education Minority Ethnic Service (GEMS) continued to support pupils at home during the autumn term. Multi-lingual staff in GEMS kept in regular contact with families affected, to support pupils to continue learning as well as to monitor their wellbeing.

81 Operation Encompass is a relatively new scheme where police services commit to contacting key staff in relevant schools before the start of the next school day if they have been called to an incident of domestic abuse at a child's home. This early information enables schools to offer immediate support to pupils affected. As lots of schools remained in contact with vulnerable families during the school summer holidays and the two-week firebreak in the autumn term, authorities such as Cardiff worked with police services to extend the scheme to operate through these periods too.

82 Children and young people looked after by local authorities are among the most vulnerable in Wales, both in terms of their wellbeing as well as their education outcomes. Local authorities have often added in extra checks and support for these

children and young people during the pandemic. For example, in Bridgend local authority officers visited care placements weekly, which helped them to identify potential placement breakdowns and be proactive in providing additional support where needed rather than waiting for placements to fail. Anglesey and Gwynedd local authorities provided looked-after children with a laptop to enable them to continue learning at home during lockdown or self-isolation periods.

83 Pupils in work-based learning have faced redundancy or anxiety related to potential redundancy during the autumn term. Some vocational courses, such as hair and beauty, have been significantly affected by the pandemic. This has disproportionately affected vulnerable pupils who are more likely than their peers to follow vocational routes at ages 14-19. For example, older secondary-aged pupils in Merthyr could not continue with junior apprenticeships run by the local college. This caused considerable disappointment for these young people, the vast majority of whom returned to school full-time while the local authority had to make alternative provision for the rest.

Cameo: Local authority support for vocational provision

In one secondary school in Pembrokeshire, leaders had already planned to evaluate and review its vocational provision during the last academic year. They worked with a local authority officer to carry out this evaluation. The school no longer employs an external vocational provider and has created its own vocational provision. It has employed three staff from the previous provider and a qualified teacher to supervise the provision. This has resulted in a significant financial saving for the school as well as allowing leaders to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the provision more closely. Around 230 learners currently access the vocational provision as part of their curriculum. The school has worked with the local authority so pupils from other providers can also access this provision. Through its vocational courses, the school now provides a crèche, nursery, and a motor vehicle workshop that serves the local community.

84 It is difficult to assess the impact of the pandemic on the proportion of young people in Wales who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Work to monitor and support young people to secure a suitable destination at the end of Year 11 into the autumn was significantly affected. Given the pandemic's national impact on employment and training generally, it is not surprising that early information from some local authorities suggests that more young people are NEET at age 16 this year than in recent years. In Swansea, pupils that schools and the PRU had identified at risk of becoming NEET were prioritised for support in the summer 2020. The young people were referred to multi-agency early help hubs for support and guidance on their next steps, and local authority officers continued to monitor their progress in the autumn term and provide support where necessary. As a result, nearly all of these vulnerable pupils have been engaged in some form of education, employment or training during the autumn, despite the challenges brought by the pandemic.

Cameo: Supporting disengaged pupils

Wrexham local authority planned a programme to target Year 9 learners who have become increasingly disengaged with education during the COVID-19 period or have become vulnerable due to their COVID-19 experiences. The programme includes 15 weekly sessions where between 10 and 15 pupils from six secondary schools take part in activities and challenges to develop their engagement with learning and resilience. Activities include problem-solving workshops, outdoor activities, workshops with motivational speakers and support from Careers Wales delivered online.

85 Pupils eligible for free school meals have poorer outcomes than their peers. The pandemic has hampered the efforts of the education system to support these pupils to achieve better outcomes than their predecessors. Headteachers have told us that this group of pupils made slower progress in their learning during the initial lockdown, with some pupils returning the school with weaker language and numeracy skills than before the lockdown started. In addition to the annual Pupil Development Grant, the Welsh Government has provided schools with additional funding through the 'Recruit, recover, raise standards' grant. Local authorities and regional consortia have advised schools on how this grant could be used to fund suitable strategies to support pupils eligible for free school meals to catch up on their learning during the autumn term and beyond. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, the local authority has worked with the Child Poverty Action Group to strengthen its support for pupils living in poverty. For example, a cluster of schools has focused on identifying the local barriers to learning that exist because of poverty currently and is working with the Action Group and local authority to address these.

86 Rising obesity in children and young people is a national concern as it leaves them susceptible to poor physical health. Obesity is primarily caused by what children and young people eat and drink and how physically active they are. It appears that pupils have had fewer opportunities to be physically active at school during the autumn term than would usually be the case. In our learner survey, 77% agree they have enough chance to exercise, which is lower than the average response from inspection surveys where 86% of pupils agree. A lot of schools have reduced the time pupils have for lunch breaks in order to protect bubbles of pupils using facilities, meaning that pupils have less time to play and be physically active. Very few schools ran any after school clubs during the autumn term that involved physical activity, and the usual sports competitions between schools have not taken place. Local authorities have taken different approaches to access to outdoor play equipment and parks, and leisure facilities and gyms have been forced to close locally and nationally at times due to government restrictions.

87 Local authority youth workers played a significant role in supporting vulnerable children, young people and their families during the initial lockdown and have continued to provide support through the autumn term. Youth workers are often highly skilled at building relationships quickly with young people, gaining their trust and finding creative ways to support young people, especially those who are at risk of disengaging with their education. Youth workers already used technology to communicate with young people, and have built on this during the pandemic by

setting up more online spaces where young people can connect safely with each other and with youth workers to socialise and discuss issues that interest or concern them. Some of these spaces were set up for specific groups, for example for young people wishing to chat online in Welsh or for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people.

88 Youth workers have struggled to maintain contact with a very few vulnerable young people who do not have regular internet access or do not like to use online tools. Despite the effectiveness of online communications, young people often regret the lack of in-person social interaction they have had this year. Where safe to, youth workers have re-established opportunities to meet with young people in person. For example, youth workers in Powys have visited the key market towns between 5pm and 7pm during the autumn to engage with young people informally, which has provided useful opportunities to check on their wellbeing and help them to access support if required.

89 Despite having extremely heavy workloads, some local authority services have created space to consider what is working well and how they could improve the way they are supporting vulnerable pupils and their families.

Cameo: Evaluating family experiences

The ALN and Social Inclusion team in Conwy is eager to learn more about the effect of this pandemic on vulnerable learners and their families. As a result, officers are involved in a project that is based on 'Evaluating family experiences during lockdown', including focus on COVID-19 bereavement support and enhanced counselling support. This has been supplemented by training for individual schools delivered by the Educational Psychology Service on request. This is in preparation for another possible lockdown situation.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

As part of the work we engaged in discussions with 340 schools and PRUs across Wales and held meetings with staff in every local authority and regional consortia.

We issued surveys to seek the views of:

- leaders
- teachers
- support staff
- governors
- parents/carers
- learners in key stages 2 and above

In addition, we looked at a range of documentary evidence provided by local authorities and regional consortia as well as nationally available guidance, data and research.

Appendix 2

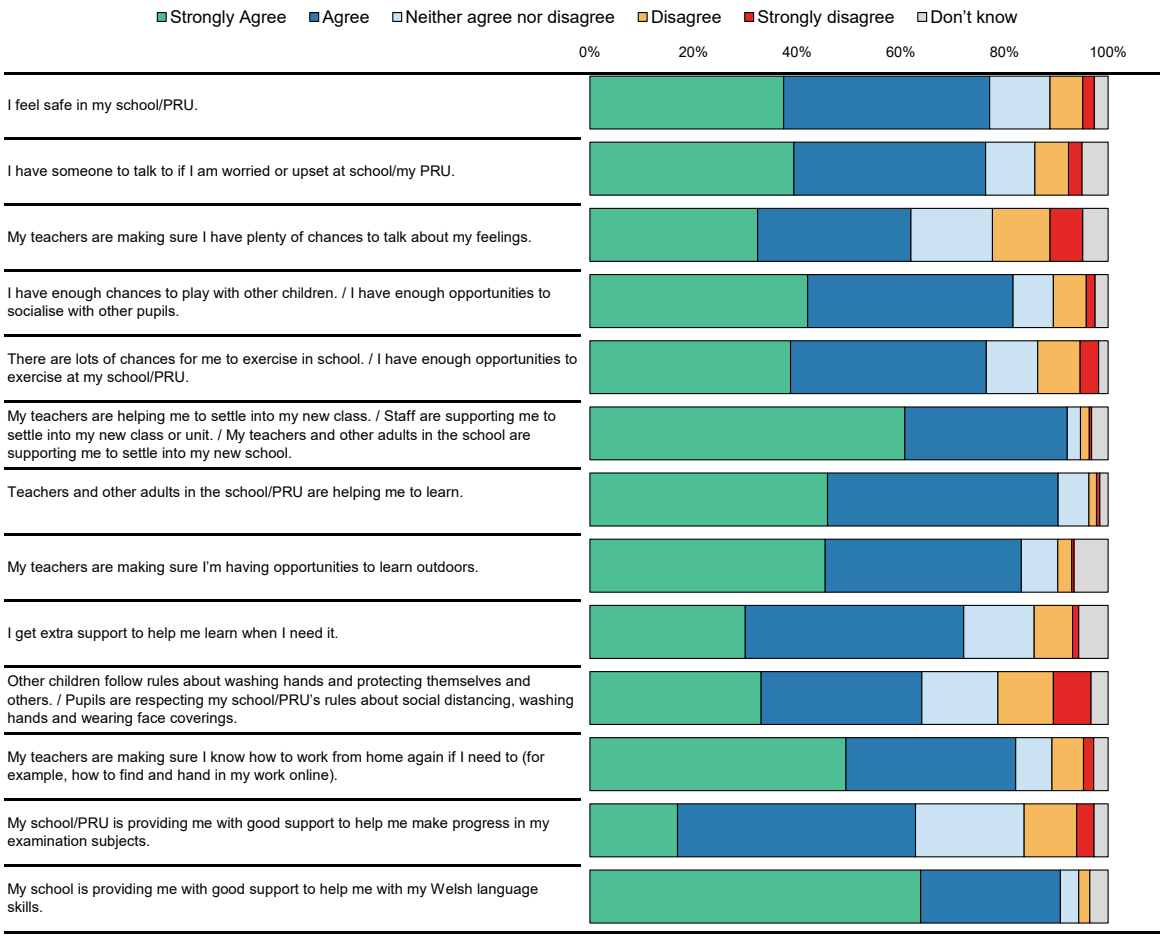
In addition to the calls to schools and LA, we issued and promoted surveys to stakeholders.

We had individual surveys for learners, parents or carers, school or PRU leaders, teachers, support staff and governors or members of PRU management committees. Some of the questions were directed at specific groups within those populations, so not all questions have been responded by all participants.

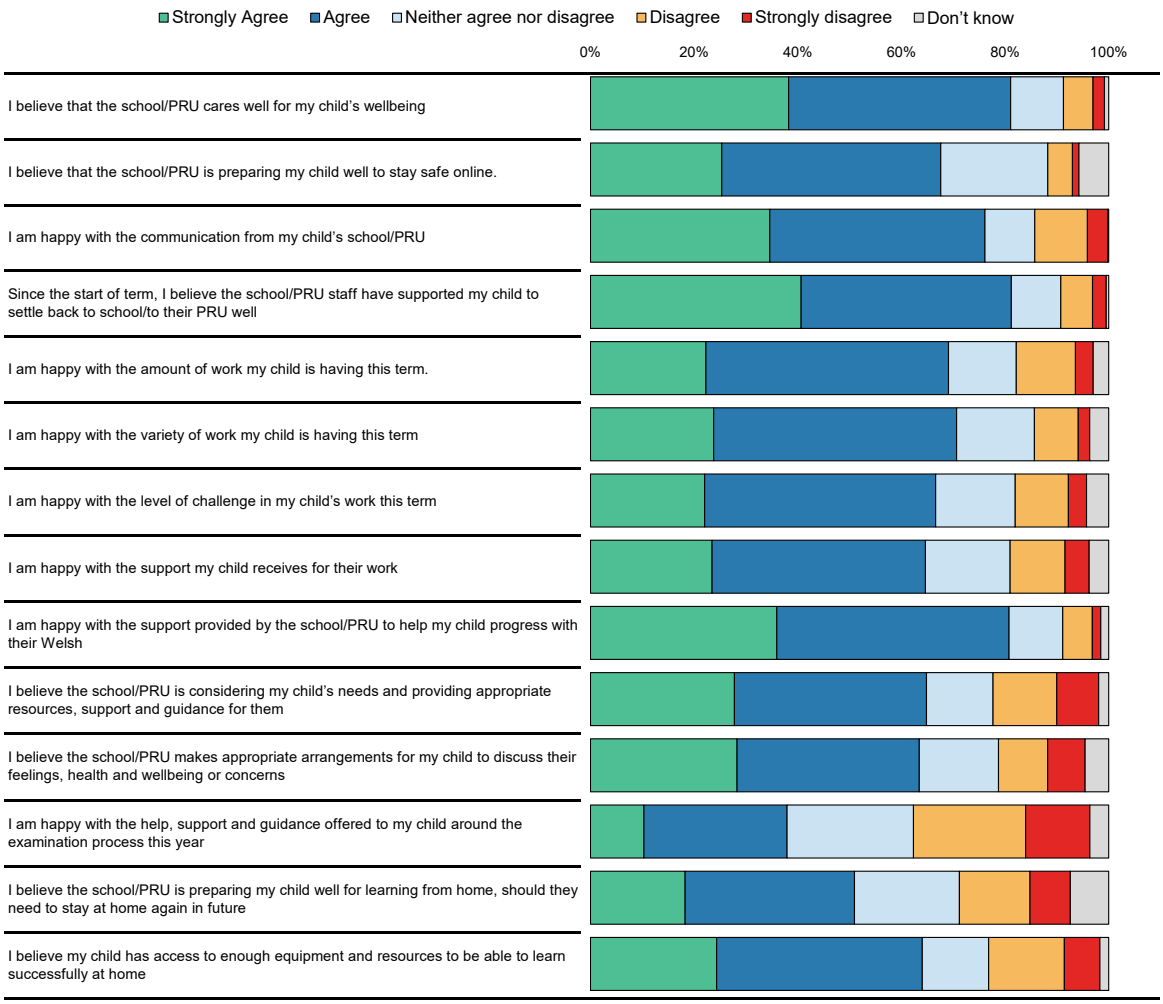
The responses are summarised below.

Stakeholders were also able to leave a comment to explain their answers or provide additional information. These were analysed and the information used to inform this report.

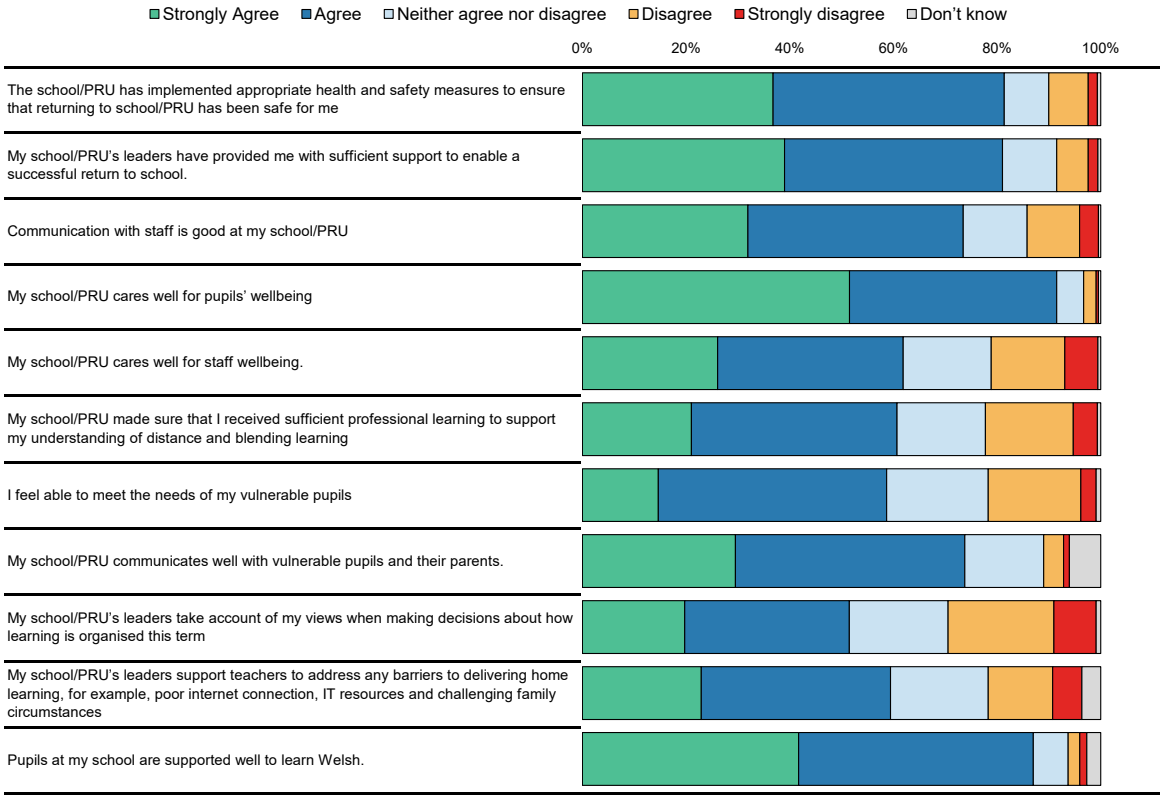
Learners (760 responses)



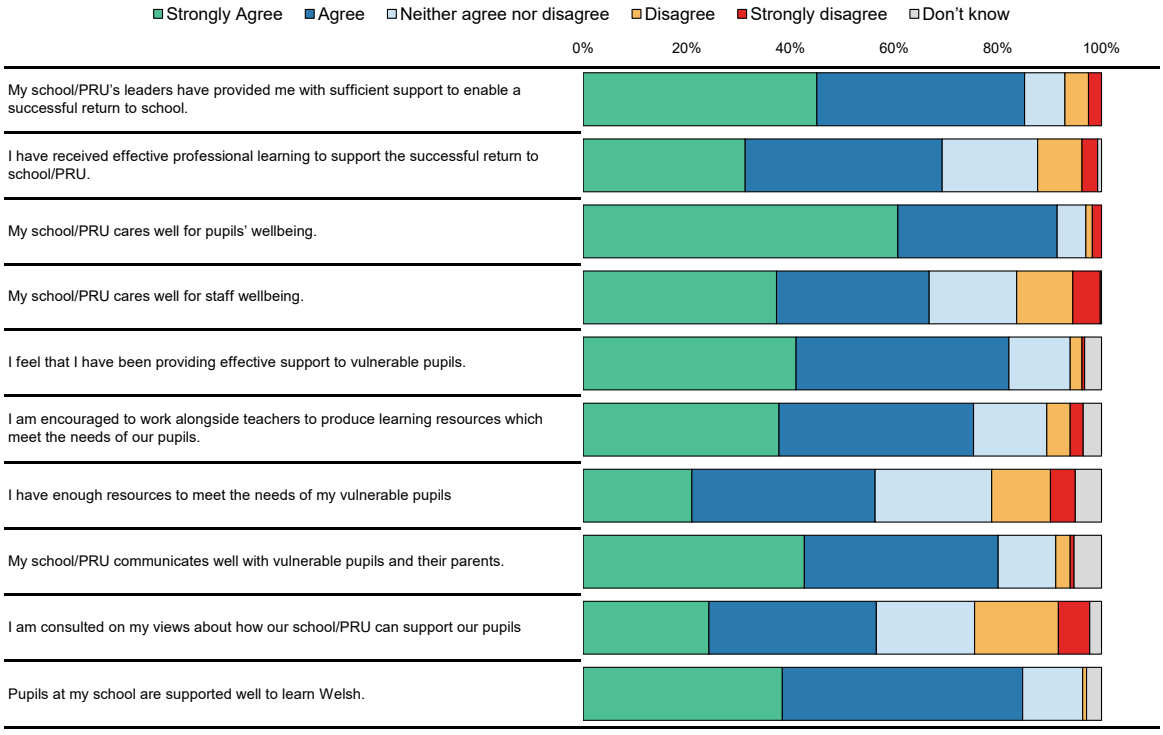
Parents and carers (3620 responses)



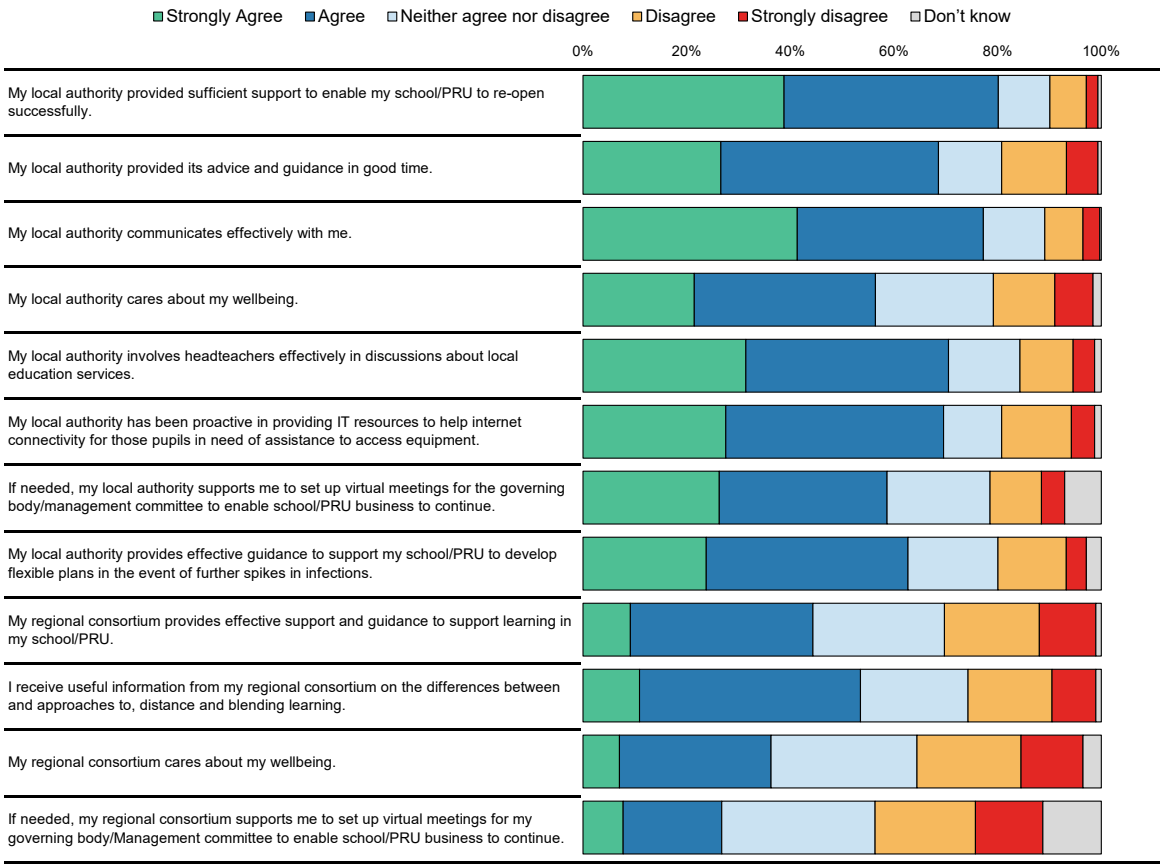
Teachers (908 responses)



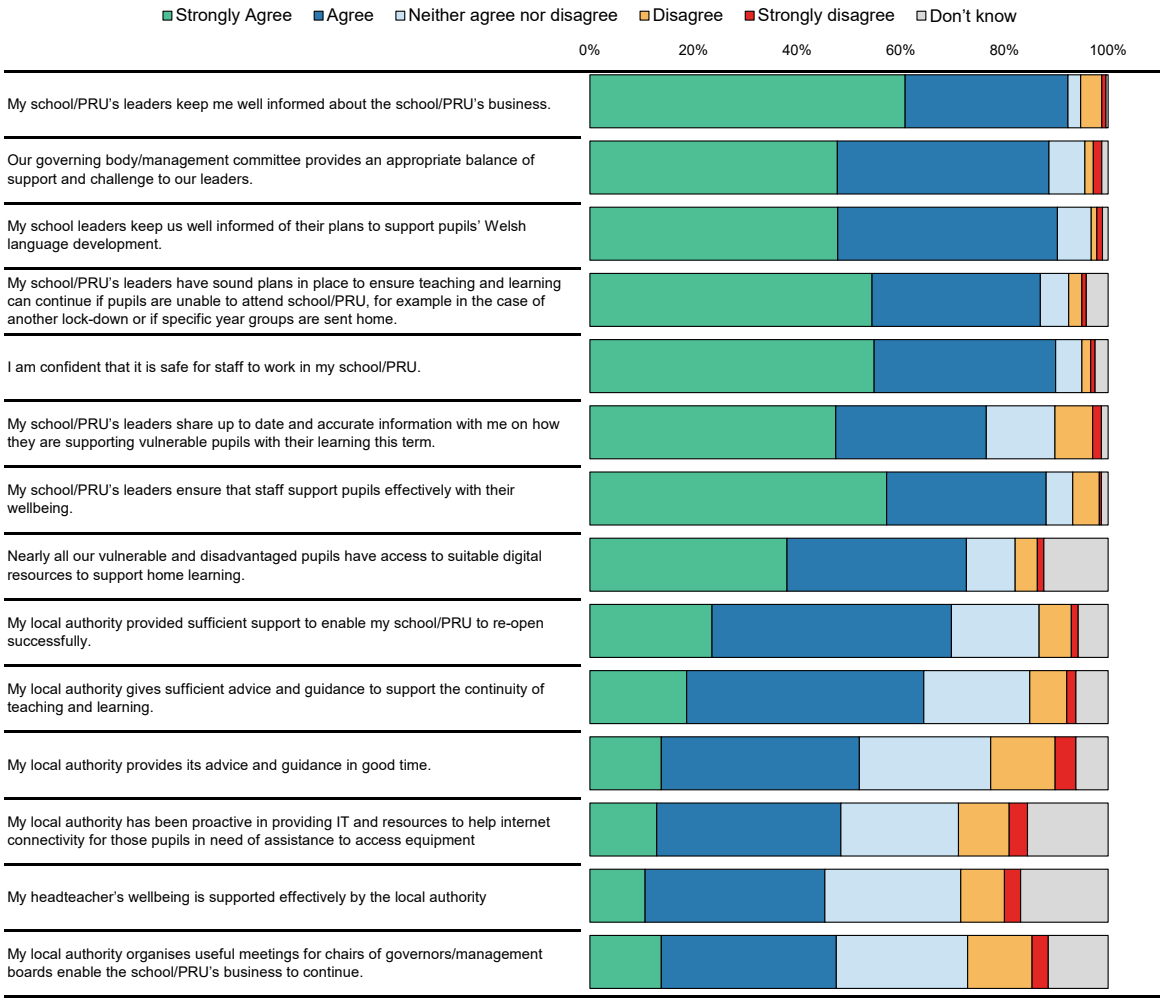
Support staff (397 responses)



Leaders (312 responses)



Governors (245 responses)



Appendix 3: Estyn publications

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

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

Appendix 4: Timeline

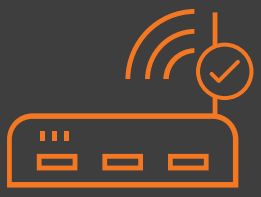
March 2020

- 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



- 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.

