



FLINTSHIRE SCRUTINY REPORT  
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## **INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT**

This year's Annual Progress Report is bespoke to Flintshire.

A strong relationship exists between Flintshire County Council and the Regional School Effectiveness Service (GwE). There are robust procedures in place for setting a direction and holding the regional service to account. The specific roles of the Local Authority and the regional school improvement service in school improvement are explicit and clear to all stakeholders and they are effectively held to account by local scrutiny procedures.

The regional service evaluates its work regularly and uses quantitative and qualitative data and information effectively to ensure that areas for improvement are identified swiftly and are firmly addressed via detailed business planning. There is a clear and effective process to ensure that the regional service meets the Local Authority's corporate priorities and targets.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Flintshire LA with the support and advice of GwE knows its schools and settings well and provides a robust and appropriate challenge as well as effective support and intervention for them. There are strategies, policies and processes for school improvement that are clear to all stakeholders and which shape and steer the delivery of school improvement activity.

The Local Authority responds promptly and firmly to schools causing concern. There are specific examples in the Local Authority's schools where intensifying the challenge and support alongside robust and timely action have directly resulted in positive changes. There is strong evidence that the Local Authority's processes and actions to support schools causing concern is impacting on the quality of leadership and pedagogy and leading to improved standards in those schools identified.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that even in the most challenging of circumstances positive change is possible. During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools across the Local Authority delivered meaningful teaching and learning experiences through a creative blended learning approach. The pandemic undoubtedly led to an increased focus on well-being and a significant investment in teaching and learning.

In most of the Local Authority's schools, the senior leadership is strong. The Local Authority and GwE provide a rich array of professional learning to develop leadership at every level, together with targeted and bespoke support for schools as required, and especially for those schools causing concern. Moreover, there are robust arrangements in place in the Local Authority where school leaders collaborate to support one another in primary clusters and secondary alliances and take increasing ownership and accountability for one another's improvement journey.

The quality of teaching is generally good across most schools in all sectors and purposeful action is taken to address areas of concern and to reduce in-school variance. The Local Authority, in partnership with GwE, has been taking positive steps to support leaders and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning prior, during and after the Covid-19 period.

The increased focus on supporting schools to improve the quality and consistency of leadership and pedagogy has led to improved standards across the majority of secondary schools. Pace of improvement needs further acceleration in a few secondary schools. All secondary schools are making more intelligent use of data and teaching, learning and

assessment information to evaluate standards and to identify priorities for further improvement but it is recognised that these processes require further strengthening to ensure a greater focus on pupil progress in some schools. Secondary schools are also delivering tracking and intervention programmes to address identified underperformance and in-school variance. In a few schools, these approaches need to be further strengthened and honed.

Nearly all schools in Flintshire are on track to realise the steps outlined in the 'Journey to 2022' (Curriculum for Wales) document. There is specific support in place for the very few schools not on track and significant progress is being made. Nearly all secondary schools are currently on track in delivering the new curriculum for Years 7 and 8 from September 2023.

The following areas have been identified as key priorities for further development and improvement:

- continue to strengthen leadership at all levels in the secondary sector with specific focus on further improving self-evaluation and improvement planning processes.
- further develop the capacity of senior and middle leaders to effectively lead on teaching and learning.
- further strengthen accountability processes across schools to ensure robust and timely interventions to address underperformance.
- ensure that all secondary leaders are actively engaged in peer collaboration and review.
- strengthen systems for evaluating impact of improvement strategies on standards and pupil progress.
- further strengthen the quality of teaching and assessment to reduce variance both within and across schools.
- further strengthen the quality of provision for development of learners' skills.
- ensure all secondary schools are implementing robust approaches to supporting learners who have additional learning needs.
- further develop tracking and intervention programmes to address identified underperformance and in-school variance and especially in relation to vulnerable learners.
- ensure that all secondary schools successfully deliver the new curriculum for Years 7 and 8 from September 2023.
- ensure schools are providing equity to all learners and have an inclusive learning environment to support those who are vulnerable to learning.
- further develop provision in secondary schools to ensure a meaningful and purposeful offer for the ability range in KS4.
- ensure all primary/secondary clusters are implementing effective transition plans.
- ensure that the secondary school in statutory category is demonstrating an increased pace of improvements against recommendations from the inspection