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.

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.

September 2020

- All pupils return to school, phasing in during the first two weeks of term.
- Minister for Education announces a commitment to provide free face coverings for all learners in secondary school and further education settings.
- Minister for Education announces that all pupils eligible for free school meals will continue to receive provisions if they are shielding or have to self-isolate.
- Estyn begins engagement calls to schools, PRUs, and post-16 settings on request from the Welsh Government to carry out a thematic review of the extent and impact of local authorities' and regional consortia's approaches to supporting schools, their school communities, governing bodies and learners. Estyn also opens a survey for learners, governors, parents and school staff to share their experiences.

October 2020

- The Education Policy Institute (EPI) publishes a report that describes the way the Welsh Government provided laptops and wi-fi devices to address the lack of access to online learning caused by the coronavirus pandemic as 'commendable'. The report states that, in contrast to other UK nations, the Welsh Government was able to draw on 'well established infrastructure to act quickly following the closures'.
- Minister for Education publishes an updated action plan setting out the next steps in Wales' reform journey, ahead of the introduction of the new Curriculum for Wales in 2022. The action plan, known as Our National Mission, shows the steps the Welsh Government has taken in response to the coronavirus pandemic and its response to the independent report published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
- Minister for Education announces that "there will be an uplift of pay to reward our highly skilled and hardworking teachers in Wales." This includes an agreement in principle to accept all of the Independent Welsh Pay Review Body's recommendations for 2020/21.
- Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services announces £12.5m package of funding to support vulnerable children and families.

November 2020

- Pupils in Years 9-13 remain at home for the week after half-term as part of the national 'firebreak'.
- Minister for Education announces that there will be no end of year exams for learners taking GCSEs, AS levels or A levels in 2021. In place of exams, the Welsh Government intends to work with schools and colleges to take forward teacher managed assessments, including assessments that will be externally set and marked but delivered within a classroom environment under teacher supervision.
- Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services launches the new 'Parenting. Give it Time' campaign providing information, support and advice for parents. The new campaign covers issues reflecting parents' concerns during the pandemic, including how to understand and respond to children's behaviour.

December 2020

- Estyn publishes its insight reports on the immediate effects of the pandemic on schools, PRUs and all age settings. These reports summarise the findings made from the engagement calls carried out during September and October.
- Estyn publishes the Chief Inspector's Annual Report for 2019-2020. This annual report reviews the standards and quality of education and training in Wales from September 2019 to March 2020. It also offers an initial account of how schools and other education and training providers supported pupils and students during lockdown while providing continuity of learning for them remotely.
- Minister for Education decides that all secondary schools and colleges in Wales will move to online learning for the last week of term, with local decisions to be made about whether or not other schools would be open that week.

Glossary

Distance learning	Where work is set and/or lessons broadcast (live or pre-recorded) to learners at home. This means that they are not required to attend school to access.
Blended learning	Where learners are provided with a combination of face-to-face learning provided in school, which is complemented by cohesively planned distance learning tasks and activities
CSC	The regional consortium for school improvement for central south Wales
EAS	The regional consortium for school improvement for south east Wales
ERW	The regional consortium for school improvement for south west Wales
GwE	The regional consortium for school improvement for north Wales

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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Dear Arwyn,

During the early autumn term, the Welsh Government asked us to undertake a review of local authorities and regional consortia's work in supporting their learning communities in schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) during the period from March to October 2020.

This letter outlines the outcome of this work in GwE. The content of the letter is based on virtual meetings with officers, as well as information from a sample of schools and PRUs in the local authorities across the GwE region. We have also considered the supporting documentation provided by GwE officers and the feedback from surveys of school/PRU leaders, governors, teachers and support staff, parents and pupils. We have referred to the outcomes of the surveys where relevant, although the surveys were mainly be used to inform the national report which was published on our website on 15 January. Here is a link to that report.

We would like to thank your staff for giving of their time to discuss their work with us and for providing additional information on request.

Yours sincerely

Meilyr Rowlands
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

The regional consortia's work to support schools and PRUs: March – August 2020

Leadership and collaboration

Educational portfolio holders and directors of education from the six local authorities worked with GwE to discuss the effect of the pandemic on education. They agreed a consistent regional approach to try to mitigate its effects.

GwE leaders worked closely with local authority managers to develop and share regional guidance to support schools and PRUs through the pandemic. At the beginning of the lockdown period, a communication strategy was agreed with the directors of the six local authorities and GwE. This strategy included Supporting Improvement Advisers (SIAs) contacting schools regularly to support headteachers and alleviate concerns. Regular contact with schools in order to support the health and wellbeing of staff and pupils was a consortium priority and schools welcomed this approach. In a number of instances, the consortium deployed its staff to a local authority to support with essential services or to schools and PRUs to support them to remain open.

The consortium continued to operate its governance structure from the start of lockdown. The GwE Joint Committee met virtually and considered revisions to its plans and work due to the pandemic. The Joint Committee also continued with matters that they would usually consider, such as the service's value for money and audit reports. The GwE Managing Director and the Joint Committee worked well to anticipate and plan for issues proactively. For example, they discussed establishing a regional approach to the transition of pupils back into schools in good time before any final decisions were made nationally. This enabled local authorities, GwE and schools to prepare and respond quickly when Welsh Government instructed schools to reopen for more learners.

Schools and providers became more accustomed to working virtually, and received support from the regional consortium and local authorities to develop their ways of working. Many schools mentioned their appreciation of the regular online contact meetings with their SIA. These included meetings within school clusters across the region to share regular updates, to consider any lessons learned and to ensure headteachers were able to share any problems and concerns.

The consortium worked well nationally to develop distance learning guidance for schools in collaboration with other regions. The region has continued to look at international research and sourced external advice to improve practice.

Promoting learning

From March 2020, GwE adapted its work to focus on five distinct phases. These were the pre-lockdown phase; supporting schools at the beginning of lockdown; distance learning; supporting schools to re-open and the blended learning phase. GwE recognised that its SIAs would have an evolving role in supporting schools to develop their distance learning approaches.

GwE worked closely with its local authorities to share guidance and advice to schools during each phase. Resources, websites and professional learning materials were shared with schools including 'How to' videos to help teachers develop their approaches to distance learning. Most school leaders feel that GwE have provided helpful support through its digital platform, the 'GwE Support Centre'. This contains all the resources and materials produced by the consortium during the COVID-19 period. GwE ensured that staff and learners could access a range of classroom learning materials, such as support for maintaining and developing literacy, numeracy and digital skills. GwE established an online classroom for each key stage and uploaded an initial bank of practical resources and links for schools to adapt and use with their own learners. The platform also included resources help to maintain connections between teaching and support staff during this period of potential social isolation, including support for building resilience and personal wellbeing.

GwE recognised that schools were at different stages in developing their support for distance learning and that their approach would vary according to their context and capacity. During this time, the consortium produced guidance to support effective distance learning and was proactive in helping schools produce their own distance learning models. This included exemplar models in order to share good practice across the region. Many of these were based on international research and gaining a deeper understanding of distance learning approaches and principles.

Between March and the end of May, GwE conducted an overview of the level of engagement of learners in distance learning. SIAs contacted all schools to gather feedback on the engagement of learners. Many of the SIAs had prior knowledge and information on the level of engagement and were able work collaboratively with schools. This work enabled the consortium to develop a regional overview of current practice, and to identify effective practice to inform and support regional guidance. The information helped to identify key barriers in learners' engagement and how the consortium could support schools in collaboration with local authorities and other partners. The report also identified the need to strengthen schools' tracking of the impact of engagement.

From June onwards, a key activity was to support the planning of pupils' transition back into school in a positive frame of mind, and to continue as seamlessly as possible with their learning. This included providing support to schools to ensure the health and wellbeing of learners returning to a very different classroom during the phased return and supporting teachers in the transition from consolidating previous learning to the teaching of new aspects. In addition, SIA supported schools with ideas about monitoring and giving constructive feedback on pupils' work.

GwE evaluated the capacity and ability of schools in their region to use the various learning platforms that are available. This provided the consortium with an understanding of which schools required additional support to develop their on-line distance learning resources and which members of staff required further training in using the technology. Overall, many schools within the GwE region noted that they saw value in the digital resources provided by the consortium during this period. A number of headteachers identified that their staff have become more confident in using technology and that its increased use had a positive impact on learning overall.

The continued support for professional learning was appreciated by many schools. For example, GwE provided support for teaching assistants (TAs) through the development of an online classroom, which included a suite of professional development opportunities. Schools were also positive about SIAs' support to subject areas in the secondary sector and their regular meetings with groups of subject teachers. The consortium has also invested in engaging its own staff in professional learning to develop their understanding of distance learning, including researching best practice national and internationally.

Local authorities within the region spoke of their open and positive relationship with GwE, whom they consider to have been at the forefront of developing the continuity of learning support and guidance for schools. Local authorities believe that at the end of June, when many pupils' returned to schools, and subsequently at the beginning of September, the consortium provided valuable support. For example, GwE provided support and guidance so that staff, pupils and parents could get used to new routines designed to keep everyone safe for re-opening schools.

At a national level, GwE worked closely with the other regional consortia to develop a collegiate response to these very challenging circumstances. GwE leaders and staff maintained regular discussions and collaboration with Welsh Government on delivering the Continuity for Learning Plan and have been involved in supporting most of the key deliverables. GwE was a key driver for developing and publishing a blended learning guidance and exemplar blended learning models in collaboration with Estyn and the other regional consortia.

Supporting vulnerable learners

On 23rd March, schools were re-purposed to support pupils of key workers and some vulnerable learners. In response, GwE adapted their work in order to continue to provide services and support for schools within its region. Regional and local roles were identified in order to support vulnerable learners and GwE staff accessed further professional development and training to help them support school leadership in these areas.

During this period, GwE supported schools and local authorities with a focus on the safety and wellbeing of pupils and the workforce. A key driver for this work was to ensure support for the physical and mental wellbeing of pupils and young people, including preparing for them to return to school with motivation and enthusiasm to

learn. The consortium's SIAs ensured regular contact with the headteacher of their link schools, to check on their wellbeing and to ensure that they received appropriate support.

The regional consortium notes that at the time, the logistics of opening schools to all learners for the 'Check in, catch up' period were complicated. GwE's Management Board were committed to working in partnership across the region to adopt a consistent approach in developing a supportive framework to help schools during this period. As part of this, GwE's SIAs worked with local authority representatives to formulate a return to school plan. This aimed to support all schools in the region to ensure they had the right policies in place and a comprehensive risk assessment that they could tailor to the circumstances in their own school. GwE worked with the local authorities in the region to develop a common approach to risk assessment. This acted as a guide for school leaders to plan for reopening schools and PRUs for the 'Check in, catch up' period and for reopening fully in September. The risk assessment framework is presented as a dashboard and includes policies, documentation and checklists. This was regularly updated as Welsh Government guidance was issued. Local authorities' corporate health and safety officers quality assured and tested the procedures to address concerns and issues. School leaders note that they appreciate the consistent approach across their local authority area and region and in particular, the dashboard developed by GwE. In addition, they were positive about the helpful communication channels, including the headteacher fora.

The consortium worked in partnership with local authority officers such as the inclusion teams, human resource and transport to consider learners' needs and appropriate learning experiences, in particular, to support their health and wellbeing. GwE SIAs and local authorities continued to work closely with schools as they worked to adapt their settings to be as safe as possible for their learners.

The regional consortium's work to support its schools and PRUs from September 2020

Leadership and collaboration

In preparation for the full return of pupils to schools and PRUs in September, GwE revised its work plan, adapting its priorities to meet the needs of schools.

GwE continued to work closely with local authorities, schools and PRUs. Evidence from our engagement calls suggest that schools value the support and training given by regional SIA on teaching and learning, and in particular the guidance on blended and digital learning.

GwE has been a key driver in helping disseminate information and guidance to schools. For example, through its 'universal wellbeing and learner support

dashboard' a professional learning directory was developed and a range of guidance was shared with all schools across the region. This was communicated through the cluster approach and with officers within each local authority. At the beginning of the lockdown period, a minority of schools communicated that they had difficulties in getting to the right information promptly. This led to GwE making adaptations to the website and since September, most schools are complimentary about using the dashboard and the accessibility of other sources of information from GwE and their local authority. Overall, communication and access to information has improved considerably during this period.

The regional 'Return to School Group', with representatives of the six local authorities and GwE, has been a useful conduit to steer a co-ordinated approach to respond to COVID-19 challenges across the region.

Cameo: Regional 'Return to School Group

The aim of establishing the group was to develop a consistent, cohesive and collaborative regional approach to respond to COVID-19 challenges across all six local authorities. The group aimed to:

- provide all schools with timely and appropriate support
- ensure all learners were kept safe and well during this period
- promote a high quality learning offer (through distance and blended learning)
- ensure that clear communication channels are established to allow two-way flow of information across the region – with schools and the wider community
- listen to the voice of headteachers
- support the wellbeing of headteachers and staff of schools
- provide schools with a comprehensive framework to support the work in restarting schools, including support on risk assessments
- re-focus the work of GwE team members where needed to support local authority colleagues.

During this period the group:

- worked in partnership to offer schools a risk assessment matrix for primary, secondary, special and PRU settings
- developed a dashboard of resources with regional and national guidance to act as a 'one stop shop' for all schools to access
- collaboratively wrote COVID-19 amendments or appendices to existing policies for use by all schools across the region
- developed a communication strategy for the work of the group based on three pillars of 'inform, support, listen'
- co-ordinated contributions from regional sub-groups to provide consistent and timely messaging to schools on human resource guidance, transport, and learner support to include universal and targeted wellbeing support
- supported all schools with resources to develop blended learning as part of promoting high-quality learning provision for all learners across all schools

- supported all schools with resources to support the planning of accelerating learning

In our contact with schools and local authorities within the region, many appreciated the co-ordinated approach during this period. The facilitating and strengthening of collaboration and team-working at many levels between the local authorities and GwE has had a positive impact on schools across the north Wales region. Some schools have commented that they now have a clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities around addressing issues with the pandemic and appreciate being able to work collaboratively across clusters to share, and have access to, expertise. A few headteachers noted that keeping learners and staff focused on reopening schools built confidence among school leaders, staff and families.

To ensure continuity for their learners, planning for different scenarios, on several levels has also been a key activity of local authority and GwE leaders since September. Leaders identified the need to support and prepare schools for possible future eventualities beyond their control. Through this, GwE and the local authorities encouraged schools to reflect on lessons learnt from the lockdown period and scenario plan for a potential further lockdown. Since the return in September, many schools have faced different challenges, for example with pupils at home self-isolating. The various scenarios included considering what learning could look like in different contexts, a fully open school, to one where all pupils are learning at home. This helped the consortium and schools consider the robustness of their distance and blended learning models.

GwE senior leaders are proactive in continuing to provide direction and vision to support leaders in schools. In particular, they are aware that headteachers, school leaders and education officers are presently working under difficult circumstances. All SIAs have continued their regular contact with the headteachers of their link schools, to check on their wellbeing and to ensure that they receive the assistance they need. To support this further, a series of workshops are available to school leaders and education officers with a focus on their wellbeing, such as on developing resilience, adapting to a changing environment and personal reflection. This continuing support of the workforce demonstrates a sound awareness by leaders in GwE and the local authorities of their likely wellbeing and development needs in the near future.

GwE provided advice and guidance to headteachers so that they could consider how to adjust their schools' strategic plans under the current circumstances. Although reviewing progress against the 2019-20 school development plans remains statutory, the consortium notes that most schools have taken a measured approach by reviewing their priorities up to March 2020. The consortium provided additional guidance to school leaders on the possible content of their school development plans to enable them to report on progress beyond March. This included possibilities for schools to consider the progress around their work on distance learning, staff professional learning and curriculum adjustments in line with what they needed to address during the pandemic.

Promoting learning

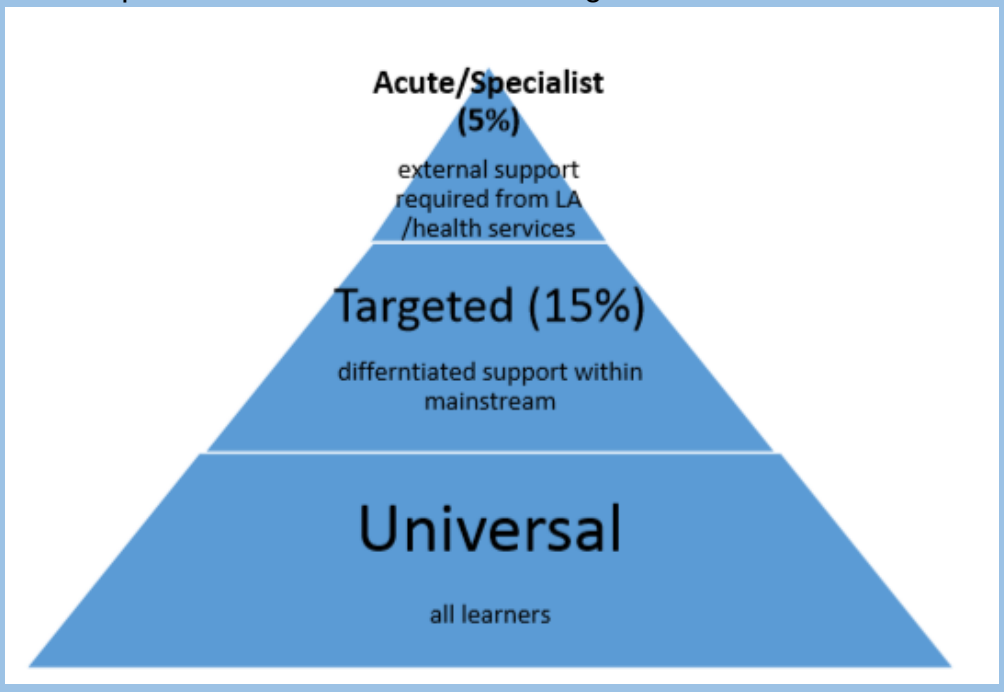
During the summer term and over the summer holidays, GwE and the local authorities worked with schools and PRUs to support their planning for the return to school in September.

Cameo: Re-starting learning model for North Wales

GwE developed a regional model, with local authorities and schools, to ensure that the individual needs of learners could be met, with consideration to their local context. The model evaluated the school's preparedness and approach to ensure learning for all pupils continued. It focused on three inter-related components that assess pupils' fitness for learning. The three components are:

- emotional and mental wellbeing
- health and physical fitness
- core skills of numeracy and literacy, independence skills, and readiness for new learning.

The three components are divided into the categories of need:



Source: GwE regional consortium

Schools needed to ensure that they could offer provision for their learners against each area to ensure equity and equality. Responsibility for supporting schools to deliver each element was agreed between local authorities, GwE and other agencies to plan appropriate provision to meet all learners' needs.

The model aims to support schools to assist learners to return to 'learning fitness' and to develop learning which allows pupils to continue to make progress. Ensuring coherence for learners between in-school and distance learning is

another key element of the model including developing appropriate learning while current curriculum requirements were disapplied.

Many local authorities and schools praised GwE's role in co-ordinating partnership work between schools and PRUs, on a cluster level in primary schools and by geographic proximity in the secondary sector. This approach has meant that schools and PRUs are able to receive valuable curricular support from their SIA, whilst turning to local authority officers for operational support.

GwE is continuing to work with local authorities to support schools and PRUs to develop a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils. During our engagement calls, many schools felt that they have been well supported by GwE and their local authority during this period. Headteachers were consistent in their view that GwE has supported schools to deliver as broad a curriculum as possible, despite the constraints. Many primary schools have adapted their plans from September to include a greater emphasis on activities that promote learner wellbeing. In many schools, this meant adjusting the theme or topic that they had planned to cover during this term. Most schools have also placed a greater emphasis on increasing their focus on developing pupils' core skills. Nonetheless, a few lead primary SIAs note that there has generally been a narrowing of the curriculum. GwE has shared new models of delivery with primary headteachers to try to counteract this issue.

Headteachers in secondary schools report that in a few subjects, teachers are finding working within the COVID-19 period challenging, particularly in providing pupils with opportunities to complete practical work, for example in design and technology, science, art, music and physical education. Schools have generally adapted their provision to cope with these difficulties. In some secondary schools, leaders have adjusted their timetable to run more double lessons. This allows schools to respond to health and safety guidance while maintaining a balanced curriculum. In a few schools, departments have adapted their schemes of work to overcome practical difficulties such as not being able to use specialist rooms.

This term, SIAs and local authority education officers have continued to work together to add to the range of teaching and learning materials that are accessible to teachers and support staff through the GwE online platform. Headteachers report that these resources provide valuable support to their staff. GwE officers explained that many secondary schools have made use of resources and in particular, they have accessed multi-disciplinary units of work that fit in well with the principles of Curriculum for Wales. Many authorities relay that GwE has promoted co-operation and collaboration between schools and within schools on a departmental basis. This term, teachers within the region are sharing resources based on each area of learning and experience to address the need to support a wide and enriched curriculum model.

Many schools that Estyn have engaged with mentioned that during the initial return of their pupils in September, a significant number needed further support to catch-up with their literacy and numeracy skills. In particular, schools in the region noted that a continued focus on re-establishing pupils' Welsh oracy skills was a priority. To

address this, GwE co-ordinated opportunities for Welsh-medium schools to work across local authority areas to develop and share resources. For example, Welsh-medium secondary schools from Wrexham, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Conwy have worked together to develop resources to support pupils' oracy skills. Over time, GwE and its schools have built a sound collection of resources available online for both schools and parents within the region. These include a series of Welsh language resources for schools teaching Welsh as a second language and bilingual resources for non-Welsh speaking parents. GwE has also raised awareness of additional materials available. For example, they have promoted 'Y Pair' as a network in Hwb established to share Welsh language resources adapted for distance and blended learning and 'Y Gist' as a network for Welsh as a second language teachers. Overall, as the autumn term has progressed, a few headteachers feel that Welsh language skills have recovered well, especially in the case of older pupils.

In our survey of school leaders, many noted that they receive useful information from GwE on approaches to distance and blended learning. Overall, these responses were more positive in the GwE region than in the other three consortia. Many schools and PRUs have found the information, resources and examples of practice for distance and blended learning produced by GwE useful as a starting point to develop their own practice. Information and professional learning has been shared through a range of fora and networks. These include cluster meetings, meetings for headteachers, subject specific fora and teaching and learning groups. GwE has offered webinars and surgery sessions to share resources and to develop teachers' understanding of effective online and distance teaching and learning. In addition, GwE has offered training for teaching assistants through an online platform. Many schools and PRUs have used the resources as a basis for their own package of professional learning to support teachers and teaching assistants' digital competency. Generally, school leaders note that staff have developed their digital skills and are better placed to offer a range of online learning experiences if pupils need to learn from home.

Cameo: An approach to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of distance learning

Following cluster meetings with the regional school improvement service to discuss distance and blended learning, one school trialled using a digital distance learning approach while pupils were in class. One group of pupils completed activities and tasks online while the teacher used direct instruction with other pupils. This allowed teachers to support pupils to use software and upload work to a digital platform while they were in school. It also allowed the school to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the activities and tasks set as distance learning. The school is adapting its approach following feedback from this process.

As expected, many learners required additional support to accelerate their learning when they returned to schools. As a result, GwE and its stakeholders recognised the need to identify effective teaching strategies to support schools and learners.

Through a review of research literature, together with research undertaken within schools in the region, GwE developed a guide to help schools identify the most effective teaching strategies and online programmes that could help schools improve pupils' core skills. In particular, GwE and the schools within the region focused on improving pupils' reading skills, including their comprehension, fluency and vocabulary skills along with improving their numeracy skills. Some of these strategies and support materials have been specifically designed to be used in schools and by parents at home to support, their child's learning. Many of the resources and strategies stem from recent collaborative research projects undertaken with GwE schools through the Collaborative Institute for Education Research, Evidence and Impact (CIEREI) which is a partnership between Bangor University and GwE.

In a few local authorities, senior leaders are keen for local authority and GwE officers to increase their role in monitoring and quality assurance so that officers gain a secure understanding of the quality of provision across their schools. Many schools have made use of pre-lockdown assessments to identify how pupils' skills have developed during home learning. SIAs have encouraged schools to consider a wide range of evidence from September in order to identify gaps in pupils' learning. Schools note that they have had helpful discussions with SIAs about making use of the lessons learnt in terms of pupil progress in recent months. For example, it seems that some pupils have made sound progress because they were provided with a broad range of open-ended activities, which gave beneficial opportunities for them to make their own choices.

The 'normal' professional learning offer has been modified to ensure that schools and settings receive relevant and purposeful support. This has enabled them to adapt to the challenging circumstances. In our engagement with schools, most headteachers have praised the content of the professional learning offered by GwE during this period. For example, they have provided training through webinars on specific accelerated learning methods based on research at the University of Bangor. Another example is how the middle leadership programme has been tailored to address how to lead at times of crisis and change. The professional learning offer prioritised supporting schools to improve the digital skills of their staff and enabling them to develop effective distance and blended learning approaches and more effective learner engagement.

The regional consortium offer a wide range of opportunities for schools to participate in specific professional learning opportunities to improve pupils' literacy, numeracy and accelerated learning strategies. This includes, the extensive SAFMEDS (Say All Fast Minute Every Day Shuffled) project to improve pupils basic mathematics fluency skills using an evidence-based teaching strategy. Other support programme for schools include a comprehensive range of training materials and resources such as a bilingual literacy toolkit, to support the literacy skills development of pupils. GwE has been training members of staff who then relay that training to others in schools and PRUs. Leaders and school staff benefit from training through webinars, networks of subject leaders, and meetings between teaching and learning leaders.

Resources for promoting literacy and numeracy have been shared through each co-ordinator. GwE is facilitating work between schools to share good practice and ideas on teaching and learning through the current pandemic. There is also support for schools to reflect on the quality of provision during the lockdown period and to use this information as they prepare for the delivery of Curriculum for Wales. Headteachers note that these resources give them a firm foundation to observe models of effective practice.

Many of the region's local authorities believe that schools and the regional consortium have changed their way of working, in many ways for the better. In particular, these local authorities are positive about the developments in ICT and acknowledge that improving ICT capacity has been a steep learning curve for everyone. They also see that more extensive professional learning opportunities are available through using a range of digital platforms. Many schools and local authorities report that staff are more likely to engage in optional professional learning activities when they can access it remotely and at a time that suits them.

Supporting vulnerable learners

GwE SIA, in collaboration with local authority officers, have given purposeful support to headteachers and school staff to promote wellbeing and, at a suitable time, begin to consider provision and learning. Headteachers identified that SIAs have provided an effective balance between support for learner wellbeing and guidance on learning during this term. They say that schools are feeling immense strain in getting the balance right between school improvement and prioritising staff and learner wellbeing.

The region's SIA with responsibility for vulnerable groups has provided purposeful resources for schools and parents and these are available on each of the local authorities' SEN and Inclusion websites. This SIA attends half-termly meetings with the education officers of each local authority and representatives from children's services in order to gather important information on aspects of learning needing further support. This has resulted in a more targeted approach to support.

GwE officers have collaborated with schools and local authorities in a range of fora. For example, officers contributed to the work of the regional ALN/Inclusion Group and produced content for the online dashboard. They also facilitated a regional shared drive of information and resources between all six of the local authorities. GwE SIAs continue to attend local authority wellbeing and safeguarding groups to share practice and information, and also the regional quality group to collaborate with the work of supporting children who are looked after.

During our engagement calls with schools, headteachers were positive about the support and advice provided by GwE to help them plan how to use the 'Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards: the accelerating learning programme (RRRS)' grant. Local authorities are responsible for monitoring the expenditure, compliance and ensuring that plans are sustainable, whereas consortium officers generally take the lead on advising schools about appropriate and effective provision.

GwE leaders have communicated that headteachers are best placed to prioritise how this additional grant funding should be spent. Support and advice is available to schools but SIAs and local authorities are keen to provide autonomy for schools to develop their own ideas about exactly how to target the grant. GwE provided a pro-forma for schools and received their plans, which were then agreed with the local authority. GwE has created a helpful dashboard and a bank of documentation and resources on their website linked to the RRRS grant so that schools can access information quickly to get ideas on grant spending, such as support for running small intervention groups. GwE are also aware of the need to support and advise some schools more closely, to ensure that the funding is used to maximum impact.

GwE are working alongside their local authority colleagues as they develop a single method of monitoring RRRS expenditure across the six north Wales authorities. In addition, it is expected that schools should show that their plans are sustainable. Some small schools told us that they have had difficulty in recruiting staff, as the grant funding will only sustain provision for a limited number of additional hours. According to SIAs, most of the smaller schools are using the grant to top up the hours of employment of existing members of staff, and providing them with training so that they will continue to benefit from the expertise when the funding ends.

Nationally, GwE officers have contributed to the work of various working groups with a focus on wellbeing and vulnerable learners. For example, a SIA with responsibility for wellbeing contributed to the national PDG Group with Welsh Government to ensure regular communication, to update on regional developments and share information back within the consortium.

GwE has supported local authorities and schools to respond to the wellbeing needs of vulnerable pupils, especially in providing complimentary professional learning for staff. The consortium has worked in collaboration with individual schools, clusters of schools and local authorities to support a universal and targeted approach to learner and staff wellbeing. It has structured this professional learning offer to support the learning in the schools. With the wellbeing of the learner central to the offer, schools can benefit from the resources and strategies in the universal offer which is available to all schools or opt for a targeted offer. To date, many schools have trialled, shared and benefitted from observing examples of effective practice from schools in their local authority and across the region. The practical intervention resources for schools to utilise, underpinned by the ‘Five principles to support home learning’ [EEF, 2020], are a focus of SIAs conversations with schools as they plan and deliver their accelerated learning programmes.

A good example of a professional learning offer is the ‘Return to school trauma-informed schools programme’. Through this programme, whole school sessions are facilitated about the impact of the pandemic and analysis of strategies that schools could consider using as their learners returned. This included key teaching and learning principles and models. A number of schools commented on this programme and noted that it was helpful to increase the number of staff who are trauma-informed and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) aware. These schools

also mentioned that teaching staff became more confident in assisting learners and identifying suitable support and provision.

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Curriculum for Wales

The journey to 2022

January 2021

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Contents

Curriculum for Wales: The journey to 2022 **2**

Purpose 2

In the context of COVID-19 2

How should we approach curriculum preparation? **4**

Developing a vision for curriculum design 4

Ways of working 5

What should we do? Shared expectations at school level through to 2022 **6**

Detailed expectations **7**

Curriculum for Wales: key milestones and timeframes **14**

Curriculum for Wales: the journey to 2022

Purpose

With the release of the refined guidance for Curriculum for Wales in January 2020, the next phase of work has commenced. Curriculum realisation is a challenge for all schools and the whole education system as we continuously drive to instil the four purposes for all the learners in Wales.

The purpose of this document is to set out for schools consistent expectations for the process of designing their curriculum and preparing to implement it from 2022 onwards.

- How should schools approach preparation for the Curriculum for Wales?
- What steps should we take to prepare for curriculum implementation in 2022?

The document sets out shared expectations that have been developed and agreed in discussion between Welsh Government, the regional consortia and Estyn. It aims to aid schools in planning their approach and sequencing activities – and to guide the support Welsh Government and middle-tier organisations offer. We will review the document in 2021 to ensure the expectations remain relevant and up to date.

We recognise that schools will be in different places and the pace and focus of activity will vary. This is not a blueprint and is not intended to dictate the pace of curriculum development. Instead, it will help guide work and provide a common reference point for all the organisations working with schools to ensure we are consistent in our expectations and the support we provide is timely for the activity taking place in schools.

All schools should use the *Curriculum for Wales guidance* to help them in developing their curriculum (see **hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/**).

Further to this document, we will work with partners to develop and publish a curriculum implementation plan which sets out the steps for government and strategic partners in supporting schools in preparation for rollout.

In the context of COVID-19

The response to COVID-19 has of course had a significant impact on schools and is likely to have disrupted their plans for preparation for the new curriculum. In terms of curriculum, schools will need to focus on two key aspects. They will need to:

- adapt their current curriculum and teaching to changing circumstances and prepare for a range of scenarios
- prepare for rollout of the new curriculum in 2022.

To support schools in the first of these, Welsh Government has published guidance on learning (see **gov.wales/guidance-learning-schools-and-settings-autumn-term-covid-19**). This guidance provides a high-level set of expectations for schools and settings in developing approaches to learning in the immediate term and seeks to close the gap between our learners while raising expectations for all.

The expectations in this document relate to the second aspect. These expectations have been refined and modified to ensure that they remain realistic in light of the pandemic and that they provide schools flexibility in their specific contexts.

How should we approach curriculum preparation?

Developing a vision for curriculum design

As schools move through the process of curriculum making, certain things remain important. As set out in the *Curriculum for Wales guidance* (see **hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/**), throughout their preparation, schools should continue to reflect on how the curriculum they are developing will:

- enable their learners to realise the four purposes and equip them for ongoing learning, work and life
- build high expectations and enable all learners to achieve their full potential
- offer a broad and balanced education that enables their learners to make links between the different areas of learning and experience and apply their learning to new situations and contexts
- support progression along a continuum of learning and how they are working with other schools to ensure there is alignment in the transitions across a 3 to 16 continuum
- support learners' health and well-being
- support learners' development of the knowledge, skills and experiences that are the foundation of being an informed citizen
- recognise their learners' identity, language(s), ability and background and the different support they may need given their particular circumstances
- reflect the diversity of perspectives, values and identities that shape their locality and Wales and develop understanding of the wider world
- build in co-construction with learners, their families and the wider community
- enable their learners to make sense of growing up in contemporary Wales and of issues that will be important into the future, including well-being, sustainable development and citizenship
- enable their learners to develop an understanding of their rights and the rights of others.

The focus here should be on exploring what the four purposes mean for all learners. Curriculum preparation and design should contribute to learners' development towards the four purposes, rather than trying to fit the headlines of the four purposes into all learning.

The *Curriculum for Wales guidance* sets out that schools and practitioners should develop a vision for their curriculum. This process is critical to developing a genuinely transformational curriculum: schools should not use current content or provision as a starting point or seek to retrofit it to satisfy the new curriculum requirements.

Schools should consider the section on 'Designing your curriculum' in the *Curriculum for Wales guidance* which can be found at **hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/**.

Ways of working

The way schools approach curriculum preparation and design will be as important as what they do. In developing their approaches, co-construction will be critical. The principles that underpin this approach should include the following.

- **Development through co-construction** – Co-construction means sharing problems and jointly developing solutions. Co-construction requires people to work across traditional boundaries: between tiers of education as well as between disciplines, schools and phases, and with stakeholders beyond the education system.
- **Equity in co-construction** – Co-construction should bring an equity between different voices in a team or in the system. It should recognise that every voice within the process brings a valid contribution.
- **Space and time to think and engage** – Co-constructing solutions takes longer. High-quality thinking, solutions and relationships need to be developed over a prolonged period of engagement. This also recognises that curriculum design is a continuous process of refinement, rather than a project with an end point.
- **Clear understanding of 'why' things are learned and done** – Epistemic knowledge supports the system to make better decisions about what should be learned. Curriculum design requires us to reason why specific learning matters and what the essence of that learning is.
- **Critical engagement with expertise** – Curriculum design requires intellectual engagement with quality research, expert input and international expertise.
- **Leadership at all levels** – All parts of the system must provide leadership to enable others to meet our vision and aspirations. School leadership should model and enable the other ways of working. It should provide clear direction, challenge and high expectations, while also allowing ownership. This leadership also involves a culture of trust and empowerment: schools and practitioners should avoid developing additional material or data in order to evidence what they are doing.

In embedding these principles, schools **should not**:

- move too quickly towards implementation
- use superficial thematic approaches or try to evidence four purposes coverage
- retrofit current content of their curriculum to meet the demands of *Curriculum for Wales guidance*
- carry out an audit in an attempt to match up every description of learning and then plan content to fit perceived gaps
- feel pressured to produce extra material just to prove what they are doing
- invest in 'off the shelf' ready-made curriculum offers
- view curriculum making as a 'once and done' event
- assess directly to descriptions of learning.

What should we do? Shared expectations at school level through to 2022

Phase	Length of time	Key work
Engagement	1–2 terms	Schools will need to develop an understanding of the conceptual model of the curriculum: this will involve engaging and sense-making with materials and literature, and developing or updating their vision with local stakeholders. Schools will reflect on current practice and learning from responding to COVID-19.
Design, planning and trialling	3 terms	Schools should start developing high-level curriculum and assessment design, informed by the guidance, and progress priorities to support curriculum realisation set out in their school development plan. Schools may begin trialling aspects of design, new approaches and pedagogy, using the learning to evaluate and refine their approach.
Evaluating and preparing for first teaching	2–3 terms	Schools should evaluate initial designs and trial further approaches. Schools will begin to finalise medium-term planning for primary and Year 7, and longer-term for Years 8–11.
First teaching and ongoing refinement	September 2022 onwards	Schools will adopt their curriculum and begin to implement it. Secondary schools should refine their curriculum design as learners progress. Schools should reflect on the effectiveness of their curriculum and use that insight to improve.

Detailed expectations

Engagement: 1–2 terms

Schools will need to develop an understanding of the conceptual model of the curriculum. This will involve engaging with materials and literature, and developing or updating their vision with the whole school community.

Schools should:

- develop whole-school understanding of a purpose-led curriculum
- consider how the four purposes drive all school priorities
- develop a vision for curriculum and the learning and teaching that supports it
- make connections with the implementation of wider education reform (e.g. the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and Welsh in Education) to ensure activity is mutually reinforcing
- develop an agreed view of priorities for, and strategic approach to, developing teaching in the school
- lead a culture for change, with ongoing conversations at all levels and time to understand and engage with changes
- build understanding of the curriculum model and approach to assessment set out in the *Curriculum for Wales guidance* among all staff
- understand the importance and value of knowledge, skills and experiences and the role each plays in enabling learning, as set out in the *Curriculum for Wales guidance*
- evaluate current practice and learning from responding to COVID-19.

Activity in schools should be characterised by:

- leaders recognising the importance of putting time and effort into developing understanding of the new curriculum and assessment framework across the school and taking steps to ensure this happens
- active engagement with the curriculum and assessment guidance to develop understanding of all staff of the key principles of curriculum design of the Curriculum for Wales (including the statements of what matters), of the descriptions of learning, and of progression and the role of disciplines in learning[1]

[1] These concepts are new and distinct from the existing curriculum. It is critical that before schools and practitioners embark on curriculum design that they understand the role and purpose of these principles and how they differ from current practice. For example, the descriptions of learning are designed to sustain learning over a period of years and should be used to select learning that provides both breadth and depth. A wide range of learning should contribute to learners' engagement with each description of learning. They are not designed as stand-alone tasks, activities or assessment criteria to be directly assessed against.

- develop all staff's understanding of the principles and practice of person-centred planning in relation to learners with additional learning needs (ALN)
- engaging with academic literature and evidence-based research
- starting conversations with learners, parents/carers and stakeholders about what is changing and how they can be involved, and establishing mechanisms for ongoing co-construction with them
- considering how pedagogy can support the realisation of a curriculum and starting to identify which approaches will best serve learners at that school
- engaging in professional learning, to develop the capability of all professionals, and using the feedback from the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) survey to help develop an environment supportive of ongoing professional learning
- capturing understanding of the range of learner needs, capacities, identities and values of learners to help establish what the four purposes mean for them and the school context
- working collaboratively in networks – this should include cross-phase work in geographic clusters (3 to 16) and with other existing networks within the same phase to share thinking and support a single continuum of learning, and it should support onwards progression post-16
- developing understanding of the importance and value of knowledge and the role it plays in learning, along with the approach to knowledge acquisition articulated in the curriculum
- using the school development plan to set priorities for the next three years, based on an analysis of what is needed to realise a new curriculum for the school.

Design, planning and trialling phase: 3 terms

Schools should start developing high-level curriculum and assessment design, informed by the guidance, and progress priorities to support curriculum realisation set out in their school development plan. Schools may begin trialling aspects of design, new approaches and pedagogy, using the learning to evaluate and refine their approach.

Building on activity in the previous phase, schools should:

- begin the design process involving all stakeholders – including learners, all practitioners and governors – and involving parents/carers and the local community
- set out design principles to ensure high standards and enable at least good progress for all learners
- ensure engagement with professional learning and that it supports the development of teaching
- engage in professional dialogue with networks to identify and solve school curriculum challenges
- have an integrated approach to implementation of wider education reform
- develop approaches for the mandatory elements of the curriculum
- ensure there are arrangements in place to secure engagement of key groups including governors, and develop their understanding of the curriculum.

Activity in schools should be characterised by:

- consolidating and building upon the activity and learning during the engagement phase, including:
  - further developing the school community's understanding of the curriculum model and assessment arrangements, including the approach to progression
  - further developing practitioners' understanding of the importance of pedagogy in supporting the realisation of the curriculum and continuing to identify the approaches they propose to adopt
  - active engagement with the ALN Code to develop understanding of all staff and ensure its implications are reflected in realising the school's vision and supporting the process of curriculum design
  - engaging all learners, parents/carers and the wider community in realising the vision and supporting the process of curriculum design

  - working in networks, collaborating and sharing approaches to curriculum design and development and enabling seamless progression in learning, including to post-16
  - ensuring that priorities are captured appropriately and resources identified to support curriculum development within the school development plan.

- considering a range of approaches (e.g. disciplinary, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary) to curriculum design and determine which approach(es) to test and evaluate in the context of the school and different areas of learning and experience ensuring all learner needs are considered in an inclusive context
- developing a shared understanding of progression within a school, and identifying what this means for its context. Sharing and discussing this initial understanding within their cluster and reflecting on these discussions to further develop their thinking
- drawing on the voice of all learners in the curriculum design process
- co-constructing a high-level curriculum model, including assessment arrangements to support progression for all learners, with all stakeholders
- working in clusters to develop thinking around the effective transition of learners along the 3 to 16 continuum, bringing continuity to curricula across phases to support learner progression. Jointly developing and trialling processes to support the transition of learners
- building-in consideration of how the new curriculum will support Welsh in Education and Cymraeg 2050
- deepening staff's understanding of the enquiry process to help facilitate curriculum design
- undertaking short- and medium-term planning and trialling some classroom approaches
- continuing to work collaboratively in networks and through this build further relationships with higher education partners to design based on a rich evidence basis.

Evaluating and preparing for first teaching: 2–3 terms

Schools should evaluate initial designs and trial further approaches. Schools to begin to finalise medium-term planning for primary and Year 7, and longer-term for Years 8–11.

Building on activity in the previous phases, schools should:

- evaluate trials and reflect on learning to influence ongoing curriculum design
- engage with a wider evidence base, including with higher education institutions (HEIs), to inform the approach to the areas of learning and experience and disciplines within them to inform curriculum and assessment design
- continue to invest in professional learning and develop teaching and practitioners to make the most of the opportunities of the Curriculum for Wales
- develop, trial and finalise transition planning as part of the curriculum design to ensure an effective process for the transition of learners along the 3 to 16 continuum.

Activity in schools should be characterised by:

- consolidating and building upon the learning during the engagement and design planning and trialling phases, including:
  - deepening all stakeholders' understanding of the curriculum model and assessment arrangements, including the approach to progression
  - ensuring that all practitioners understand the importance of pedagogy in supporting the realisation of the curriculum
  - continuing to engage parents/carers and the wider community in realising the vision and the process of curriculum design
  - continuing to work collaboratively in networks, sharing approaches to curriculum design and development
  - extending short- and medium-term planning and trialling, ensuring that these approaches are inclusive of all learners
  - learning from trials and testing of potential approaches to curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment and using this to refine the approach, ensuring that these approaches are inclusive of all learners
  - continuing to work collaboratively in networks and through this build further relationships with higher education partners to design based on a rich evidence basis

- drawing on learner voice to reflect on teaching, planning and classroom delivery to inform evaluation and refinement of approach
- developing approaches to enable effective and appropriate assessment as an indistinguishable part of learning and teaching
- refining their understanding of progression, both within their school and across their cluster and wider networks. Making arrangements to support ongoing sharing of understanding of progression
- engaging with parents/carers and the community about the emerging school curriculum
- further development and approaches to the mandatory aspects of the curriculum
- developing effective processes for engaging and communicating with parents/carers throughout the school year in order to support learner progression
- developing school-level action research models to help facilitate ongoing curriculum design and making.

First teaching and ongoing curriculum refinement: September 2022 onwards

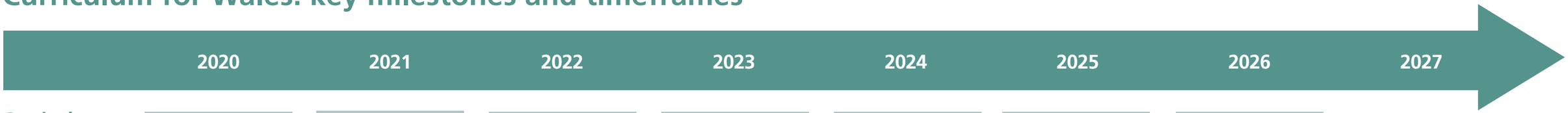
Building on activity in the previous phases, schools should:

- adopt the curriculum and begin to implement
- in the case of secondary schools, refine curriculum design as learners progress from Year 7 to Year 11 from September 2022 onwards
- develop, and use, mechanisms to reflect on the effectiveness of the new curriculum, pedagogy and assessment arrangements and use that insight to improve.

Activity in schools should be characterised by:

- schools continuing to build on work done over the last two and a half years
- ensuring the four purposes, and their key characteristics, guide curriculum realisation, the approach to assessment, and pedagogy
- deepening understanding of what the purposes mean for learners, including engagement with academic expertise, and using this insight to inform practice
- using the opportunities offered within the new curriculum to change practice in order to raise standards, close the attainment gap and support learner progression towards the four purposes
- collaborating with other schools and settings to deepen understanding, capacity and capability to support realisation of the curriculum, effective pedagogies and assessment for learner progression
- continuing co-construction in realising the curriculum in school, with appropriate involvement of all staff, learners, parents/carers and the wider community.