The content of the report captures progress against four key areas in addition to identifying the net steps on the improvement trajectory:

Key Area 1 – Improving Leadership

Key Area 2 – Improving Teaching and Learning

Key Area 3 – Curriculum and Provision

Key Area 4 – Learner Progress and Standards

There are two appendices to this report: Appendix 1 is a concise summary of the four key areas for secondary schools; Appendix 2 is a concise summary of the four key areas for primary schools.

## **IMPROVING LEADERSHIP**

### **Summary of main actions, engagement and impact**

Senior leadership in Flintshire schools is generally strong. Due to the ongoing focus on support and guidance for leadership:

- nearly all schools are taking action to further strengthen leadership within their school with specific focus on further honing and improving evaluation and improvement planning at all levels.
- most schools are prioritising guidance and support to further develop the capacity of senior and middle leaders to effectively lead and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning.
- there is an increase in the number of leaders accessing high quality training and leadership development programmes.
- an increasing number of schools have senior leaders who are trained as peer reviewers and improvement facilitators and are actively engaging in peer review activities.

The Local Authority and GwE provide a rich array of professional learning to develop leadership at every level, together with targeted and bespoke support for schools as required, and especially for those schools causing concern. Moreover, there are arrangements in place where school leaders collaborate to support one another in primary clusters and secondary alliances, taking increasing ownership and accountability for one another's improvement journey.

The Local Authority and GwE have effective procedures to support schools with their self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Schools are firmly challenged on the quality and veracity of their self-evaluation processes and Supporting Improvement Advisers are actively engaged in evaluation activities within schools such as scrutiny of work, lesson observations and learning walks and harvesting pupil voice.

Almost all schools managed to continue to evaluate the quality of their provision throughout the Covid-19 period using a variety of useful sources of information and evidence, including regular discussions with other schools and GwE Link Advisers. Most schools gathered the views of stakeholders effectively via questionnaires for pupils and parents, telephone calls or conversations with individuals. Based on these findings, most have adapted and improved their provision considerably. Since summer 2022 all schools have put in place actions to ensure that evaluation activities were strengthened post Covid-19 and in response to the expectations of the new School Improvement Guidance.

A substantial number of Flintshire Local Authority practitioners have engaged in the National Leadership Programmes for professional development. This includes middle leaders, senior leaders, new head teachers and experienced head teachers. Effective collaboration takes place between the Local Authority and GwE to support the development of leaders across the 'Leadership Pathway'. Information regarding the effectiveness of the programmes is regularly communicated via termly Regional Leadership Group meetings. This collaboration and communication ensure that the Local Authority can identify developmental needs and target further support, if necessary, e.g., bespoke professional learning for middle leaders in secondary schools.

All leadership programmes were adapted for virtual delivery. Teachers in Flintshire demonstrated a noble commitment to develop their practice and leadership skills during the Covid-19 period. Despite all additional challenges, 67 practitioners participated in the leadership programmes during 2021-22 whilst a further 60 individuals engaged in the programmes for 2022-23.

Over the last four years, 21 practitioners have met the requirements for the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) qualification. Effective collaboration takes place between the Local Authority and GwE to support new head teachers and acting headteachers. The programme consists of a rich array of regular training throughout the educational year in order to equip headteachers to be able to successfully undertake their work e.g., briefing sessions from local authority officers with responsibility for Finance, Human Resources, Safeguarding, Health and Safety. All new headteachers are allocated a Leadership Coach to provide additional support and guidance on leadership and management issues. This means that new heads are provided with timely and appropriate support from experienced and accomplished school leaders to further support the development of their leadership skills. Twenty-three headteachers have followed the programme since it started in 2018 including 7 this year.