Curriculum for Wales: key milestones and timeframes



Curriculum for Wales

28 January
Curriculum for Wales guidance published following consultation, ready for realisation from 2022

Work with partners to establish plan for National Network to support implementation

Begin to commission bilingual resources to support curriculum design in schools and settings

Establishment of a National Network to support implementation of the curriculum

Publication of curriculum implementation plan

Consultations on additional *Curriculum for Wales guidance* (February and May 2021)

Pilot to test the approach for relationships and sexuality education (RSE)

Publication of additional guidance to be incorporated into the *Curriculum for Wales guidance*[1]

Bilingual resources published to support curriculum design in schools and settings

September
Full rollout in all funded non-maintained settings, maintained nursery schools, primary schools, and Year 7 in secondary schools

Evaluation process set and underway to develop understanding of impact of teaching Curriculum for Wales

Bilingual resources available to support curriculum design and implementation in schools and settings

September
Full rollout in Year 8

September
Full rollout in Year 9

Development of post-16 offer in light of new curriculum

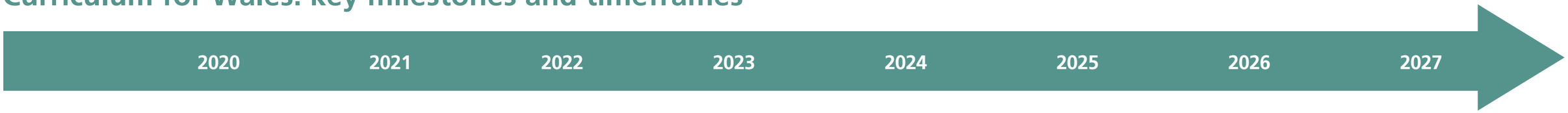
September
Full rollout in Year 10

September
Full rollout in Year 11

Full evaluation of curriculum implementation

[1] Careers and work-related experiences (CWRE) (December); relationships and sexuality education (RSE) (December); Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) (December); education otherwise than at school (EOTAS)/pupil referral units (PRUs) (September); British Sign Language (BSL) (September); Enabling Pathways (December); a curriculum and assessment framework for funded non-maintained settings (December).

Curriculum for Wales: key milestones and timeframes



Qualifications

7 February
Deadline for Qualifications Wales consultation on qualifications at 16

June
Qualifications Wales publish summary of consultation responses and decisions based on consultation

Qualifications Wales develop proposals for the future range of qualifications

January–March
Qualifications Wales consultation on the future range of qualifications

Summer
Qualifications Wales publish consultation findings and agree future range of qualifications

Autumn
Qualifications Wales consult on design and assessment parameters of future GCSEs

Qualifications Wales develops draft approval criteria for first wave of qualifications

Beginning of 2022
Consult on and agree approval criteria for first wave of qualifications

Awarding body commences development of new and updated qualifications for first wave

Consult and agree approval criteria for second wave of qualifications

Awarding body commences development of new and updated qualifications for second wave

New qualifications fully approved

Training and resources to support new qualifications developed

First teaching of new qualifications

First award of new qualifications

Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

6 July
Introduction of Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill to the Senedd

December
Stage 1 scrutiny – deadline for publication of committee report(s)

December
Stage 1 Senedd plenary debate

December
Start of Stage 2

February
Start of Stage 3

March
Stage 4

Introduce secondary legislation for the Curriculum for Wales

Introduce secondary legislation for the Curriculum for Wales

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SEQUENCE

	Change Management	Planning the Implementation	Think- pieces Assessment Pedagogy	Framework of CfW Strategy requirements Inter-relationships of the structure	Visioning	Overview of the four different models	Understanding of Discipline. Progression and depth of knowledge over time	Discipline within the AOLE disciplinary	Discipline within the AOLE multidisciplinary	Transition – Working across the phases	Cross-curricular Skills	Integral skills	Cross Cutting Themes	Interdisciplinary planning	Integrated planning	The Role of Enquiry	- Reviewing policies and legislation - High level curriculum model / planning - Reporting to parents and community - Reviewing vision
Golden threads running throughout	**Assessment** **Pedagogy** **Learner Voice**																
GwE team discussions AOLE teams	Whole team January 2021	Whole Team February 2021	Whole Team January – March 2021	Whole Team March 2021	Whole Team March 2021	Whole Team March 2021	Re-visit April 2021	April 2021	April 2021	May 2021	May 2021			May 2021	June 2021	June and July 2021	
PL for Senior Leadership Teams	3-16 clusters	Individual 3-16 cluster workshop	Individual 3-16 clusters and webinar	Curriculum Design 1 – webinar	Visioning workshop in 3-16 clusters	Curriculum Design 2 in 3-16 clusters	Curriculum Design 3 in 3– 16 clusters			Reviewing 3-16 cluster plans							
	Jan / Feb 2021	April 2021	April / May 2021	May 2021	June 2021	June 2021	June 2021										
PL for Middle Leaders			Reflections on Pedagogy - playlist	Engaging with the CfW framework - playlist	Engaging with the wider reform elements - playlist	Thinking of AOLE vision - playlist		Engaging with the AOLEs - playlist									
Subject / AOLE Teacher Networks			Practical session on pedagogy and assessment in thinkpieces?	Practical session on the framework		A Practical overview on deepening understanding of curriculum models	A Practical overview on Progression and Depth	A Practical overview deepening understanding of disciplinary and multidisciplinary models			A Practical overview on cross-curricular skills, Integral Skills and Cross-cutting Themes			A Practical overview on interdisciplinary and integral models		A practical overview of whole school / department approaches to curriculum planning	
				May 2021		End of June 2021	July 2021	September 2021			October 2021			November 2022		March 2022	
Head teacher forum messages			- Share road map - Overview of Professional Learning for Senior Leaders - Overview of Professional Learning for ML - Overview of Network content inc. success criteria for Summer term - Introduction to Think-pieces - SIA work programme for summer term - Grant dashboard April 2021														
Messages by SIAs in Clusters / Alliances			As above and also: - Planning CfW Implementation workshop - Introduce Think-pieces (discuss Leadership) - Support self-evaluation April / May 2021														

Gudalen 14

	Network 1	Network 2	Network 3	Network 4	Network 5	Network 6	Network 7	Network 8	Network 9
Session	Practical session on the framework	A Practical overview on deepening understanding of curriculum models	A Practical overview on Progression and Depth	A Practical overview deepening understanding of disciplinary and multidisciplinary models	A Practical overview on cross-curricular skills, Integral Skills and Cross-cutting Themes	A Practical overview on interdisciplinary and integral models	A Practical overview on learner voice in the process	A Practical overview on the role of enquiry	A practical overview of whole school / department approaches to curriculum planning
Date	May 2021	June 2021	July 2021	September 2021	October 2021	November 2021	January 2022	February 2022	March 2022
Success Criteria									
Resources available									

GwE

Collaborating • Learning • Succeeding

THE REFORM JOURNEY

Think Pieces

CONTENT

1. FOREWORD 3

2. INTRODUCTION 4

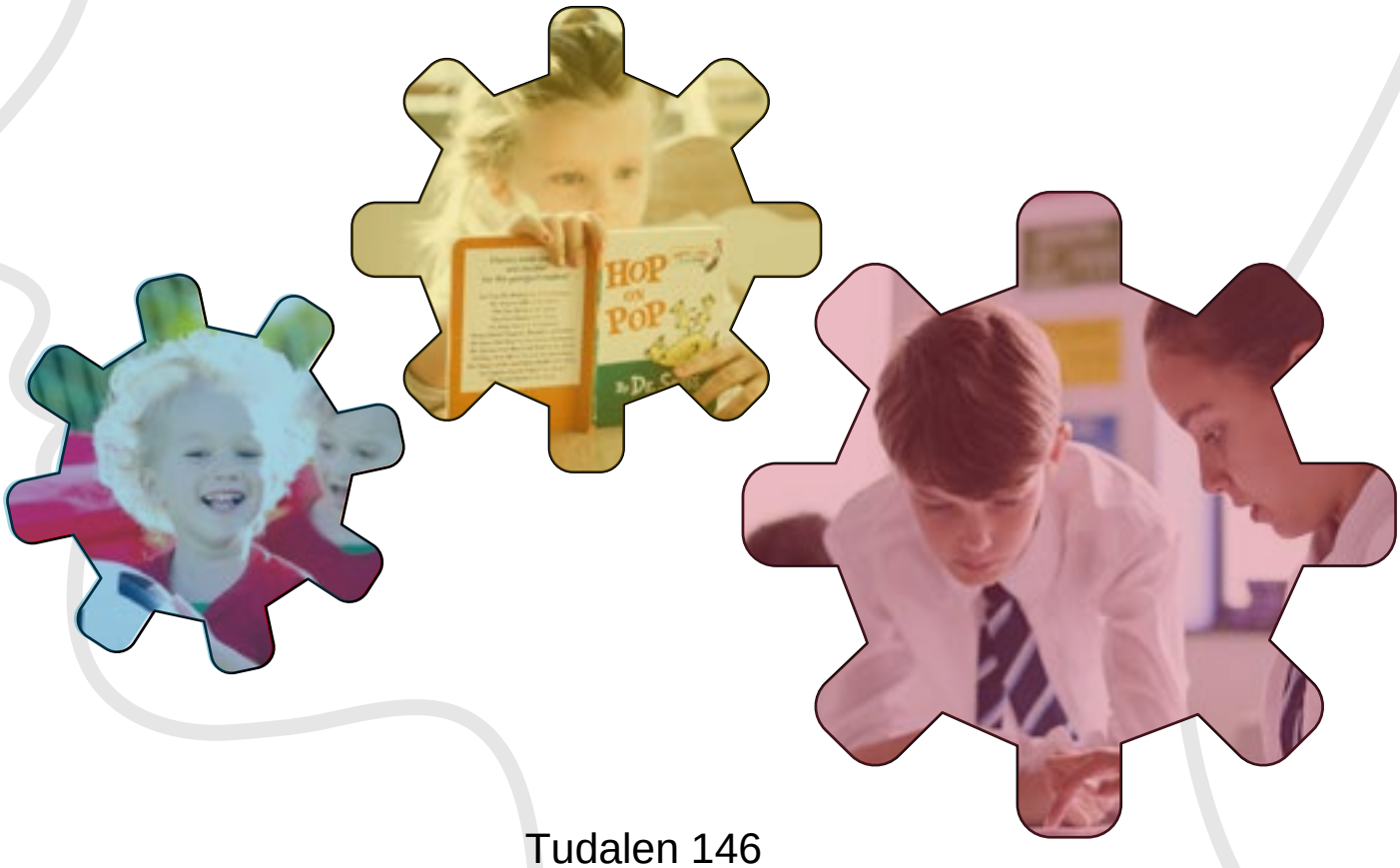
3. LEADERSHIP 5

4. VISION 9

5. PEDAGOGY 12

6. ASSESSMENT 15

7. CURRICULUM DESIGN 19

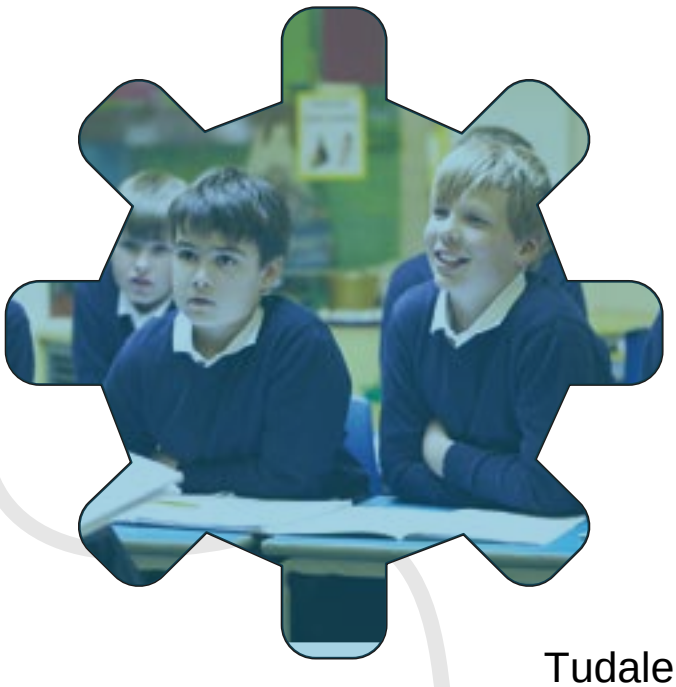


FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to share these think pieces with you. We've been very fortunate to work with Professor Graham Donaldson who has advised and guided us through the process. We are also thankful to colleagues from Local Authorities, Estyn, Bangor University and other Regional Consortia who've joined us in workshops to refine and redraft the content.

We hope that alongside the professional learning offer, these Think Pieces will provide a stimulus for staff in your school and clusters to reflect on what is already working effectively, what needs refining and what needs to be changed. I would like to invite all of you and encourage you to share practice and ideas and be part of the professional learning journey that we are all on in preparation for September 2022.

This is a learning process for all of us. We look forward to supporting, sharing and developing solutions to ensuring that the new curriculum will be built on existing excellent practice in our schools. New innovations have taken place during the pandemic which will be a strong foundation for building a new offer for learners. I'm sure that this new curriculum offer will ensure that learning for our pupils will be a very positive experience and one that will produce the highest standards for them.



Arwyn Thomas
GwE Managing Director

INTRODUCTION

The education reform programme in Wales, built around the new Curriculum for Wales (CfW), provides a positive way forward as we emerge from the restrictions of the last year. It has at its heart a number of guiding ideas.

- That the curriculum and associated pedagogy and assessment should flow from clear purposes agreed nationally and pursued locally.
- That those purposes should encompass helping all of our young people to become: ambitious and capable learners; enterprising and creative contributors; ethical and informed citizens; and healthy and confident individuals.
- That young people's learning should build progressively towards those purposes across their time in school education.
- That teachers and schools should have greater freedom to realise those purposes in ways that can meet the needs and characteristics of the young people and the communities that they serve.

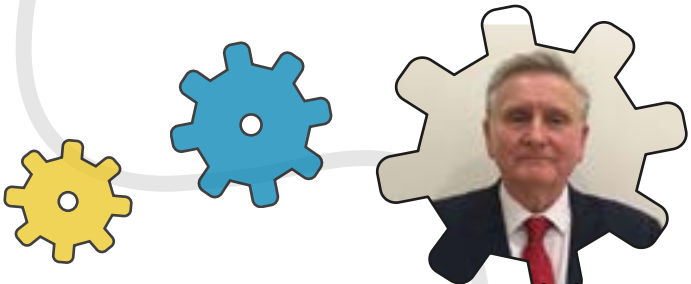
These basic ideas give rise to a number of important implications.

- That the national curriculum framework should establish necessary national consistency of purpose and approach but leave wide scope for local decision making about key aspects of learning and teaching.
- That curriculum making is a process that should involve collaboration amongst teachers, schools and wider interests.
- That accountability should not inhibit the quality or narrow the scope of learning. Wherever possible it should pursue quality enhancement rather than narrow quality assurance.

The success of the reform programme should be judged against the extent to which it leads to better and more relevant learning for young people and to higher standards of achievement. Both the quality of the learning and the nature of standards should relate to the extent to which the agreed purposes are being realised in practice for all young people.

Of course, the impact of the pandemic will influence how we can move forward with the reform. We need to re-establish the relevance of its four guiding purposes for Wales's young people. In many ways the pandemic has made those purposes more relevant than ever as we seek to build the confidence of our young people and rekindle their desire to learn. We have all had to think deeply about what matters in learning during periods of interrupted schooling and the four purposes of the new CfW stand up well to that examination. The pandemic has also required changes to the nature of the teaching and learning process, not least in the ways in which digital technologies can enhance possibilities for more independent learning.

This series of papers developed by GwE directly reflect these ideas and implications. They ask us to think deeply about purpose and highlight matters of curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment that must be addressed if we are to realise the opportunities offered by the reform programme. In particular, they are couched in the language of learning not of direction or implementation. Taken together, they provide for a process of collaboration, exploration and learning that can build firm foundations for the realisation of the opportunities offered by the new curriculum for every young person in every school and every classroom across the consortium.



Professor Graham Donaldson

LEADERSHIP

Curriculum for Wales: Considerations for School Leadership

'…… Leadership is the ability to influence and inspire action in others, and respond with vision and agility during periods of growth, disruption or uncertainty to bring about the needed change.'

Yvonne Ruke Akpoveta, Cornell University

Schools are currently facing perhaps their biggest leadership challenge ever while guiding their school through the reform journey. This challenge has been further amplified by the pandemic with school leaders having to respond quickly to keeping everyone safe, ensuring everyone's wellbeing and delivering a new way of learning.

Curriculum for Wales gives leaders at all levels, including middle leaders and governors, the opportunity to influence, collaborate and inspire others; the learner, the teachers, the wider school community and fellow school leaders across the system. While navigating a school community through this journey, everything a leader does should have the learner at the heart of any decision and action and at the centre of any changes that they influence. At each point of this journey, we need to remind ourselves of the end goal and our destination; that learners receive improved provision that ultimately leads to better standards.

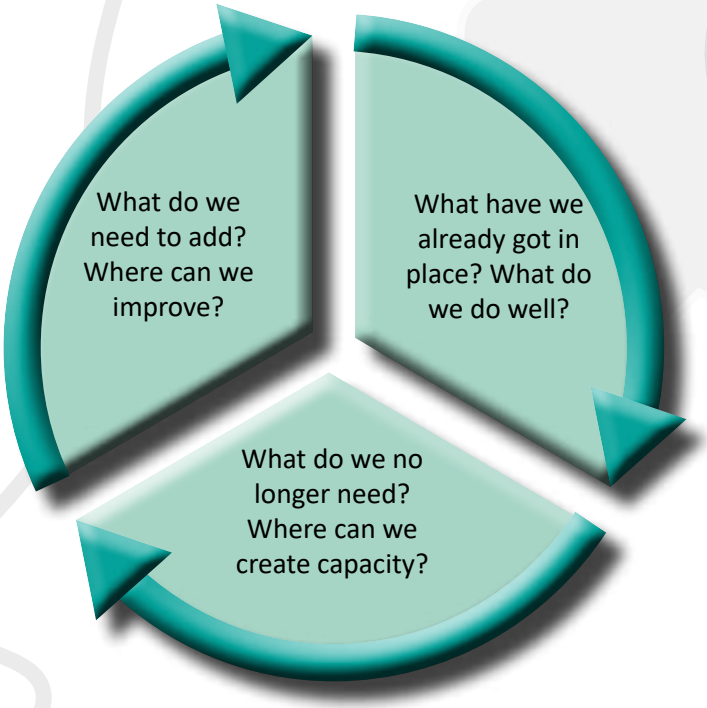
During the pandemic all schools have shown an ability and agility to adapt to an ever changing landscape, exemplifying Schools as Learning Organisations at its best. They have embraced the transversal themes of Time, Trust, Thinking together and Technology which has provided a firm foundation for the journey towards Curriculum for Wales.

OPPORTUNITIES

In a leadership context, Curriculum for Wales offers many opportunities. Further to this, although challenging, the pandemic has provided growth points such as improved partnerships with parents, a more skilled teaching profession, digital competency, collaboration between schools and with external bodies.

THE CHALLENGES

Leaders face many challenges along this journey. These challenges will be further amplified by the current pandemic. Leaders will need to carefully consider their timing of planning and executing the reform journey. This includes winning the hearts and minds of the whole school and local community, ensuring that there is a smooth transition from aspiration to activity. This will need to be done in a balanced, collaborative way, that doesn't make the complex complicated. A significant challenge for leaders will be to create the context for good management to work. Empowering leaders at all levels is paramount, as is ensuring that they have the space, time and professional learning to deliver the vision.



THE PROCESS

The implementation of Curriculum for Wales is a process, not an event and needs planning and executing in stages. Enough time needs to be built in for implementation to be effective, particularly in the preparation stage. The stages of the journey need to be prioritised appropriately. A school's curriculum is everything a learner experiences and should be informed by the four purposes. When planning the processes we need to consider how we celebrate successes and let go of what's not working.

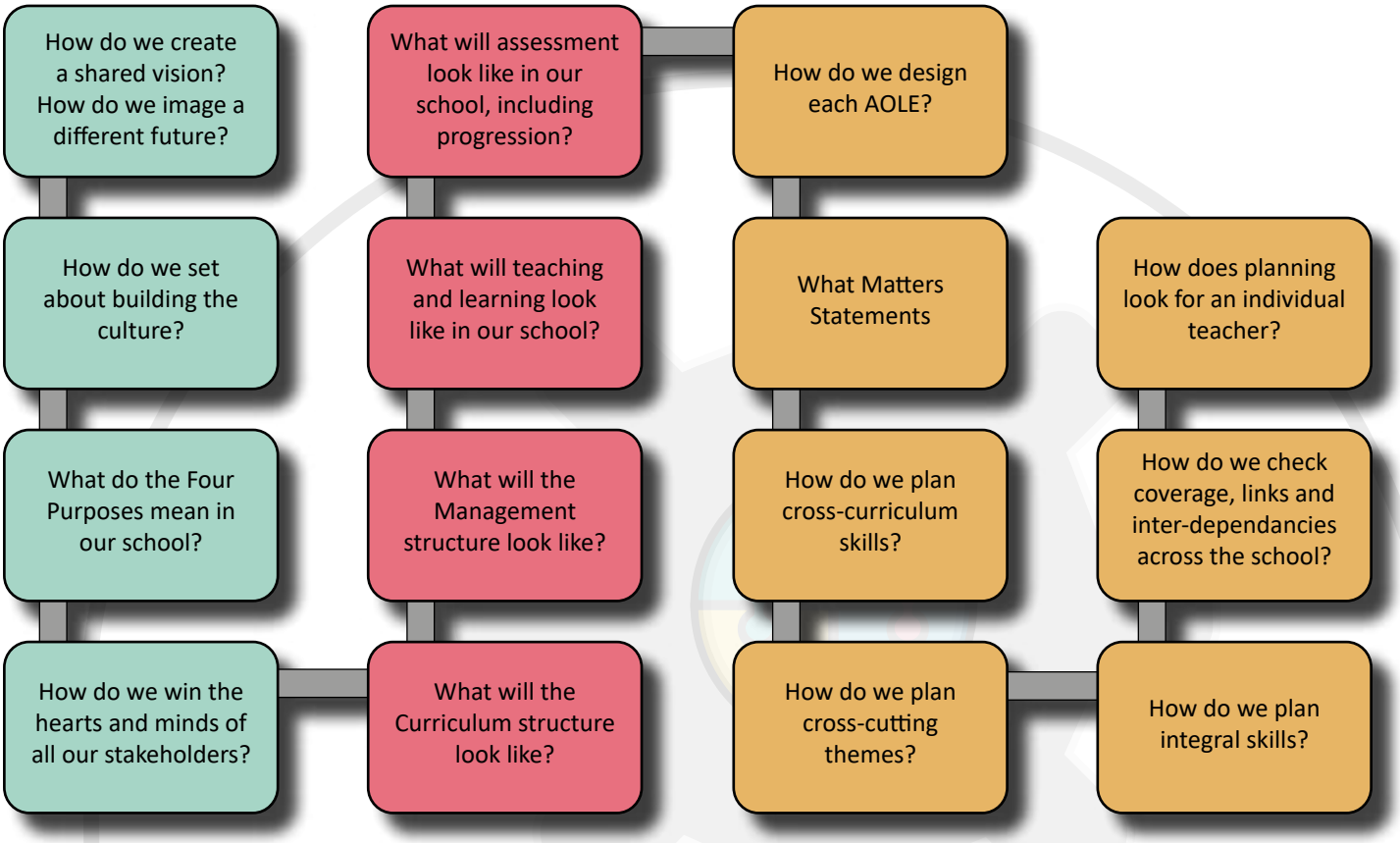
During this process, the role of every leader will need to focus on identifying the school's strengths and recognise its growth points, before sequencing the steps it needs to undertake to drive the Reform Journey within their school, local community and beyond.

STAGES / STEPS

When setting out on this journey, school leaders will be focusing on implementing a shared vision. Leaders will have to consider what steps and when to take them. By mapping out a path containing a number of steps, it will help a leader visualise the journey ahead and ensure the implementation of the vision. These steps will vary from school to school and from context to context. They can be categorised into three areas:

1. Engagement (mint)
2. Designing and Planning (pink)
3. Trialling, evaluating and preparing first teaching (yellow)

We will also need to consider what the golden thread considerations are that run through these stages; wellbeing, professional learning, 3-16 and collaboration across schools. It also imperative that there is continuous evaluation throughout the process, beginning with an evaluation of current practice and evaluating progress along each stage. Regular communication with stakeholders at various stages of the journey is also needed.



The success criteria for Leadership in our schools as we embrace Curriculum for Wales could be that ……
…**as a learner in my school I will:**

- see and feel that the four purposes are at the heart of everything my school does
- know that my wellbeing is considered important
- know where to turn for help
- be able to take risks and make mistakes along the way in a safe environment
- know that my work will challenge me to think, to have high expectations of myself and help me to be independent
- have opportunities to be a leader of my own learning
- have positive relationships all around me
- feel that I have a voice and am listened to and valued
- be reassured that I'm supported
- be given valuable feedback that helps me improve
- be known as an individual and celebrate mine and other's successes together
- appreciate that my teachers are learning alongside me to become the best teachers they can be
- be reassured that my education is preparing me for the future
- appreciate that my school teaches me everything I should know and I have opportunities to develop my interests
- be proud to be part of my local community, a citizen of Wales and the World
- have opportunities to work and learn with other children and young people from around the world
- recognise that my school is helping my future by being environmentally aware and developing sustainably

As a teacher I will:

- ensure that the four purposes are at the core of my work
- collaborate further with colleagues within my school community and further afield
- be actively involved in appropriate professional learning around Curriculum for Wales
- use research and enquiry evidence to further develop my classroom practice
- ensure that the culture of being a learning organisation is evident in my practice
- further develop my technology skills to deliver effective learning to all my students
- take advantage of coaching and facilitation sessions to help me further develop professionally
- ensure robust self-assessment procedures are in place in my classroom
- contribute effective practice case studies and facilitate professional learning sessions within the school and beyond.

As a parent I will:

- learn from the school how the four purposes are at the core of everything my child does
- see how my school works and learns from the wider community
- be assured that the teachers in my school attend high quality professional learning so that they can support my child's learning
- learn what being a learning organisation means and be part of that journey as one of its most important stakeholders
- receive support and encouragement from my school to develop my technological skills so that I can support my child's learning
- be assured that my school uses all the assessment strategies available to it so that they have a rounded and holistic picture of my child's abilities.
- Support my child's learning by taking an active role.

VISION

THINK PIECE: VISION

DEFINITION OF VISION:

- A shared vision is not an idea but a force in people's hearts – an answer to what we want to create? (Peter Senge)
- A vision is a simple statement which all stakeholders carry through with them in all thought processes over time and acts as the guiding principle.

DEFINITION OF VISION FOR WALES IN 2021 ONWARDS:

- A vision as an everyday driving force that determines changes and priorities, big or small.
- A vision that utilises the four purposes as the starting point and aspiration for the school's curriculum design.
- A vision that encompasses everyone in the school community as learners; including pupils, teachers, leaders, governors and parents/carers.

What vision means to:

Pupils

- *What is your current starting point?*
- *What do you as a learner in Wales need, to be able to succeed in the world you live in?*

Do the four purposes for pupils mean they have:

- Improved learning experiences that include rich learning opportunities and authentic learning contexts that allow pupils' skills and knowledge to be applied and refined?
- Real reasons for engaging in learning that encourage them to be creative, to keep asking questions and to contribute their thoughts and opinions?
- The confidence that they are supported to understand how they learn and how to reflect on their work and make progress?
- Security in the knowledge that the school knows them well as individuals, provides opportunities for them to collaborate with others, encourages them to prioritise their own wellbeing and empowers them to be ambitious and to have high expectations?
- A safe environment to take measured risks and to know where and how to seek help if required?

Parents/Carers

- *What is your current starting point?*
- *How can you support yourself and your child/children to be able to succeed in the world they live in?*

Do the four purposes for parents and carers mean they are:

- An active and valued partner in contributing to the vision?
- Able to engage in meaningful two-way communication with the school?
- Able to establish a relationship focused on learning that incorporates mutual trust and respect?
- Provided with opportunities to contribute to their child's/children's learning?
- Encouraged to feel proud of their children and to be an active part of what their children have achieved?

Teachers

- *What is your current starting point?*
- *What do you need to be the best teacher you can be?*
- *What does it mean to enable your learners to succeed in the world they live in?*

Do the four purposes for teachers mean they have:

- A shared understanding of success?
- Confidence to develop creativity and innovation, the empowerment to contribute to the vision and bring it to life and the opportunity to take responsibility?
- A strong sense of individual and collective wellbeing that allows them to feel valued in their profession, to know that their voice will be heard, to have high expectations and to be proud to teach in Wales?
- Opportunities to develop a broad skill set, to have a deep understanding of effective teaching and to engage in continuous professional development?
- Sufficient time to think together, to maintain positive and trusting relationships and to collaborate with others in their own school and with other schools?
- The skills to develop as leaders and to establish strong home-school partnerships?
- Safe space and freedom to take calculated risks, to become active curriculum makers to facilitate learning and to provide inclusive classrooms that support the progress of all learners?

School Leaders

- *What is your current starting point?*
- *What do you need to be the best leader you can be?*
- *What does it mean to create a thriving learning climate for all?*

Do the four purposes for school leaders mean they have:

- A shared understanding of what success looks like across the four purposes?
- A focus on better learning and higher outcomes?
- An appropriate focus on the recognition and development of a whole school ethos that promotes the school as a learning organization and promotes continuous learning at all levels?
- A sound sense of their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others, a humble approach, the ability to listen, and a desire to understand and engage with local communities?
- A willingness to make a meaningful contribution to progressing learning?
- A focus on creating time for thinking together as a school and learning community, and to promote the empowerment of staff?
- The skills to develop trusting partnerships with networks of schools, to establish clear two-way communication within their own school and to engage positively with all stakeholders?
- An ethos of leadership through ideas rather than leadership by control?

Governors

- *What is your current starting point?*
- *How can the governing body support the school in bringing the vision to life?*

Do the four purposes for governors mean they have:

- A shared understanding of what success looks like across the four purposes?
- The willingness to make an active contribution to school life and to be proud to make a difference?
- A clear focus on representing the school within the wider community?
- The skills to listen, support, challenge and scrutinise across the work of the school to achieve higher standards for all?

Wider community

- *What is the current starting point?*
- *How can wider community play an active role in contributing to the curriculum?*

Do the four purposes for the wider community mean that:

- Local businesses have opportunities to contribute to learner experiences?
- There is a shared responsibility and willingness to commit across the wider community?
- The wider community can contribute to learning through improved opportunities within industry, through enhanced technology, and through advising on the skills learners will require to meet the needs of the future workforce?
- They can contribute to the vision of the school by providing an awareness of local, national and international contexts including sustainability awareness and how to reduce inequalities across our society.

Why do we need to change?

- Curriculum for Wales gives us four clear purposes of education. Therefore, we now have an opportunity to ask why? What are the needs of all learners to thrive within, and contribute to, an ever changing, technologically-advancing 21st Century?
- The current vision will not necessarily support the new curriculum. Therefore, what knowledge, skills and experiences can schools offer to allow learners to develop the four purposes?
- The Covid era has presented challenges that have changed the way schools work and operate. What can schools learn from this experience and what opportunities can we develop and build upon to create a new resilience, increased pupil independence, enhanced creativity and improved digital learning?

What do we need to change?

- The changes needed at school level will be specific to individual schools and will need to capture the vision of the four purposes at a local level.
- There will be an opportunity to consider the broader vision of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015)
- At an operational level there is a requirement for cultural change through a common re-definition of success. This should include a broader and more qualitative set of indicators, owned by all and including the wider community. Over time, these indicators will change and develop as schools gain a greater understanding.
- The design of a new vision, that includes a local curriculum from a national framework, needs to allow for, and incorporate, collaborative local decision making.
- The new vision needs to reflect a curriculum as a process that is experienced and that will evolve rather than an as end product.

How do we go about making those changes?

We must:

- Ensure all stakeholders are involved in the conversation about why these changes are happening and in resetting the vision. This will ensure that everyone feels ownership, that they can see their own role and will achieve a common understanding of success.
- Make best use of GwE's Professional Learning for senior leaders. This will encourage reflection and discussion on the process of developing a shared vision through engagement with all stakeholders.
- Make sure desirable behaviours are modelled by all through a culture of trust, and clear and inclusive communication. .
- Maintain a clear flow of communication and collaboration through positive and open relationships. Build confidence through keeping everything simple and make sure the main focus is always on the learners.

PEDAGOGY

THINK PIECE: PEDAGOGY

Pedagogy is … about more than 'teaching' in the narrow sense of methods used in the classroom. It represents the considered selection of those methods in light of the purposes of the curriculum and the needs and developmental stage of the children and young people across the 3-16 continuum. It combines theoretical and practical knowledge and skills with fine judgement about what is required to promote effective learning in particular contexts. It lies at the heart of what it means to be an excellent teacher.

('Successful Futures' p.63)

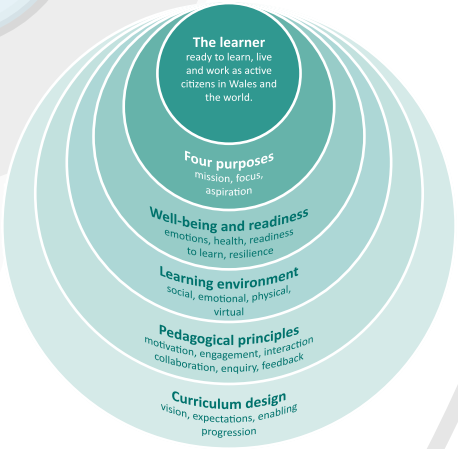
Sound pedagogy will be an integral part of the successful implementation of the curriculum. It means much more than the implementation of a pre-determined repertoire of methods and requires high-quality teachers with a sound understanding of the 'why' and 'how' of teaching as well as the 'what'. The implications for the formation and subsequent growth of teachers as reflective practitioners and for schools to develop as learning organisations are considerable.

Key questions to consider (p.52 'Curriculum for Wales guidance')

1. How will we create a culture which encourages practitioners to develop a deep understanding of pedagogy and the skills to select the most appropriate pedagogical approaches to meet the needs and interests of all learners?
2. How will we ensure that the pedagogy of the Foundation Phase is developed and built on across the continuum?
3. How will our vision for learning reflect the twelve pedagogical principles?
4. What learning environment do we need to create to fully support our vision for learning?

Pedagogy

Making sense of the interactions and relationships that lead to learning



Why do we need to change?

The need for change is very clear if we are to develop a curriculum which supports and enables world-class teaching and learning in the twenty-first century. If Curriculum for Wales is to have the intended positive impact on children and young people's learning and achievement, it is vital that we take full account of the implications for pedagogy. There is a fundamental interdependency between the 4 purposes of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

- Children and young people want lessons to be more relevant and engaging, with more practical lessons, more fun, more interactivity, and more out-of-classroom activities. There is a sense that a more general enthusiasm for learning has been sacrificed in the race for qualifications.
- There are significant needs to move away from 'learning about' to 'learning to', with a growing skills focus and an emphasis on application and development of higher-order skills, particularly creativity, entrepreneurship and digital literacy.
- There is increasing focus on the purpose and use of assessment, and in particular its critical role in relation to teaching and learning.
- Representatives of business were similarly extremely concerned that schools were out of touch with the emerging digital workplace. They saw the ability to use technology creatively for researching and problem solving as key competences that they wanted to see in prospective employees. ('Successful Futures' Chapter 2)

What do we need to change?

We need to:

- Strive for a continuity and progression of pedagogical approaches across the 3-16 continuum, that enacts the four purposes at the core of teaching and learning with well-being at the centre.
- Deepen teachers' understanding of the appropriate pedagogical approaches to meet the individual needs of children and young people rather than on the preferred methods of teachers.
- Create meaningful learning experiences that challenge and stimulate the individual needs and contexts of all the children and young people of Wales. How are we planning relevant and engaging learning experiences to ensure that they make steady and deeper progress that is appropriate to their stage of development?
- Plan learning experiences that fully develop and integrate the higher-order cross-curricular and integral skills.
- Further develop digital competencies to focus on pedagogy, deeper skill development, transferability and understanding, as well as potential application of these competencies. Build on the experiences and progress gained through blended learning approaches during the Covid-19 pandemic of online and face-to-face teaching.

How do we go about making those changes?
What does this mean for all leaders and practitioners of pedagogy?

How well are we:

- Creating, developing and implementing a shared vision for pedagogy with all stakeholders to realise the four purposes?
- Evaluating our current practice? How do we know 'what' and 'where' our strengths are in pedagogical practices and what needs to be further developed?
- Providing Professional Learning (PL) opportunities for all teaching staff to discuss and share good practice? To reflect on up-to-date educational research and to allow continual professional development that can enhance the pedagogical knowledge, understanding and skills of each practitioner as well as the quality of provision within a school and cluster. How is it supporting their work in relation to the professional standards?
- Modelling effective pedagogy across the continuum? What does the progression and pace of the 12 pedagogical principles look like in practice from a teaching and learning perspective for all stages and all needs?
- Ensuring opportunities to experiment with new approaches and to allow time to share, reflect and refine?
- Ensuring that we have high expectations of all learners? Is classroom and online practice successful in engaging all learners to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding to an appropriately high level as they move through the school and continuum?
- Exploring and realising the potential of the learning environment both indoors and outdoors? Furthermore, how classroom organisation, routines and relationships can facilitate different learning approaches and experiences as well as developing children and young people's social, emotional and physical well-being.
- Exploring Signature Pedagogies that are common to specific disciplines and Areas of Learning Experiences (AoLEs) that meet the needs of individual learners and the learning objectives?
- Embedding assessment for learning as a pedagogical principle consistently into classroom practice? How does it provide practitioners with insight into the effectiveness of teaching and learning and take into account external accountability and expectations?
- Considering pedagogy when designing assessments? Are we providing opportunities for learners to apply skills and knowledge in different ways to suit their own preferred style of learning and application?
- Ensuring that pedagogical approaches offer broad experiences whilst also allowing opportunities to

work with examinations and results? We cannot disregard the significance of qualifications in shaping young lives.

Further reading and research

- Successful Futures on gov.wales
- Curriculum for Wales guidance on Hwb
- GwE 12 Pedagogical Principles toolkit (captures research, literature, school based practice)
- 'Talk Pedagogy' national network on Hwb and Microsoft Teams

Offeryn Addysgeg
GwE Pedagogy Tool

Glossary

Signature Pedagogies - understanding experiences that allow learners to think and act in the same manner as experts in a particular field or domain.

ASSESSMENT

THINK PIECE: ASSESSMENT

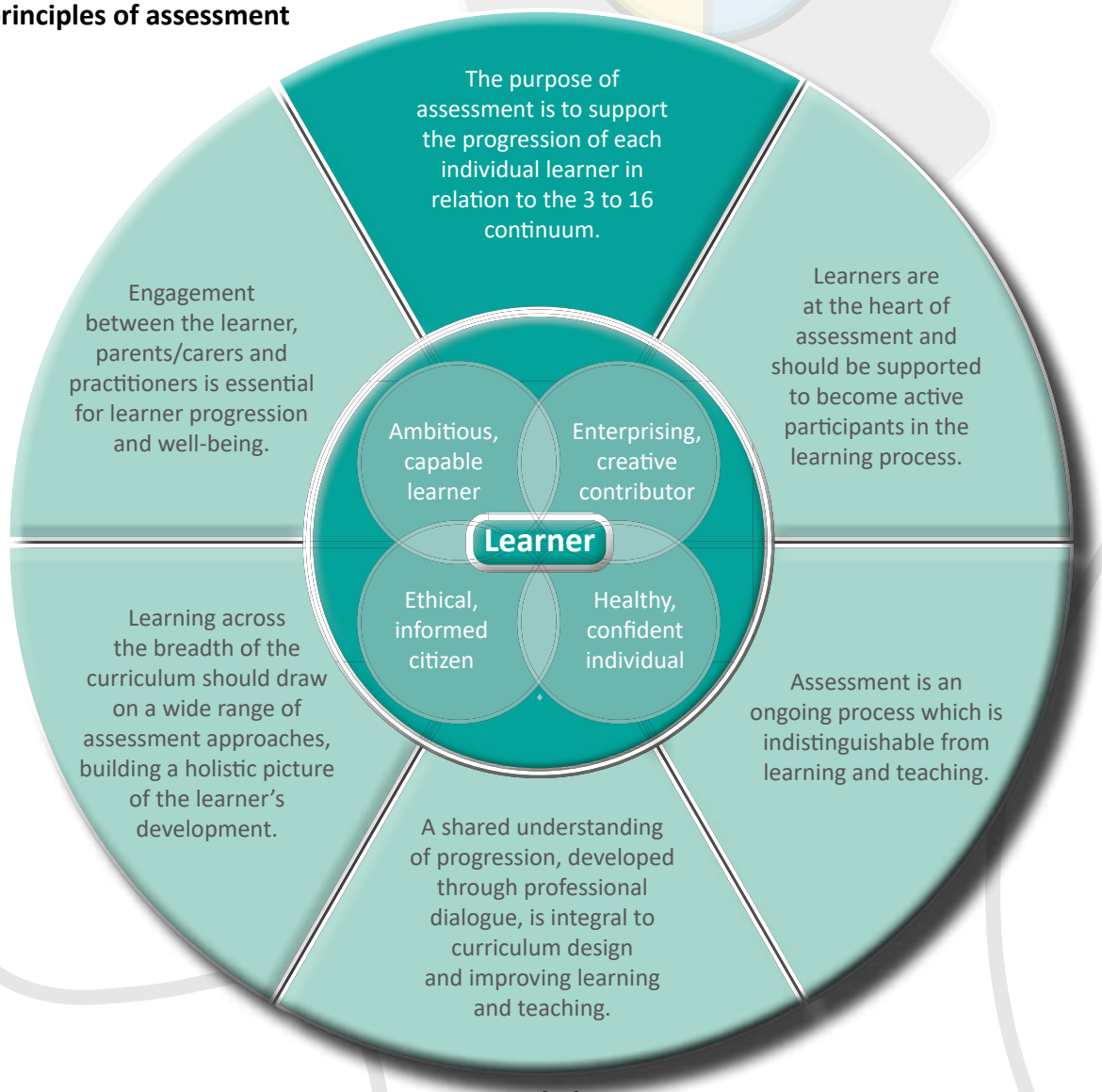
The main owners of assessment information are the learners and they should play a key part in their learning process. Assessment, curriculum design and pedagogy are interdependent and their planning needs to be aligned.

According to the Curriculum for Wales 'Supporting Learner Progression Assessment Guidance' the main purposes of assessment are:

- Supporting individual learners on an ongoing, day-to-day basis
- Identifying, capturing and reflecting on individual learner progress over time
- Understanding group progress in order to reflect on practice

It also notes:
"Assessment plays a fundamental role in ensuring each individual learner is supported and challenged accordingly. It should contribute to developing a holistic picture of the learner – their strengths, the ways in which they learn, and their areas for development – in order to inform next steps in learning and teaching."

The key principles of assessment



Why do we need to change?

- Some assessment processes are unnecessary and don't align with the principles of Curriculum for Wales
- Assessment needs to effectively reflect the changes to the vision, curriculum and pedagogy.

What do we need to change?

We need to:

- Increase the emphasis on effective formative assessment, discussing and assessing learning with learners.
- Encourage more professional dialogue between all staff within and between schools with a focus on assessment to enable pupil progress, how to have effective discussions with learners about their learning and approaches to planning and reviewing learners next steps, thus deepening the learning.

How do we go about making those changes?

We need to:

- Involve all stakeholders in developing the vision for assessment and the purpose of the processes.
- Take time to reflect and plan. For example, how best to use the What Matters Statements, principles of progression and descriptions of learning to design assessment processes.
- Carefully consider the purpose/reason for any assessment. For example, is it relevant? What use will be made of the assessment information?

WHO NEEDS WHAT FROM ASSESSMENT?

What do learners need?

Learners need:

- Timely feedback about their current progress and a direction for their next learning steps. For example, in the form of daily feedback from adults, peers, self-assessment in the classroom and also from periodic assessments.
- Celebration and reinforcement of achievements and motivation for further learning.
- Ownership of assessment information and to play a central part in planning for further progress:
  - increasing breadth and depth of knowledge;
  - deepening understanding of the ideas and disciplines within areas;
  - refinement and growing sophistication in the use and application of skills;
  - making connections and transferring learning into new contexts
  - increasing effectiveness as a learner
- A good understanding of how they learn and how they are developing as confident, independent learners.
- A learning environment that enables them to assess their learning effectively, discuss mistakes or misconceptions confidently and to give and receive feedback respectfully.

What do practitioners need?

They need:

- Relevant, practical, accessible information that can be used flexibly to plan for learner progression, both on a daily basis in the classroom and from periodic assessments.
- To make good use of formative assessment and to ensure effective response to feedback.
- To be able to devote their time and energy to teaching, and to recognise that taking time to talk with, and listen to, learners, is valuable assessment.
- To be able to assess the learner using more qualitative data, taking a holistic approach to review progress and inform next steps. There should be a focus on wellbeing and metacognition as well as academic progress.

For example, considering learners' work, their development as a learner and taking input from parents/ support staff /external agencies.
- The time to participate in effective and regular professional dialogue on learner progress with other colleagues and leaders within school and, when relevant, between schools. For example, peer engagement, professional dialogue, transition meetings.

What do school leaders need?
They need:
- Simple, effective processes to identify learner progress to gain a clear picture of teaching and learning. They should then use this information to plan an effective strategic direction for the school and share this information appropriately with different stakeholders and audiences.
- To encourage an environment based on mutual trust and respect, rather than compliance and reporting.
- To ensure continuous and effective professional learning for all staff to develop strong formative assessment practices.
- Regular and informed discussions and information on assessment and learner progress between middle and senior leaders and governors, in order to support strategic planning for school development.

What do parents/carers need?
They need to:
- To be well informed and reassured about their child/children's progress and to celebrate their successes both academically and as a young person.
- Be involved in varied and regular communication with the school to share information about their child/ children's progress and to know how best to support further learning and progress.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Which current assessment practices do you need to keep/rethink/ change/elimininate?
- What impact will feedback have on learner progress and teaching?
- *E.g. How will learners improve their work based on verbal, in the moment feedback and written feedback?*
  How will teachers adapt their teaching in response to learner feedback/understanding?
- How will your assessment practices inform teaching and learning?
- How will you ensure that learners are fully involved in assessing and planning their progress?
- How will your assessment approaches support the four purposes?
- How will you ensure a shared undertsanding of progression – within your school and between a cluster of schools?
- How will you ensure that the main purpose of assessment is for information on learner progress rather than for accountability?
- What information will you need and when? What use you will make of the information?
- How will the information be helpful for learners/stakeholders?
- How will you ensure that parents are involved in an effective learning partnership?
- How do you plan to move along the continuum from quantitative assessment to qualtitative assessment?
- How might you create the space and capacity to develop and to use assessment effectively?

Further reading:

- Curriculum for Wales Guidance
  https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/
- Curriculum for Wales - Supporting Learner Progression Assessment Guidance
  https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/supporting-learner-progression-assessment-guidance/#the-purpose-of-assessment
- Assessment for Learning: Using the right tools and resources to notice and respond to progress across the curriculum (New Zealand Curriculum)
  https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Strengthening-local-curriculum/Leading-local-curriculum-guide-series/Assessment-for-learning
- Assessing and monitoring Pupil Progress EEF
  https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/assessing-and-monitoring-pupil-progress/
- Rethinking Assessment (bigeducation.org)
  https://bigeducation.org/blogs-ra/

CURRICULUM DESIGN

THINK PIECE: CURRICULUM DESIGN

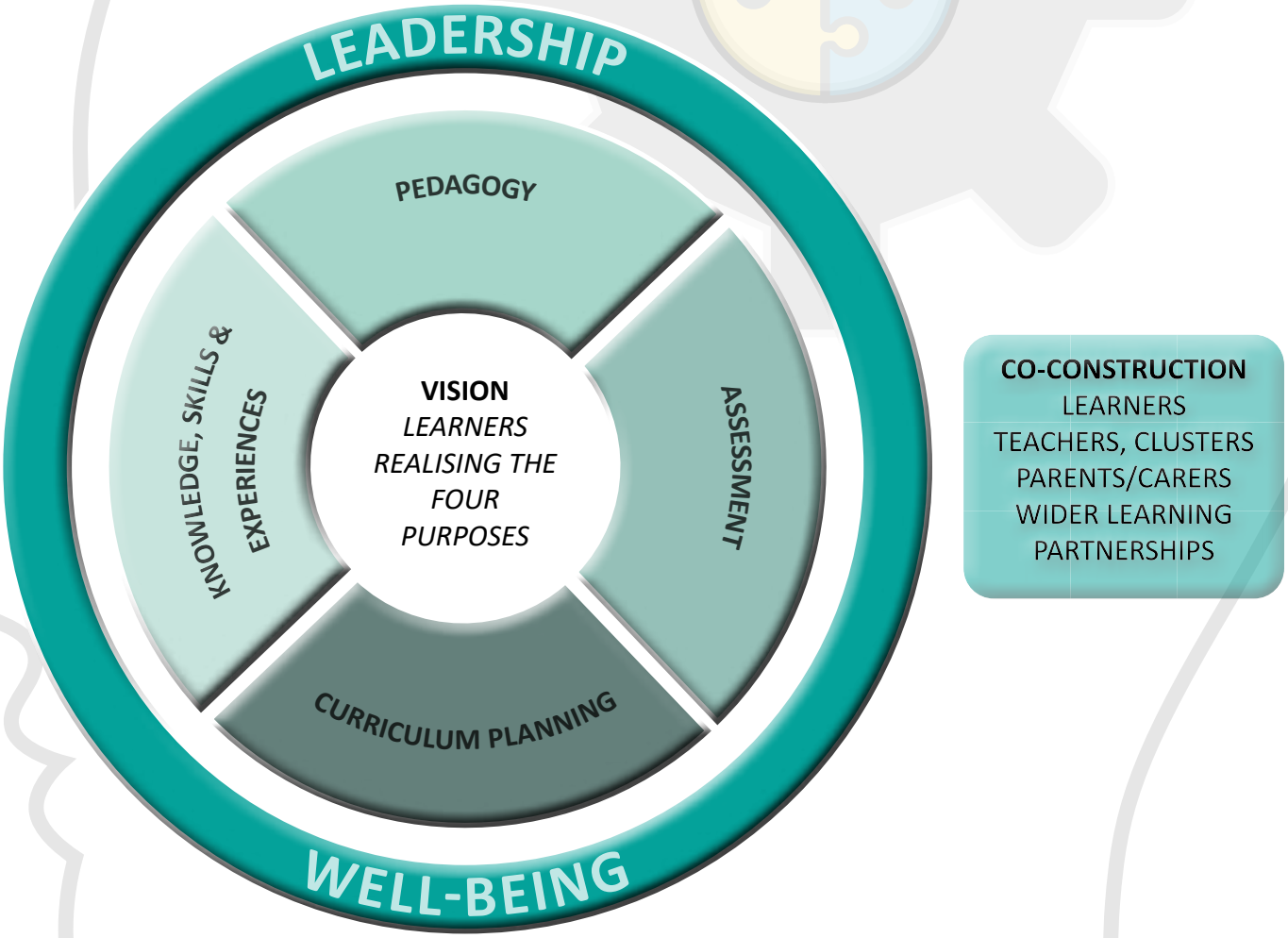
What is Curriculum Design?