Thirty-seven school leaders, as well as nearly all GwE staff supporting schools in Flintshire, have followed the national programme for coaching and mentoring. Feedback was received noting that the programme had a positive impact on individuals in schools and also on the work of the regional service in supporting schools and clusters.

An inclusive development and training programme for governors is available, partly produced through consultation and engagement with governors in order for them to identify their own developmental needs. Feedback from governors on the programme has been very positive. The regional service has a diverse provision of training to enrich that of the Authority.

A rich array of professional development is provided for teaching assistants through the national programmes, i.e., the Teaching Assistants Learning Pathway [TALP]. This includes 'Induction', 'Practising Assistants' and the 'Aspiring HLTAs' programme, leading up to HLTA status assessment. In the same manner as the Leadership programme for teachers, these encourage individuals to become reflective practitioners who evaluate their practice against the 'Professional Standards for Assisting Teaching'.

All TALP programmes have been adapted for virtual delivery, a change that has been very well-received by Flintshire teaching assistants. The 'Induction' programme was put in the form of an online playlist and during 2020-21 and 2021-22, 26 assistants completed this programme. This is 17% of the teaching assistants completing the programme across the region - numbers are the same as the previous two years. The Induction programme will continue to be delivered in this format.

The 'Practising Assistants' programme was also adapted during 2021-22 for virtual delivery. Towards the end of 2021-22 the Practising programme gradually returned to face-to-face delivery (as the situation allowed). This was welcomed by teaching assistants and facilitators alike. The Practising programme is available regionally or can be delivered to a cluster of schools. Three Flintshire schools in total have hosted the Practising programme.

A new national Aspiring Higher Level Teaching Assistant [HLTA] programme was created in 2020 which has now been running over four cycles, with 38 teaching assistants from Flintshire Local Authority participating. Upon completion of the new Aspiring HLTA programme, and meeting literacy and numeracy qualification requirements, teaching assistants can apply for HLTA status assessment. Over the last four years, 44 teaching assistants have received HLTA status. These numbers are significant.

Effective collaboration at a cluster level in the primary is a strength in the Local Authority. All Supporting Improvement Advisers working as Link Advisers with the primary schools are experienced and have been supporting specific clusters for an extended period. This means that the regional service and education service now have a thorough knowledge of the

strengths and needs of specific schools and clusters/groups of schools. There are numerous examples across the primary catchment areas that show that systems and processes for collaboration are maturing amongst the Authority's schools and as a result there is an increase in the sharing of expertise and best practice. It has also led to a reduced workload in response to the Reform Journey. At best, collaboration involves leaders from all tiers meeting regularly to discuss and share effective practice, collaborating in a structured and directed manner and successfully developing a wide variety of areas such as Curriculum for Wales, pedagogy, Additional Learning Needs, digital and primary-secondary transition. This collaboration has resulted in improving learner experiences and outcomes.

58 primary and secondary schools in 8 catchment areas are committed to the peer review programme through the Schools Partnership Programme. 34 teachers have been trained as peer reviewers and 36 are trained facilitators.

## **IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING**

### **Summary of main actions, engagement and impact**

Due to the increased focus on support and guidance for improving the teaching and learning through engagement in the Shirley Clarke Assessment for Learning [AfL] research programme, through networks for teaching and learning leads, networks for core subject and the work of the 'team around the school' for Schools Causing Concern:

- many schools are demonstrating improvements in specific aspects of pedagogy. However, the pace and scale of improvements require further attention in a few schools.
- nearly all schools are taking appropriate action to further strengthen pedagogy and raise standards.
- high quality targeted subject specific support for pedagogy is improving standards of teaching and learning across many subjects and specifically in English and Mathematics and improving both depth and breadth of understanding.
- nearly all schools have appropriate literacy and numeracy interventions in place and can demonstrate the progress made by groups of pupils.

The quality of teaching is generally strong across most schools in all sectors and purposeful action is taken to address areas of concern and to reduce in-school variance. The Local Authority, in partnership with GwE, has been taking positive steps to support leaders and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning prior, during and after the Covid-19 period.