Curriculum design is a process. The important principles and considerations that should inform that process include developing:

- a vision for curriculum in a school
- a curriculum structure to make that vision a reality

Why do we need to change our current curriculum design?

Evidence from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys, the relative performance of children and young people in Wales in national qualifications, and evaluations in Estyn reports all demonstrate that levels of achievement are not as high as they should be – Successful Futures.



Why Curriculum Design?

It is essential that each child and young person in Wales should be able to benefit from curriculum and assessment arrangements that will best meet their needs and equip them for their future lives. Our children and young people only have a relatively short time at school so we must use that time judiciously

and productively to help each and every one to grow as capable, healthy, well-rounded individual who can thrive in the face of unknown future challenges.

Currently, curriculum design often takes the form of a framework of subjects to be taught over a defined period such as key stages. This approach to the curriculum involves defining what all children (or groups of children) should experience. An alternative approach focuses more directly on the expected outcomes of learning. In this approach the curriculum is often framed in terms of the key skills, capabilities or competencies that will be developed in children and young people.

The subject versus skills debate of these two curriculum designs merely creates unhelpful comparisons. An effective e curriculum needs to enthuse children and young people about learning in ways that include both the vital contribution of discipline-based learning and the knowledge, skills and temperament that will help them to meet the needs of today and the challenges of tomorrow.

The school curriculum in Wales should be defined as including all of the learning experiences and assessment activities planned in pursuit of agreed purposes of education. These purposes should directly influence decisions about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Pg. 14 Successful Futures – Principles of Curriculum Design – the curriculum should be: authentic, evidence-based, responsive, inclusive, ambitious, empowering, unified, engaging, based on subsidiarity, manageable.

Key points for designing a local curriculum

- A local curriculum should be unique and responsive to the priorities, preferences, and issues of the school's community, parents and learners.
- What works well, and improving learning for all, should be at the heart of local curriculum design.
- We may not find what works best immediately or for all learners. Understanding that this is a journey means we can continue to challenge and evaluate our ideas, systems, and processes as we learn along the way.

What do schools need to change?

Schools should:

- Build a curriculum that allows learners to pursue the four purposes.
- Work collaboratively to ensure that there is a continuum of learning between phases/sectors.
- Review the structure, distribution and time allocation of disciplines and staffing
- Evaluate and question: why are we doing this and how does it progress the learning?
- Consider the role of accountability measures and performance outcomes. Schools must prepare learners for exams and qualifications. **They should not compromise the curriculum and learning experiences for our learners**
- Ensure equity of access to the curriculum for all learners

Making the vision a reality

In order to create the curriculum from a vision we need to consider the following:

- **What should we teach and why?**
- **How should we teach it?**
- **How will this support our learners to realise the four purposes?**

We need to ask ourselves:

- Are we engaging all stakeholders in a conversation about these three questions?
- Is this curriculum informed by the schools vision, values, ethos, location and surroundings?

- How will assessment support this curriculum as well as the learning?

This freedom of choice should be underpinned by an evidence based process of curriculum design, where the aim is always to help learners realise the four purposes

- How do we select curriculum content?
- How can we support our teachers in choosing the specific experiences, knowledge, skills and context that will best support learning?
- How is the learning best structured?
- What professional learning will our teachers need?
- How does the curriculum contribute to learners' realisation of the four purposes and acquisition of the integral skills which underpin them?
- How does the curriculum support the development of the learners' sense of identity in Wales?
- Is the curriculum broad and balanced?
- Is the curriculum appropriate for the learners with regards to age, ability and aptitude?
- How does the curriculum enable appropriate progression along the continuum of learning?
- How does the curriculum incorporate opportunities for the application of cross-curricular skills?
- How does the curriculum incorporate assessment for learners' progression?
- How does the curriculum draw on learner voice and respond to learners' needs, experiences and input?

What structure should underpin learning and provide the same high expectations for all learners?

We need to ask ourselves:

- How can we best utilise the experiences, expertise, skills and passion of our teachers/team to provide an up to date and relevant curriculum?
- How will we support progression along a continuum of learning and how do we collaborate to ensure effective transition across the 3 to 16 age range?
- Are the Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) the most effective delivery structure for achieving the four purposes?
- Is the current conventional structure of the week - in secondary schools 25 x 1 hour lessons or 30 x 50 minutes - and the current allocation of time to different subjects – the most effective vehicle to deliver what is clearly a very different curriculum? Does the distribution of delivery time need to be re-examined alongside the conversations around learning?
- How do we ensure that the principles of progression drive the planning process and not simply the theme within the thematic approach (if a school decides that a thematic curriculum is the most appropriate way forward)?
- Do current school timings and cohort organization best meet the needs of the new curriculum? Do we need to look flexibly at timings of the day and groupings?
- How can we best utilise the non-contact time of teachers/support staff to support curriculum development?

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

- Reflecting on what we have learnt during the Covid-19 pandemic – what can we take from this experience moving forward?
- Do we see the purpose of education differently?

CURRICULUM DESIGN MODELS

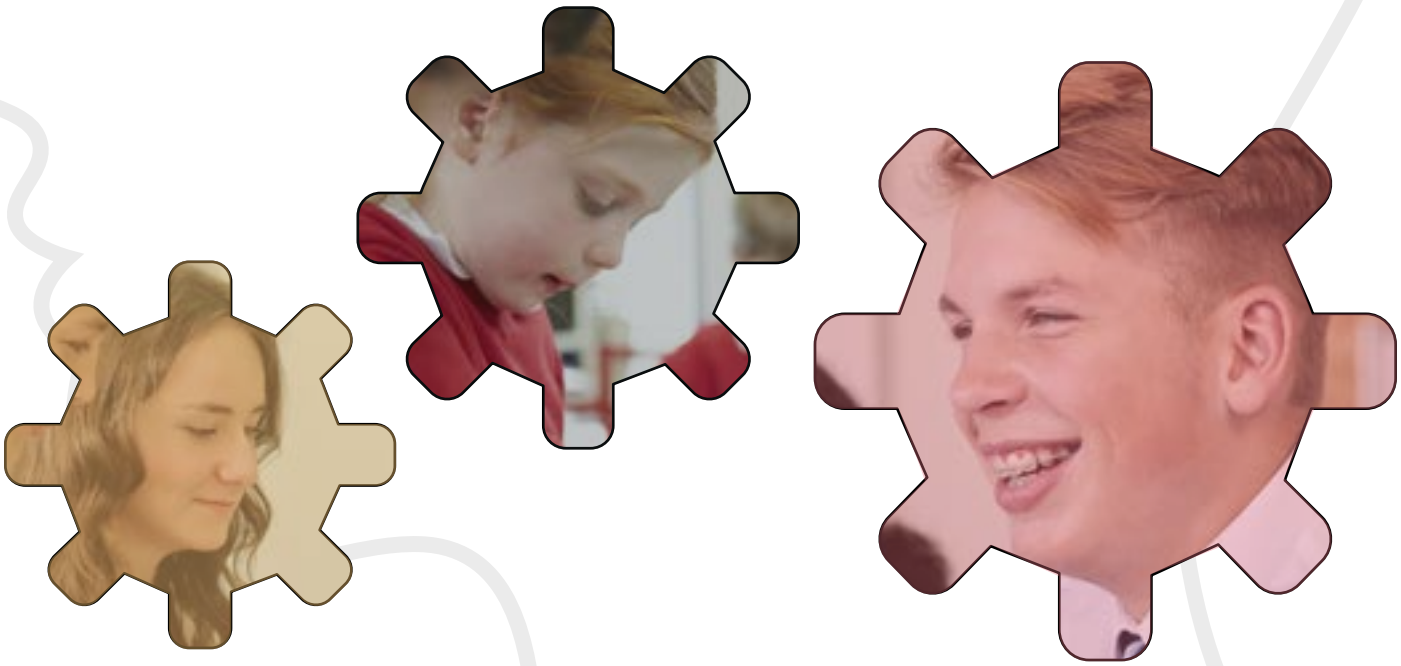
Have you considered different models for curriculum design?

MODEL	DEFINITION
Disciplinary	Specialist teaching within disciplines or subjects

MODEL	DEFINITION
Multidisciplinary	A multidisciplinary curriculum is one in which the same topic is studied from the viewpoint of more than one discipline.
Interdisciplinary	Combines several school subjects into one active project or is organized to cut across subject-matter lines, bringing together various aspects of the curriculum into meaningful association. Draws knowledge and skills from two or more disciplines in a more connected way Addresses a complex problem or focus question that cannot be resolved by using a single disciplinary approach e.g. a Global Pandemic
Integrated	Largely an interdisciplinary, organisational approach, which breaks down traditional subject boundaries – either partially (e.g. hybrid subjects) or fully (e.g. the US middle school approach)

Questions for consideration

- How effective would the chosen curriculum model be at making connections within and between knowledge and skills and AoLEs, etc.?
- How well does the model develop the cross-curricular skills?
- How well does each model develop a deep understanding of wellbeing, sustainability, equality and climate change?
- Do the themes or big questions ensure rich and rigorous learning across subject areas?
- How do we ensure progression is built into the curriculum model?
- How do we ensure multidisciplinary or inter-disciplinary approaches provide rich and rigorous learning in all of the connected subjects?
- Would we map this model across the whole curriculum?
- How might this model impact on the sequencing of learning within areas?
- How can we provide the time and space for teachers to undertake collaborative planning?
- How do we support our teachers in transitioning from the old curriculum to the new Curriculum for Wales?
- Is a particular model more suitable to some areas of learning more than others? Why?
- What does each approach look like over the 3-16 continuum?
- How could we sequence the learning to ensure that key concepts were not missed?
- How do we prevent superficial coverage of some key concepts?
- How can we match the different approaches with preparation for exams?



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EDUCATION & YOUTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday, 1 July 2021
Report Subject	Social Media & Internet Safety
Cabinet Member	Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education and Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the majority of children and young people today the internet is an integral part to their lives. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased time online for everyone and has also highlighted the risks posed to children and young people online by harmful activity and content.

The safety and welfare of learners is paramount, with safeguarding an integral principle of digital learning. The overarching aim is to help protect children and young people from illegal, harmful and false content on the internet and to promote safe, responsible and considerate behaviour online. This is reflected in the approach driven by Welsh Government in their guidance, the Curriculum for Wales and through the provision of resources on Hwb. Locally the coordination of safeguarding training, policies, procedures and self-evaluation tools enables the Council to monitor schools implementation of the guidance and provide support.

This report has been developed to provide members with an update on the Portfolio's Social Media and Internet Safety policy and provision following the previous report given in 2019.

RECOMMENDATIONS	
1	That members receive the report on social media and internet safety and confirm they have received an appropriate level of assurance about the education offer to schools in relation to online safety, including social media.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	**EXPLAINING THE NATIONAL CONTEXT**
1.01	The 'Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes report' 2020/21 by Ofcom explores media use, attitudes and understanding among children and young people aged 5-15 years, as well as media access and use by young children aged 3-4 years. Below is a summary of media use among 5-15s in Wales in 2020: • 62% have their own tablet and 62% their own smartphone • To go online – 70% use a laptop, 67% a tablet and 67% a smartphone • 48% watch live broadcast TV and 90% watch video on demand content (this includes subscription services including Netflix and broadcast catch up services including BBCiplayer and websites like you tube and vimeo. • 69% play games online • 51% use social media apps/sites • 65% use messaging apps / sites • 98% use video sharing platforms (VSP) • 38% use live streaming apps/sites • 71% are aware of potential vlogger endorsements (12-15s who go online). • 49% are aware of ad placements in search engines (8-15s who go online and use search engines. • 30% have seen worrying or nasty content online (8-15s who go online). Among the findings nationally, almost all children aged 8-15 years who went online reported that they had received some sort of information or advice about online safety and said they would tell someone if they saw something worrying online. Among 12-15 year olds, comparable proportions had received this from either a parent or teacher (around eight in ten); while those aged 8-11years were more likely to have had advice from their parent (87% vs. 80% teacher). This information is very encouraging as it provides some level of assurance that primary and secondary schools are delivering on key aspects outlined in the Digital Competency Framework (DCF) and also many parents are also providing support and advice.
1.02	**School Health Research Network (SHRN)** The School Health Research Network (SHRN) conduct a national health and wellbeing survey every two years with secondary school aged children in

	Wales. The most recent survey was conducted during the Autumn term 2019; 6733 pupils from all 11 secondary schools in Flintshire participated in the survey. This is higher than the first survey undertaken in Autumn 2017 which had 6585 participants. Following the survey, schools received an individual report of their findings in Spring 2020, and members of the Healthy Schools team were able to develop one page profiles summarising each school's data and provide support in the development of action plans accordingly. The SHRN County report was issued May 2020 and the County SHRN Action Plan 2019-2024 has been updated to reflect the latest data. The implementation of this is overseen by the Flintshire Emotional Wellbeing Steering Group. Survey questions relevant to this report include: cyberbullying, explicit images and online contact with friends they got to know through the internet. **Students who have ever sent someone a sexually explicit image of themselves:** on average 10% of Flintshire learners reported that they have sent a sexually explicit image of themselves, which is the same as the national average. This is 2% lower than in 2017. **Students who have been cyberbullied in the past couple of months*:** (*Includes students who have been bullied once or more in the past couple of months)**:** On average 20% of Flintshire learners reported that they had been cyberbullied in the past couple of months which is 2% higher than the national average of 18%. However, this is lower than in 2017 when 23% reported that they had been cyber bullied. **Students who have online contact almost all the time throughout the day with friends they got to know through the internet:** on average 5% of Flintshire learners reported that they had online contact almost all the time throughout the day with friends they got to know through the internet. This is 1% lower than the national average. The term 'online contact' in the context of this survey question relates to 'sending and receiving text messages, emoticons, and photo, video or audio messages through instant messaging (e.g. WhatsApp, Snapchat), social network sites (e.g. Facebook) or e-mail (on a computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone)'. There is no comparative data for this question as it was not asked in 2019. The next survey will take place between September – December 2021 and all Flintshire secondary schools are encouraged to participate. Reports will be available in Spring/Summer 2022. A new digital system for reporting bullying incidents has been developed taking into account the Welsh Government's 'Rights, respect, and equality: Statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools 2019'. This will be in place from September 2021 for Flintshire primary and secondary schools. The new online system will provide a more accurate picture of bullying within schools in its various forms and how schools are addressing concerns reported.
1.03	**UK Government: The Online Safety Bill**

	In April 2019 the UK Government produced The Online Harms White Paper which set out the plans for a package of measures to keep UK internet users safe online and managing online harms. As part of the Online Harms White Paper, a regulatory framework would be introduced. This would include a mandatory 'duty of care' that would require companies 'in scope' to take reasonable steps to keep their users safe and tackle illegal and harmful activity on their services. The duty of care would be overseen by an independent regulator that would have effective enforcement powers to ensure that companies are compliant with the applicable Codes. The Online Harms White Paper was consulted on in Summer 2019 and the UK Government published an initial response in Feb 2020. Thereafter a full Government response was published in December 2020. The consultation highlighted the urgent need for action to protect users, particularly children, from significant harm. Companies and user groups welcomed the Government's intention to provide regulatory clarity and certainty. Legislation and regulation in the UK will form only part of the response required in order to tackle online harms. Notably in the full Government response, it confirms that Ofcom will be named as the regulator in legislation, and sets out the intended policy position. It is anticipated that The Online Safety Bill will be ready in 2021.
1.04	**Welsh Government: Action Plan** The first national Online Safety Action Plan for Children and Young People in Wales was launched in July 2018 and sets out how the Welsh Government would work with teachers, parents and carers, learners and partners to keep children and young people safe online. The action plan provided a focus for the Government's online safety work, building on the achievements over the last few years including the Hwb Online Safety Zone (now referred to as the Keeping Safe Online Zone) and the 360 degree safe Cymru online safety self-assessment tool. In 2019 this action plan was updated and additional actions added. The 2020 action plan has broadened the scope to account for the areas of cyber resilience and data protection and provides a strategic vision to keep children and young people safe online in Wales.
1.05	**Welsh Government Guidance** During the COVID-19 outbreak, the Welsh Government developed dedicated guidance 'Live-streaming and video conferencing: safeguarding principles and practice'. The guidance was issued in May 2020 and outlined key considerations for safe practice when live-streaming or video conferencing to support remote learning. The guidance formed part of the continuity of learning 'Stay Safe. Stay Learning.' programme and is aimed at maintained schools and settings in Wales. When schools decide to use live-streaming or video-conferencing, governing bodies, head teachers and staff must have full regard to national safeguarding guidance and local safeguarding policies. Also published in 2020 was the revised 'Keeping Learners Safe' guidance which outlines the role of local authorities and governing bodies in

	safeguarding children under the Education Act 2002. The guidance relates directly to the new Wales Safeguarding Procedures and duties under The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Notably it also includes a Safeguarding Audit Tool the purpose of which is to support all schools to review their safeguarding arrangements. The audit tool can help schools to identify strengths and weaknesses in their safeguarding arrangements and to ensure they are exercising their legal safeguarding obligations in line with the Keeping Learners Safe statutory guidance. This tool will form the basis of the Council's monitoring obligations going forward. Schools' Acceptable Use policies will be monitored as part of the safeguarding self-evaluation process. The 'Sharing Nudes and Semi-nudes Guidance: Responding to incidents and safeguarding children and young people' was also published in December 2020. The advice aims to support schools in developing procedures to respond to incidents involving sharing nudes or semi-nudes and signposts to resources and sources of support. This guidance replaces 'Sexting: Responding to incidents and safeguarding learners' published in 2017.
1.06	**Curriculum for Wales** The Curriculum for Wales guidance was published in January 2020 and aims to help schools develop their own curriculum. Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Competence will be statutory responsibilities across all areas of learning and experience within Curriculum for Wales when it is rolled out from September 2022. The Digital Competency Framework (DCF) was the first element of the new curriculum for Wales to be made available in 2016. It was developed by practitioners from Digital Pioneer Schools, drawing on research, including consideration of existing regional and international digital frameworks. The DCF sets out the digital skills to be attained by learners aged between 3 and 16-plus across four strands: Citizenship: Interacting and collaborating: Producing: Data and Computational Thinking. The Citizenship Strand focuses on developing and applying critical thinking skills and strategies. It includes specific elements focused on online behaviour, cyberbullying together with health and well-being.
1.07	**Hwb** Hwb is the Welsh Government's programme of action for improving the use of digital technology for learning and teaching in schools. Hwb includes multiple strands of work e.g. investment in broadband, education technology (EdTech) in-school infrastructure and the Hwb platform comprising of multiple cloud services. Hwb aims to provide learners, families, education practitioners, professionals and governors with the latest resources, information and guidance to enhance their digital resilience. The Keeping Safe Online Zone on Hwb has been designed and developed to support online safety in education across Wales. It provides an extensive suite of up-to-date bilingual resources, Welsh Government guidance and links to further sources of support on a range of online safety issues.

1.08	**360 Degree Safe Cymru** 360 Degree Safe Cymru is an online safety self-review tool for schools in Wales which is part of Hwb. It allows schools to review their online safety policy and practice and benchmark their progress against other schools nationally. 360 Degree Safe Cymru was updated in March 2021 to make the tool easier and quicker to use. The review takes schools through each aspect of online safety, helping them to collaborate, report, and progress. The 360 Degree Safe platform is used by 95% of schools in Wales and in Flintshire 68/78 schools are registered (increasing from 61 in 2019) 360 Safe Cymru is split into a number of aspects which cover the main areas of online safety in a school, e.g. responsibilities, policy, communications, technical security, etc. Each aspect offers five level statements, ranging from 'nothing in place' to the aspirational practice. Included for each aspect are target levels reflecting good online safety practice, and included for every single level are suggested improvement actions that describe how schools might reach the next level. Schools are encouraged to have a group of users, alongside a nominated lead, so that they can work collaboratively on the review, bringing together many areas of expertise. Analysis of 360 Safe Cymru, shows that schools in Wales report that the strongest aspects of their online safety provision are: • filtering and monitoring • policy scope • policy development • acceptable use • digital and video images. While areas for improvement are: • community • impact of the online safety policy and practice • staff training • governor education • self-evaluation. The data shows that schools perform better in areas of policy and where services (such as filtering) are provided for them. Other areas are more difficult to develop and embed, but often lead to the most effective practice. As of June 2021, 29 of the 68 registered schools in Flintshire have completed all the aspects of the 360 Degree Safe programme.
1.09	**All Wales School Liaison Core Programme** The All Wales School Liaison Core Programme (AWSLCP) is a partnership between the Welsh Government and the four Welsh Police Forces. School Community Police Officers (SCPO) deliver a programme of lessons in

	schools and provide a variety of supportive school policing and safeguarding activities. In addition to the core program of lessons there are variety of themed lessons schools can choose for delivery. Lessons relating to online safety include the following: • Stay SMART (Internet Safety) • Be cyber safe (Cyberbullying) • Risk Pics (Sexting) • Look who's talking (Grooming) • During the Covid-19 pandemic many officers were able to provide delivery online and face to face lessons have since returned. Officers provide an invaluable source of support to schools in dealing with a wide variety of issues including those online.
1.10	**Estyn** The new inspection framework is set to be introduced in September 2021 and will reflect the new curriculum and arrangements for self-evaluation. At present no date has been confirmed for when school inspections will resume.

2.00	**RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**
2.01	The provision for support for schools comes predominately through GwE, the regional school improvement service and Hwb.

3.00	**IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT**
3.01	The risk for the Council is the potential to breach statutory legislation related to safeguarding and the wellbeing of children. This includes the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2020. There is also potential for reputational damage and negative press coverage if there are significant breaches of policy involving learners or Flintshire employees in relation to internet and/or social media activity and findings from Estyn Inspections. This risk is mitigated by the Council having named officers with specific responsibilities for safeguarding in schools. The Council also provides firewall and web filtering services to schools via a service level agreement. A rolling safeguarding training programme for head teachers / designated safeguarding leads is in place. The dissemination of relevant information to schools is undertaken, alongside the monitoring of self-evaluations and annual reporting by schools on the implementation of relevant policies including Safeguarding, and Acceptable Use.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
4.01	None.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	**Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report 2020** https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/217825/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2020-21.pdf **School Health Research Network National Report 2019/20** https://www.shrn.org.uk/national-report-2019-20/ **The Online Harms White Paper: Full government response to the consultation December 2020** https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/outcome/online-harms-white-paper-full-government-response **Enhancing digital resilience in education: An action plan to protect children and young people online – summary of actions** https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/342ef42c-7717-4e5b-b72f-646a2d774518/enhancing-digital-resilience-in-education-an-action-plan-to-protect-children-and-young-people-online-summary-of-actions.pdf **Live-streaming and video-conferencing: safeguarding principles and practice In September 2020** https://hwb.gov.wales/zones/keeping-safe-online/live-streaming-and-video-conferencing-safeguarding-principles-and-practice/ **Keeping Learners Safe Guidance 2020** https://gov.wales/keeping-learners-safe **Sharing nudes and semi-nudes Guidance 2020** https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/6ad01b82-3a2c-4bf4-bd21-f5bac42655a4/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-guidance-for-education-settings-in-wales-final-english-011220.pdf **All Wales School Liaison Core Programme Lesson Matrix 2020/21** https://schoolbeat.cymru/uploads/media/2020-21-Lesson-Matrix-SchoolBeat.pdf

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	**Contact Officer:** Claire Sinnott, Learning Advisor – Health, Wellbeing & Safeguarding **Telephone:** 01352 704054 **E-mail:** Claire.sinnott@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	AWSLCP The All Wales School Liaison Core Programme **DCF** Digital Competency Framework **Hwb** *Hwb* is a platform with online tools and resources to support education in Wales. https://hwb.gov.wales/ **SHRN** School Health Research Network https://www.shrn.org.uk/ **360 degree safe Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** A self-review tool to help schools review their online safety policy and practice. https://360safe.org.uk

Mae'r dudalen hon yn wag yn bwrpasol

EDUCTION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday, 1st July 2021
Report Subject	Commencement of the Socio-economic Duty
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets
Report Author	Chief Executive
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Welsh Government has commenced the Socio-economic Duty in Wales. The statutory requirement of the duty places a legal responsibility on relevant bodies, when they are taking strategic decisions, to have due regard to the need to reduce the inequalities of outcome resulting from socio-economic disadvantage. The new duty will be a key mechanism for supporting the most vulnerable in our society.

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the new duty and update all Overview and Scrutiny Committees of our preparedness for the commencement of the socio-economic duty.

RECOMMENDATIONS	
1	Scrutiny note the requirements of the Socio-economic Duty.
2	Scrutiny is assured of our preparedness in meeting the new duty.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	**EXPLAINING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY**
1.01	Sections 1-3 of the Equality Act 2010, the Socio-economic Duty, requires relevant public bodies, when taking strategic decisions, to have due regard to the need to reduce inequalities of outcome that result from socio-economic disadvantage. This section of the Act was not enacted when the Equality Act came into force in 2012, and has lay dormant on the statute books. Welsh Ministers commenced the Socio-economic Duty on 31 March 2021.
1.02	The Socio-economic Duty intends to ensure that those taking strategic decisions: • take account of evidence and potential impact on people who experience socio-economic disadvantage. • through consultation and engagement, understand the views and needs of those impacted by the decision, particularly those who suffer socio-economic disadvantage. • welcome challenge and scrutiny. • drive a change in the way that decisions are made and the way decision makers operate.
1.03	Welsh Government (WG) has advised that “the duty is a key mechanism in supporting the most vulnerable in our society and something which will be extremely important in our continued response to Covid-19”.
1.04	WG has published non- statutory guidance, “A More Equal Wales, Preparing for the Socio-economic Duty” and a fact sheet to support organisations who are required to meet the duty. Guidance for decision makers “Socio-economic Duty: scrutiny framework” has also been published to support decision makers meet their duty to show “due regard”. This includes a checklist with examples of evidence to confirm “due regard” has been given.
1.05	Key terms explained in the guidance include: • **Due regard -** will require the named authorities to consider the issues and to give weight to such considerations proportionate to their relevance. • **Inequalities of outcome** – any measurable difference in outcome between those who experience socio- economic disadvantage and the rest of the population – lower healthy life expectation, lower paid work, poorer skills and attainment. • **Reporting** - there will be no statutory reporting but organisations should be able to demonstrate how they have discharged their statutory duty and have a clear audit trail of evidence. An individual or group who feel that their interests are adversely affected by a decision or feel that an organisation is not complying with the duty may bring a judicial review claim against that organisation.

	• **Strategic decisions -** Strategic decisions are defined as “those decisions which affect how the organisation fulfils its statutory purpose over a significant period of time”. These do not include routine, day to day decisions.
1.06	Some examples of strategic decisions include: • Medium to long term plans; • Setting objectives; • Changes to and developing public services; • Strategic financial planning; • Major procurement and commissioning decisions.
1.07	WG has set out four steps within the guidance to support organisations to prepare to meet the duty: • **Step 1** - identifying strategic decisions • **Step 2** - identifying those involved with strategic decisions. • **Step 3** - ensure that those involved with strategic decision making process understand the requirements of the duty. • **Step 4** - integrate consideration of inequality of outcome caused by socio-economic decisions within existing processes to understand and start evidencing, for example, Integrated Impact Assessments, engagement processes.
1.08	We are already undertaking a number of these steps: • Strategic decisions are identified in formal committee reports; • Integrated Impact Assessments (IIA) include potential impacts on poverty and these are included within committee reports for decision makers to consider; • Impacts on the well-being goals, including the goal “An Equal Wales”, and the future ways of working are also reported within committee reports; and • Poverty is included as a priority within the Council Plan.
1.09	The new duty provides an opportunity to review and update what we do, including IIAs, procurement and committee reports. This will ensure that we can evidence we are meeting the new duty and are considering how our decisions might help reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage. We are updating our IIA tool to ensure the new duty is fully considered and are amending the commissioning form to ensure commissioning officers complete relevant impact assessments before procuring new services.
1.10	Further information about this new duty is provided as part of a presentation to this committee.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	**Revenue/Capital:** there are no implications for the approved revenue and capital budgets for either the current financial year or for future financial years. **Human Resources:** there are no implications for additional capacity or for any change to current workforce structures or roles.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	An Integrated Impact Assessment is not required as this report provides an overview of legislation requirements. Strategic reports to formal committees, from 31 March 2021, will require evidence of demonstrating due regard to the Socio-economic Duty. **Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles Impact**

Long-term	No change.
Prevention	Positive. The new duty aims to ensure that potential impacts on socio-economic disadvantage are considered
Integration	Positive. The new duty aims to build on existing legislation, such as the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
Collaboration	No change
Involvement	Positive. Demonstrating due regard to socio-economic disadvantage requires public bodies to listen to the voices of people and communities who experience socio-economic disadvantage.

Well-being Goals Impact

Prosperous Wales	Positive. The purpose of the new duty is to reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage.
Resilient Wales	No change
Healthier Wales	Positive. The purpose of the new duty is to reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, including health inequalities.
More equal Wales	Positive. The purpose of the new duty is to reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage.
Cohesive Wales	No change
Vibrant Wales	No change
Globally responsible Wales	No change

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	No consultation required as this reports on a new duty.
4.02	All Council Overview and Scrutiny Committees will be receiving this report.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	A More Equal Wales: Preparing for the commencement of the Socio-economic Duty. Non- statutory Guidance . Commencing The Socio-economic Duty Fact Sheet Socio-economic Duty: Scrutiny Framework

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	**Contact Officer:** Fiona Mocko, Strategic Policy Advisor **Telephone:** 01352 702122 **E-mail:** fiona.mocko@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	Integrated Impact Assessments: An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) is a way to look at how a proposal could affect communities and if different groups within the community will be affected differently. It takes into consideration impacts on the environment, equality (people with protected characteristics), health, poverty and Welsh language. **Socio-economic disadvantage**: Living in less favourable social and economic circumstances than others in the same society. This includes both communities of interest and communities of place. Communities of interest includes people with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and groups of people who share an experience, for example, people who are homeless. Communities of place include people who are linked together because of where they reside or work.

Mae'r dudalen hon yn wag yn bwrpasol

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 1st July, 2021
Report Subject	End of Year Performance Monitoring Report
Cabinet Member	Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Flintshire County Council Reporting Measures 2020/21 were identified by portfolios and approved by Cabinet in September 2020. This report presents the annual out-turn of performance against those measures identified for 2020/21 relevant to the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

This out-turn report for the 2020/21 Reporting Measures shows that 67% of the performance indicators have met or exceeded their targets.

This report is an exception-based report and concentrates on under-performance against target.

RECOMMENDATIONS	
1.	That the Committee consider the End of Year Performance Monitoring Report to monitor areas of under performance and request further information as appropriate.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE PERFORMANCE AT YEAR END 2020/2021
1.01	The year-end performance monitoring reports provide explanation of the progress being made toward the agreed measures set out in the Flintshire County Council Reporting Measures 2020/21. These measures were approved by Cabinet after targets for 2020/21 were re-assessed for forecasted performance due to the disruptions caused during the response phase of the pandemic.
1.02	This report is an exception-based report and concentrates on under-performance against in-year targets.
1.03	**Monitoring our Performance** Analysis of performance against the performance indicators is undertaken using the RAG status. This is defined as: • RED - under-performance against target. • AMBER - where improvement may have been made but performance has missed the target. • GREEN - positive performance against target.
1.04	Analysis of current levels of performance against target shows the following: • 41 (67%) have achieved a green RAG status • 12 (20%) have an amber RAG status • 8 (13%) have a red RAG status
1.05	There are no performance indicators (PIs) which show a red RAG status for current performance against targets relevant to the Education, Youth & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There are no specific resource implications for this report.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	**Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles Impact**

Long-term	Throughout all of the Mid-Year Monitoring Report there are demonstrable actions and activities which relate to all of the
Prevention	
Integration	

Collaboration	Sustainable Development Principles. Specific case studies will be included in the Annual Performance Report for 2020/21.
Involvement	

Well-being Goals Impact

Prosperous Wales	Throughout the Mid-Year Monitoring Report there is evidence of alignment with the Well-being Goals. Specific strategic and policy reports include impact and risk assessments.
Resilient Wales	
Healthier Wales	
More equal Wales	
Cohesive Wales	
Vibrant Wales	
Globally responsible Wales	

Council's Well-being Objectives
The Council's wellbeing objectives will be included in the Annual Performance Report for 2020/21. We have reviewed and updated our Well-being Objectives in throughout the development of the Council Plan 2021/22.

4.00	**CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT**
4.01	The Reporting Measures are monitored by the respective Overview and Scrutiny Committees according to the priority area of interest.
4.02	Chief Officers have contributed towards reporting of relevant information.

5.00	**APPENDICES**
5.01	Appendix 1: End of Year Performance Monitoring Report 2020-21.

6.00	**LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**
6.01	Flintshire County Council Reporting Measures 2020/21.

7.00	**CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS**	
7.01	**Contact Officer:** **Telephone:** **E-mail:**	Ceri Shotton, Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator 01352 702305 ceri.shotton@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**
8.01	**Reporting Measures:** The document which sets out the performance indicators of the Council. This document provides a set of measures to support recovery and selected portfolio measures. **An explanation of the report headings** **Measures (Key Performance Indicators - KPIs)** Baseline Year – As a new indicator, a target has not been established. This will be monitored and targets established for the following year. End of Year Target – The target for this end of year as set at the beginning of the year. Current RAG Rating – This measures performance for the year against the target. It is automatically generated according to the data. Red = a position of under performance against target, Amber = a mid-position where improvement may have been made but performance has missed the target and Green = a position of positive performance against the target. Trend – Trend arrows give an impression of the direction the performance is heading compared to the previous year: • A 'downward arrow' always indicates poorer performance regardless of whether a KPI figure means that less is better (e.g. the amount of days to deliver a grant or undertake a review) or if a KPI figure means that more is better (e.g. number of new jobs in Flintshire). • Similarly an 'upward arrow' always indicates improved performance.

End of Year Report 2020/21

Revised 28/05/2021

Key for Report Performance

Performance	Shown as
Off Track (Red)	
Monitor (Amber)	
On Track (Green)	

Trend	Shown as
Downturned (Red)	
Maintained (Amber)	
Improved (Green)	

What we mean by Performance RAG

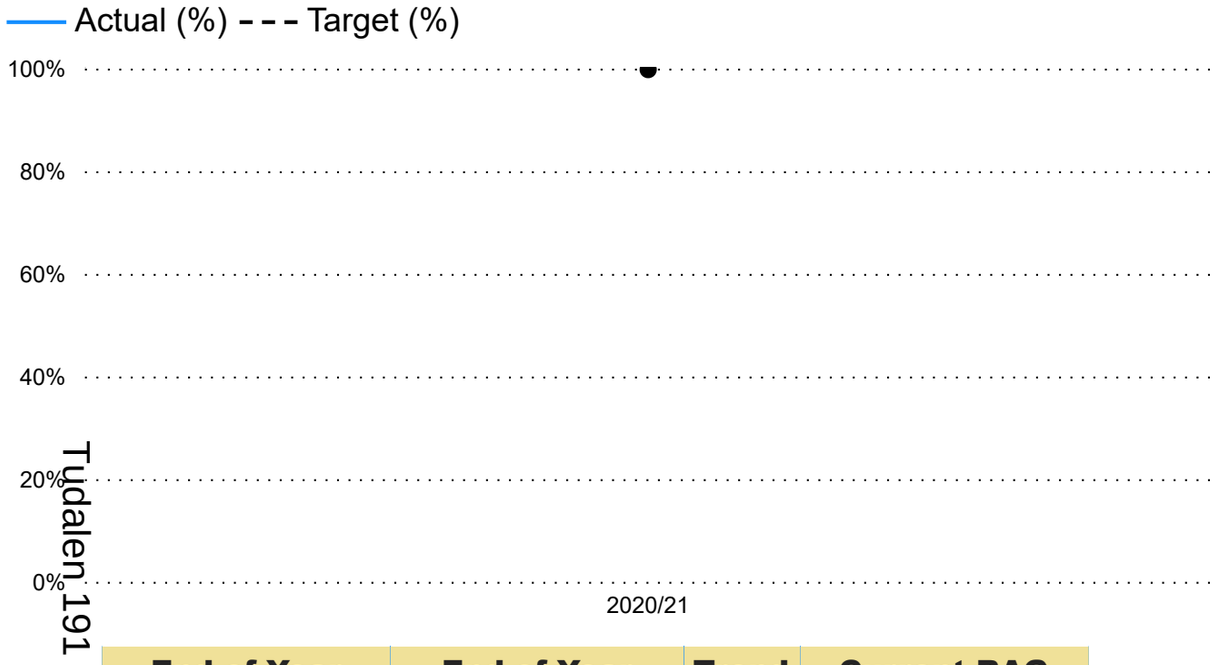
The Performance RAG is generated by assessing current performance against the target. This outcome is then illustrated in the report using the images above.

What we mean by Trend

The Trend is generated by assessing current performance against last years performance. This outcome is then illustrated in the report using the images above.

Education and Youth - Recovery Measures

All schools adopt ‘Ask Ceri’ resource

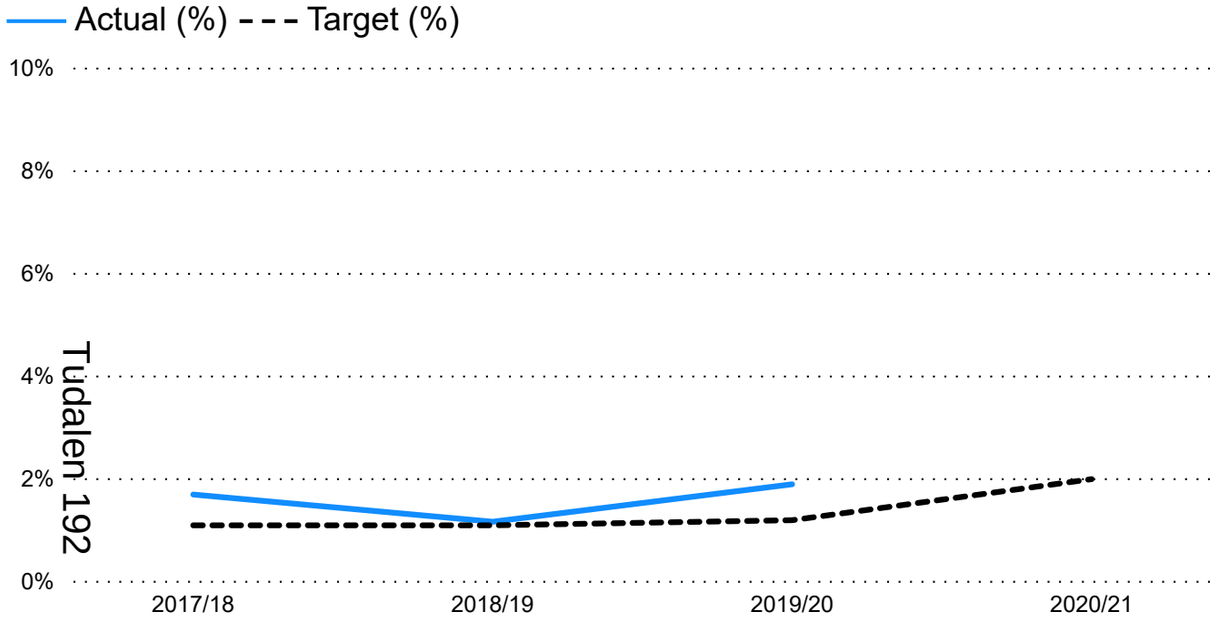


End of Year Actual (%)	End of Year Target (%)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
100.00%			

Comment
As a result of the COVID pandemic, it has not been possible to follow this up with schools beyond the training provided in March 2020. This will now move as an action to the 2021-2022 plan.

Education and Youth - Portfolio Measures

Percentage of year 11 leavers not in education, training...

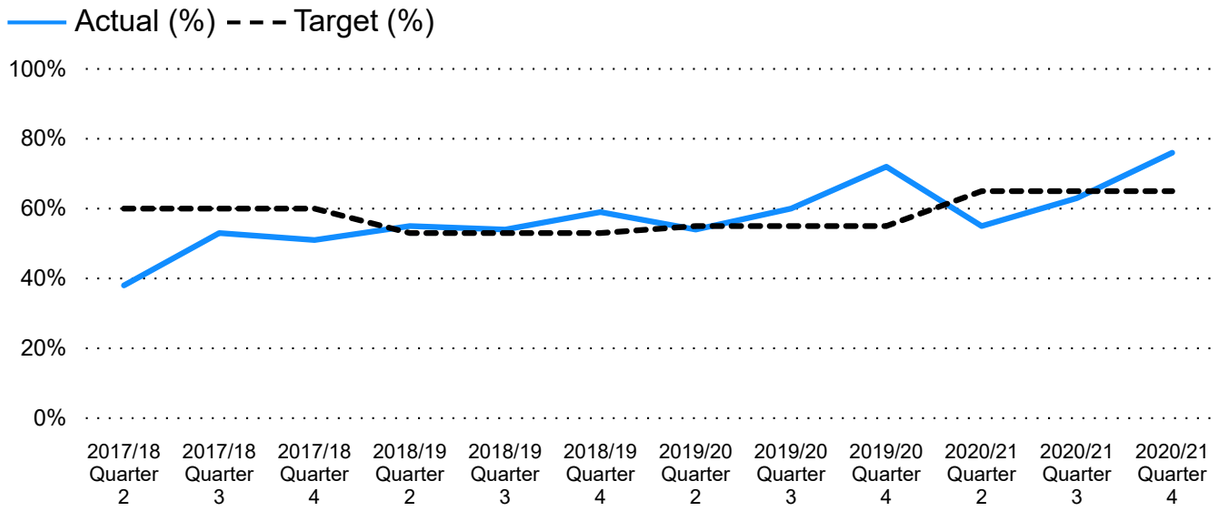


End of Year Actual (%)	End of Year Target (%)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
	2.00%		

Comment

The pandemic has adversly impacted education, employment and training opportunities for young people leaving statutory education in 2020. Officers have paid particular attention to mental health and wellbeing, offering a range of support to individuals and their families. A broader range of alternative education packages have been sought to promote engagement and the development of relevant skills to facilitate the successful transition into further education, training or employment.

The percentage of young people aged 16 – 18 in the youth justice system offered education, training or employment



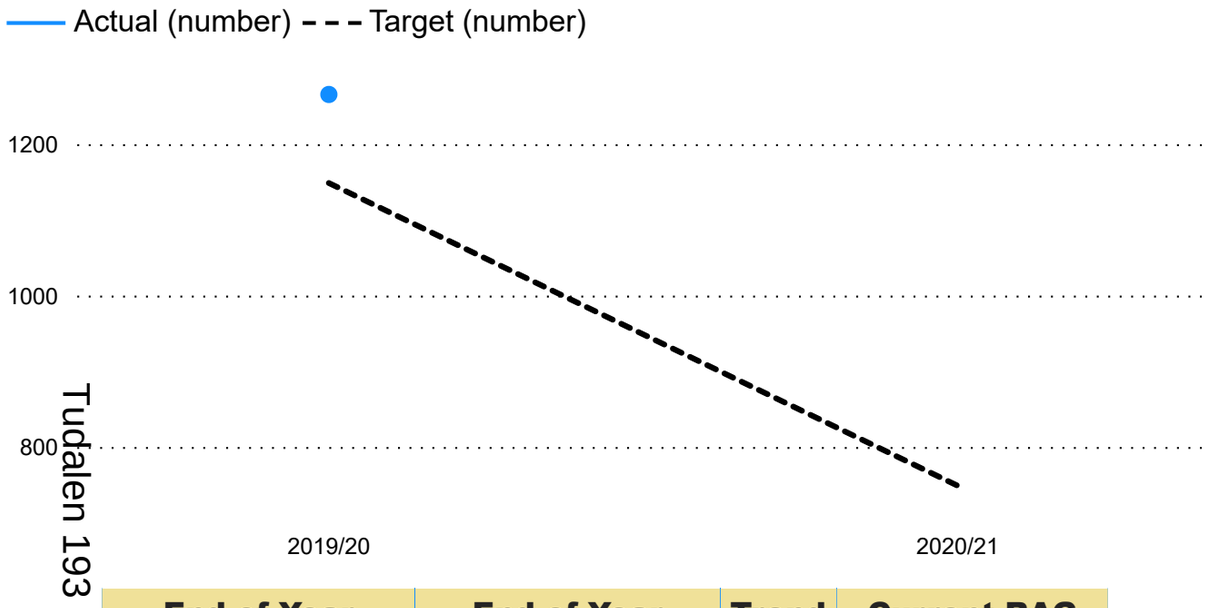
End of Year Actual (%)	End of Year Target (%)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
64.67%	65.00%	↑	

Comment

Of the 45 young people above school age open in the quarter, the majority were offered Education, Training and Employment. 65% were accessing more than 16 hours per week. The Youth Justice Service has an Education worker who supports all young people who are not accessing the full provision, and is able to offer alternatives to mainstream school or college through training courses and apprenticeships. This ensures that all young people referred to the services are assessed in terms of their educational provision at the point of entry.

Education and Youth - Portfolio Measures

The number of pupils who receive fixed term exclusions from school

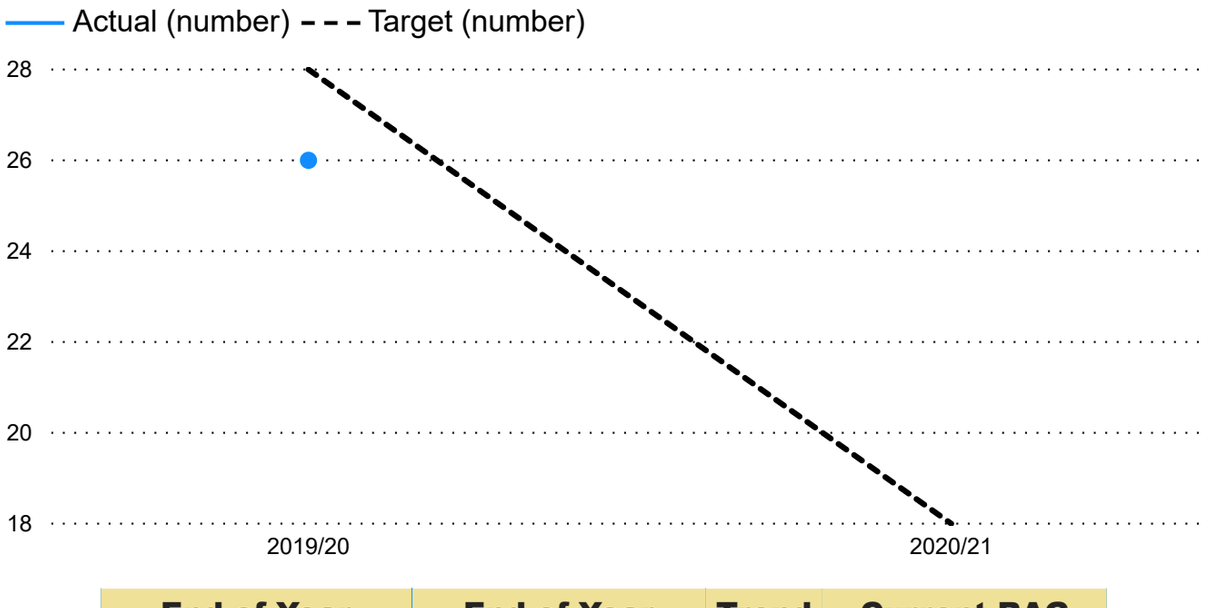


End of Year Actual (No.)	End of Year Target (No.)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
	750.00		

Comment

Attendance in schools was limited due to the COVID restrictions which has naturally impacted on the levels of exclusion from schools. Work has continued to support an overall reduction once pupils return to school. This includes changes to central services and processes to support earlier identification and intervention for pupils and increased capacity for the Counselling Service. Schools have also been offered a range of training to support an increased focus on wellbeing and engagement.