Since the beginning of lockdown, the Local Authority and GwE were proactive in their support for schools. A wide range of quality materials and models for distance and blended learning have been provided through digital platforms such as 'Google Classroom' and GwE Support Centre. The work has drawn on the findings of research into effective international practices.

Almost all headteachers have appreciated the input of the Link Supporting Improvement Advisers and Local Authority officers in terms of providing guidance and support for schools and clusters to develop their provision. Almost all headteachers noted that facilitating cluster meetings has been instrumental in sharing ideas and good practice for developing their distance and blended learning provision. It was also noted that these meetings have had a positive impact on their mental health and well-being.

The Local Authority and GwE have also provided a range of high-quality guidance and resources to support schools to improve parental engagement and have worked with Mike Gershon to facilitate parental access to quality materials so that they also can support their children. 'Helping your Child to Learn' (HYCTL) and 'Helping your Teen to Learn' (HYTTL) materials, and the 'Revise with Mike'

resource have been very well-received. The range of revision strategies has also impacted on teachers' classroom floor practices as they prepare learners for end of year examinations.

Schools have been provided with detailed guidance to support their preparations for delivering the new curriculum. The focus on pedagogy and the 12 principles are central to this work. Since September 2021, the service and school representatives have been working effectively with Professor Graham Donaldson, in an attempt to deepen understanding of the Curriculum for Wales Framework. This work has involved promoting successful collaboration meaning that teachers have been able to jointly-plan examples and models to share across schools.

In Flintshire, practitioners from 45 schools are part of the Regional and Local Networks. The Networks share the fruits of their labour with all schools via GwE's Support Centre. Led by network members, effective webinars were held for all school leaders on curriculum design, assessment and progression and planning principles. Schools have noted that the presentations have boosted their confidence to develop their high-level curriculum design and to incorporate the four purposes within their planning. All schools have accessed these workshops either via a live recording or through subsequent discussions with the Link Supporting Improvement Adviser. The regional service has placed a strong focus on developing pedagogy as part of the support for developing the Curriculum for Wales.

The GwE Formative Assessment Action Research project [led by Shirley Clarke] has been one of the pillars of the professional learning programme since November 2017 with 56 Flintshire primary schools, 9 secondary schools and 2 special schools engaging with the project over three tiers. 22 primary schools, 3 secondary schools and 2 special school engaged with the project as part of the tier three cohort. An impact evaluation has identified:

- there has been a positive impact on the quality of teaching in classes, standards of attainment, pupil well-being, attitudes to learning and development as independent learners.
- teachers have deepened understanding of effective pedagogy on the basis of wide and current research, both on a local and international level. They have also become leaders of teaching in their schools and beyond.
- teachers have undertaken action research in their schools and have taken part in professional collaboration and become confident pioneers. Consequently, schools that are a part of the project are developing well as learning organisations.
- there has been a sharper focus on effective pedagogy in cluster collaborations.
- there have been explicit inputs to improving schools' readiness and preparations for delivering the new curriculum e.g., increasing focus on the four purposes, 12 pedagogical principles, schools as learning organisations, professional standards for leaders and teachers, assessment purposes and planning principles.
- schools have made good and effective use of formative assessment principles and strategies for distance and blended learning.
- parents have come to understand more about formative assessment in their efforts to support their children at home e.g., learning powers, learning outcomes, success criteria and verbal feedback.

There has also been a consistent focus on supporting schools to improve the quality of differentiated support across the ability range. Establishing the secondary More Able and Talented [MAT] Coordinators' Network, prior to Covid, is one specific example of this work. Specific guidance and support have been issued to develop better understanding and confidence amongst coordinators to lead on this across schools and to develop their processes and systems for identifying, tracking and supporting this particular group of learners. There was also input to ensure that they were aware of the national developments in this regard. As a group, they have collaborated to ensure a shared understanding and how

to ensure an appropriate level of challenge and how to promote recall and revision strategies. Since the pandemic, this group has become part of the Teaching and Learning Leaders group.