The number of pupils who are permanently excluded from school



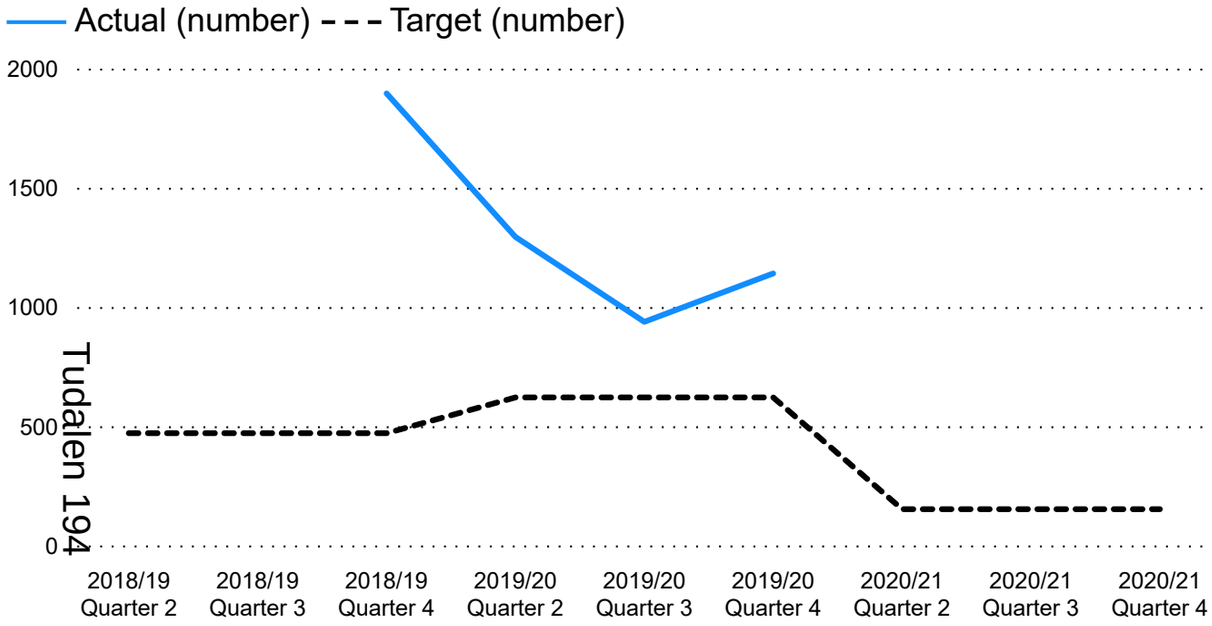
End of Year Actual (No.)	End of Year Target (No.)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
	18.00		

Comment

The level of permanent exclusion has reduced overall due in essence to the closure of schools during the pandemic. There were a number of pupils who had been permanently excluded just prior to periods of lockdown and officers ensured that they were allocated educational provision pending the resumption of the statutory processes which were paused by Welsh Government.

Education and Youth - Portfolio Measures

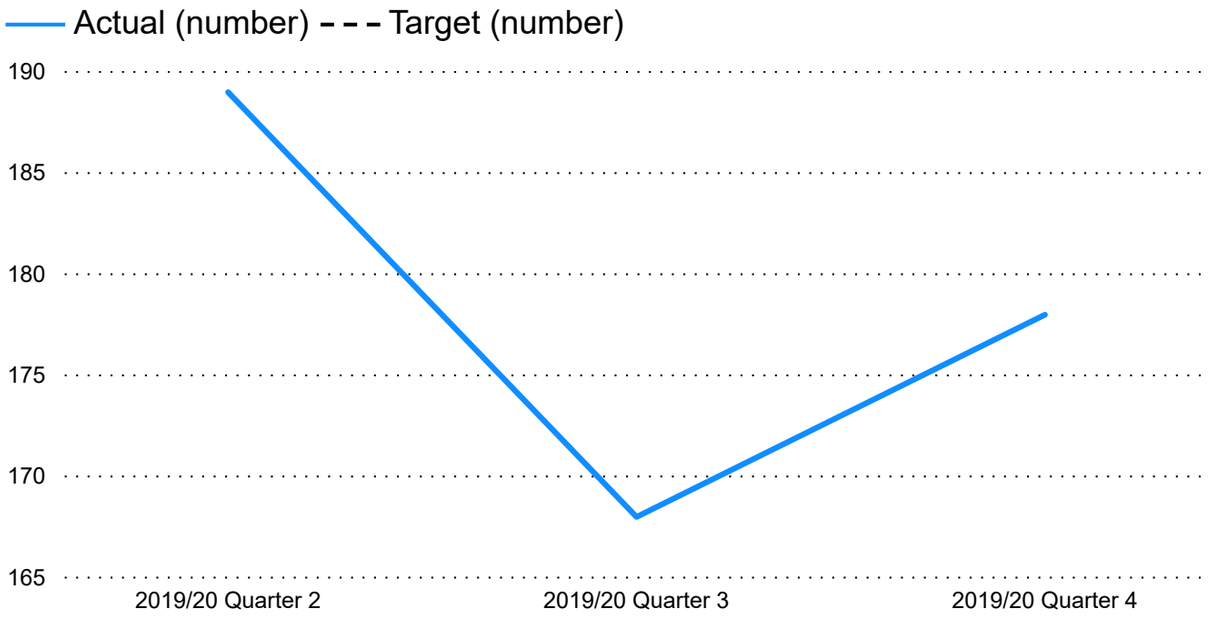
Number of children who access the Childcare Offer



End of Year Actual (No.)	End of Year Target (No.)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
	625.00		

Comment
In line with Welsh Government COVID-19 guidance, the childcare offer was suspended. The funding has been used to support pre-school children of keyworkers, identified vulnerable children or those with additional needs, and also to support 5-8 year olds in summer play schemes.

Number of childcare providers

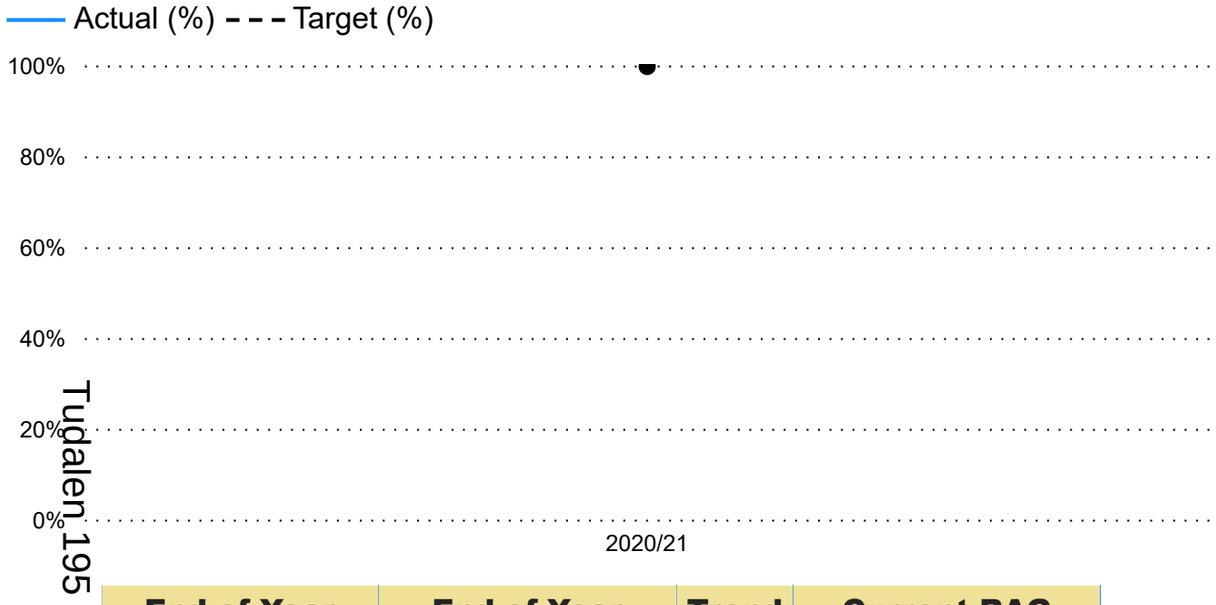


End of Year Actual (No.)	End of Year Target (No.)	Trend	Current RAG Rating

Comment
No target set - Due to the suspension of the scheme, no providers contributed to the childcare offer.

Education and Youth - Portfolio Measures

All schools maintain progress against key milestones in implementation of the new curriculum

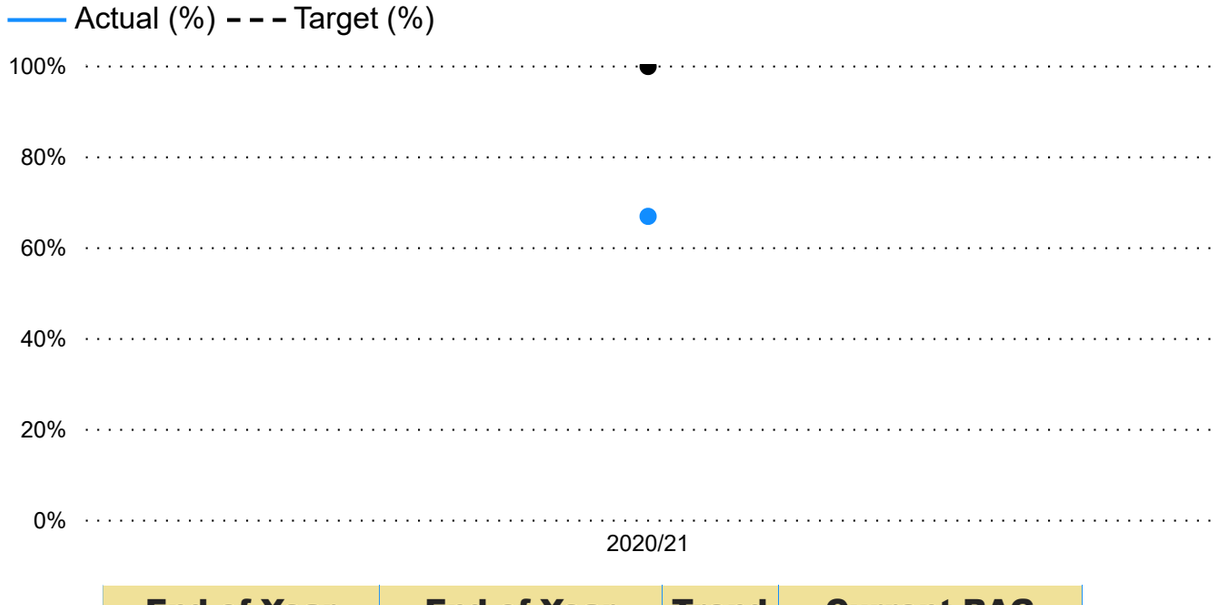


End of Year Actual (%)	End of Year Target (%)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
100.00%			

Comment

Whilst the pandemic has resulted in significant disruption to education over the last twelve months, schools in Flintshire have continued where possible to access professional development and plan for the implementation of the new curriculum. The summer 2020 INSET day set aside for planning for the new curriculum was however cancelled. Secondary schools can now also use the summer 2021 curriculum INSET day for work related to centre determined grades for GCSE and A Level qualifications.

All schools maintain progress against key milestones in the ALN reforms



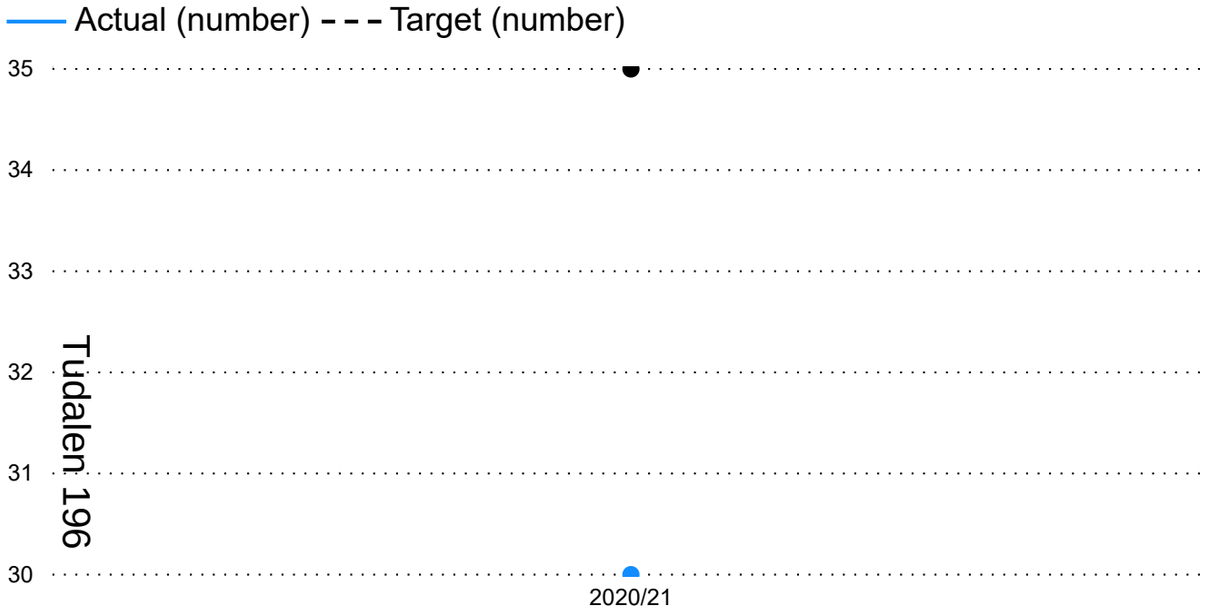
End of Year Actual (%)	End of Year Target (%)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
100.00%			

Comment

The additional workload pressures placed on schools by the pandemic has affected the level of progress recorded against the milestones. The level of engagement from schools in the training and Additional Learning Needs Transformation cluster and Forum meetings indicates a higher level of preparedness than the percentage indicates. The recent publication of the operational Code (April 2021) will enable the Council and schools to finalise their approaches ahead of implementation in September 2021.

Education and Youth - Portfolio Measures

First time entrants into Youth Justice Service

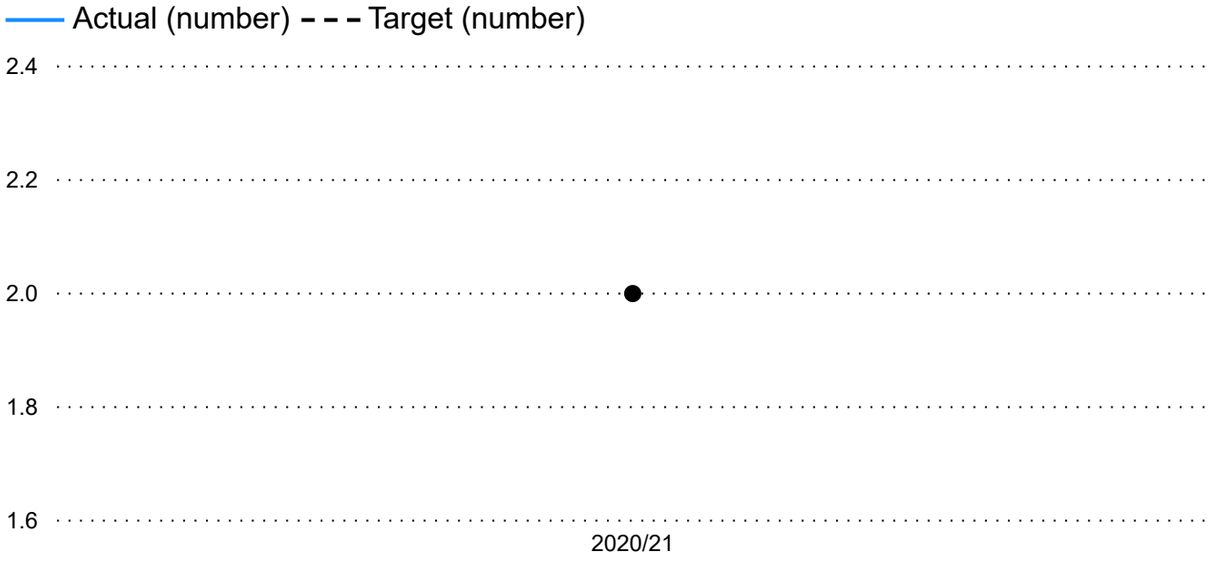


End of Year Actual (No.)	End of Year Target (No.)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
30.00	35.00		

Comment

The number of First Time Entrants to the criminal justice system in Flintshire has fallen in 2020. There is a robust early intervention process that supports young people who are at risk of offending. Young people who have come to the notice of the police for low level anti-social behavior are referred to the Youth Justice Service, and they and their families are contacted with an offer of support. The use of Out of Court disposals enables a full assessment and bespoke intervention to be carried out. This approach diverts young people away from the courts process and deters further offending.

Number of Immersion Youth Workers in secondary schools



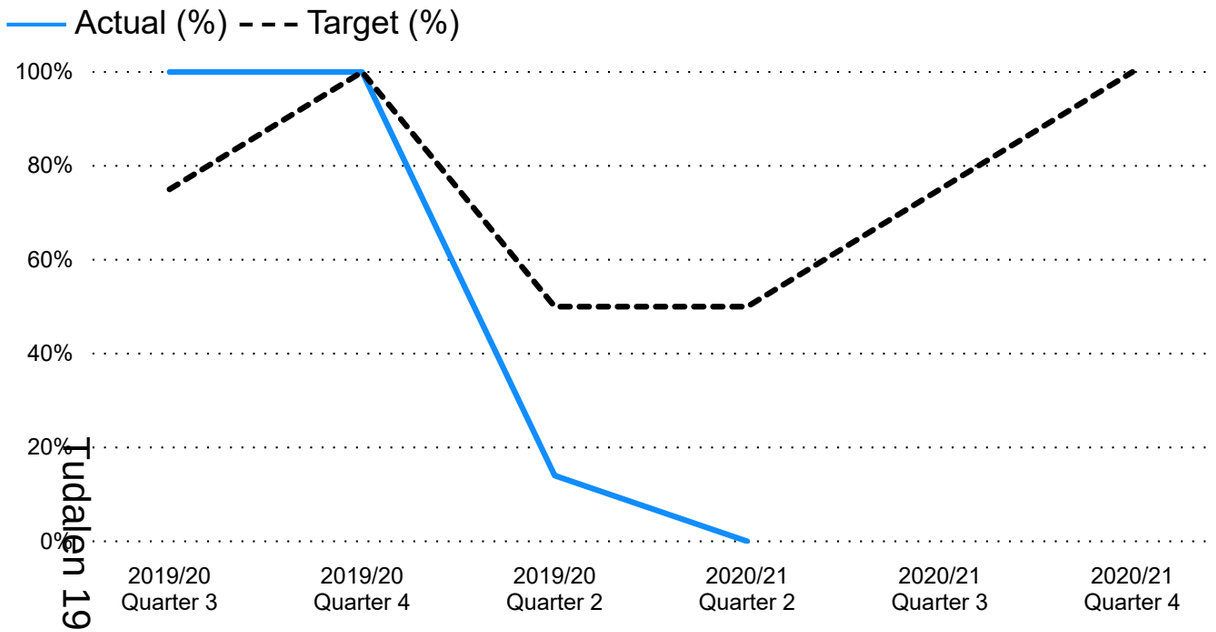
End of Year Actual (No.)	End of Year Target (No.)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
2.00			

Comment

Youth Service are developing plans to increase this number during 2021/22 but numbers are not yet confirmed.

Education and Youth - Portfolio Measures

Access to sanitary products in schools

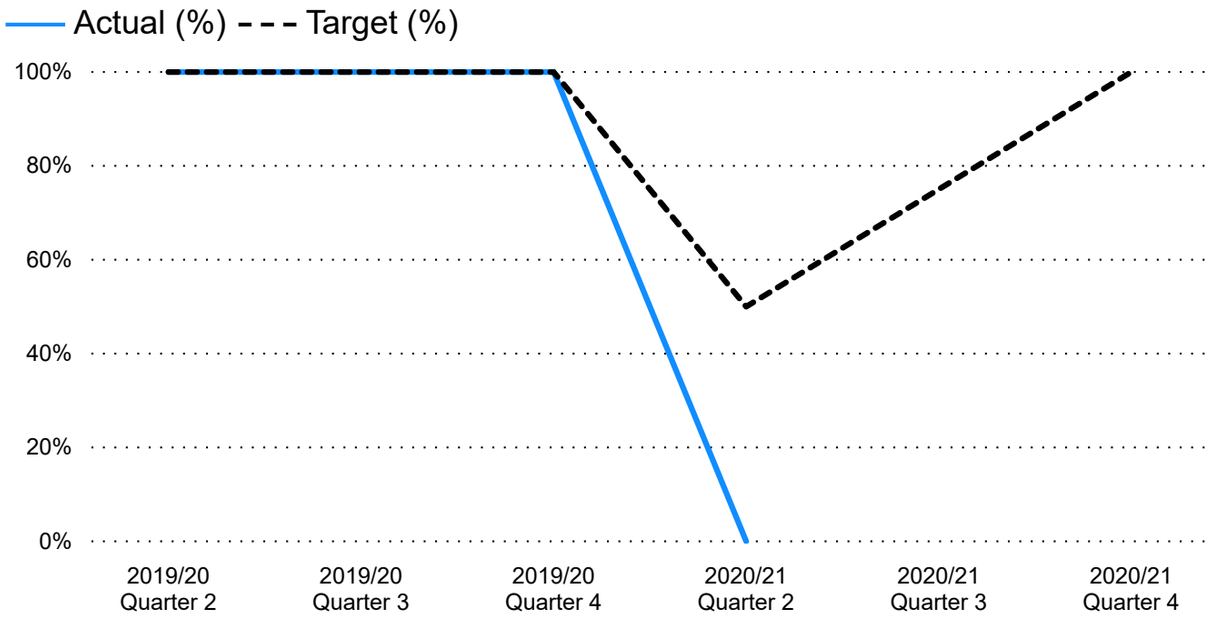


End of Year Actual (%)	End of Year Target (%)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
100.00%			

Comment

The grant funding is monitored and audited as it is allocated to individual schools. Support is provided to ensure products are purchased in-line with grant conditions.

Access to sanitary products in youth clubs



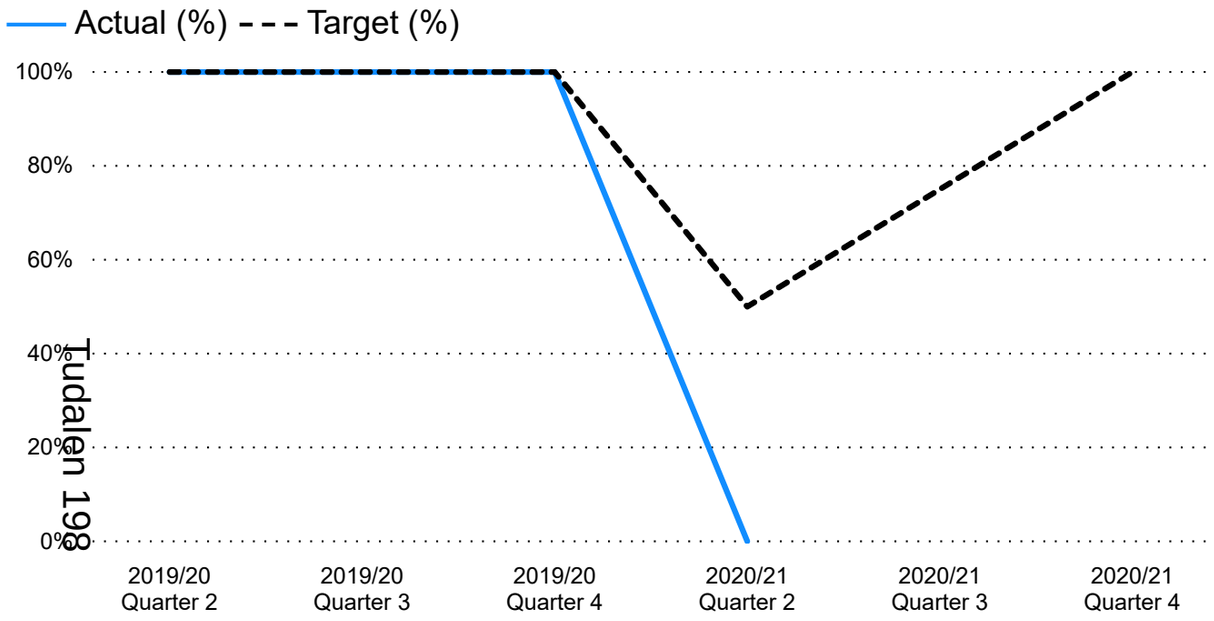
End of Year Actual (%)	End of Year Target (%)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
100.00%			

Comment

The grant funding is monitored and audited as it is allocated to individual youth clubs. Support is provided to ensure products are purchased in-line with grant conditions.

Education and Youth - Portfolio Measures

Access to sanitary products in Foodbanks



End of Year Actual (%)	End of Year Target (%)	Trend	Current RAG Rating
100.00%			

Comment
The grant funding is monitored and audited as it is allocated to individual foodbanks. Support is provided to ensure products are purchased in-line with grant conditions.