A range of networks and forums are operational to support leaders in the secondary sector, at every level, to be able to lead on pedagogy with increased confidence and effectiveness. This includes networks for senior leads on teaching and learning and for core subject heads of department. There is evidence that collaboration within the networks has been a particular strength and mutual support has been key in order to ensure consistency of teaching and learning approaches in secondary schools. The senior leaders' Teaching and Learning group covers issues from information-sharing and discussion such as curriculum matters, teaching approaches, assessment, skills' provision and upcoming training opportunities. The group is impactful in bringing leaders together and ensuring a central and frequent dialogue around teaching and learning.

Subject networks have focused on supporting middle leaders to take the lead on teaching and learning; on facilitating and supporting peer collaboration and on strengthening evaluation and improvement planning processes and procedures; on promoting a better understanding of planning and pedagogy in the context of the new curriculum; on improving literacy and numeracy interventions as well as supporting specific aspects of KS4 and KS5 preparations and assessments. The work of the networks is much appreciated by secondary leaders who make effective use of the quality resources that have been jointly developed and hosted on GwE's Support Centre (Tanio websites [Science], MathsCymru [Maths], Y Pair [Welsh] and Herio [English]).

The English and Literacy networks have been a mixture of delivery of key messages, training and breakout room discussions covering pedagogy development, plans and approaches for GCSE, developing literacy, retrieval practice and oracy strategies. Following Heads of Maths network meetings, individual schools have been given further support to implement various approaches that have been discussed. Heads of Science meetings provide an opportunity for discussions and activities on planning, delivering and evaluating their new CfW activities, GCSE schemes of work, examples of assessments and pedagogical approaches that are working well in their schools.

The impact of the subject networks is clear on several levels and across a range of aspects:

- middle leaders have been up skilled in their knowledge and understanding of methodology and quality of planning e.g., recall strategies, strategies to improve oral and writing work, use of technical equipment to develop subject skills etc.
- middle leaders have improved their knowledge and understanding of the 12 pedagogical principles and preparations for the new curriculum.
- good practices have been disseminated and are being more widely adopted. A considerable number of leaders have noted their appreciation of the opportunities to share ideas and developments and to support one another professionally.
- increasing use of the digital library resources on GwE's Support Centre and of the subject websites to improve learner experiences, to prepare learners for examinations and to prepare purposeful intervention programmes.
- leaders and teachers are more confident in their digital skills.
- leaders are more confident with pupil predictions, assessment and grading.
- effective targeting to promote Welsh oracy skills.

In addition to the networks and forums, specific support is available to all individual secondary schools and this targeting has resulted in clear improvements in several instances. The content of the Support Plan for individual schools is based on the school's specific needs arising from their self-evaluation and which is a priority in the School Development Plan. Support to improve aspects of teaching and learning underpins these plans. They are jointly

produced with the senior management teams and Supporting Improvement Adviser. The relationship and collaboration between schools and GwE is very strong, and the positive impact of the support is evident in several aspects of schools' work. For schools in statutory category, the content of their Support Plans has been verified and ratified by Estyn through their monitoring processes.

Any primary schools causing concern are carefully monitored by GwE and the local authority. Where necessary a bespoke support plan will be agreed with the school, and this has led to marked improvement in those schools. Since September 2022, Supporting Improvement Advisers have been working with primary leaders to develop bespoke support plans for all schools. This aligns with expectations in the new School Improvement Framework. There are numerous examples of purposeful and effective support for schools on improving specific aspects of teaching and learning. For example, all SIAs support their schools in monitoring learning through a range of evidence including work scrutiny, learning walks and listening to learners and staff. This enables primary leaders to refine their monitoring and self-evaluation in order to develop more focused areas of improvement. SIAs provide guidance or signpost relevant professional learning or link schools to support. This enables each primary school to receive bespoke targeted support.

There is robust evidence that the toolkit for 3-8-year-olds at individual school, cluster or authority level, is effective. In most schools, this has had a positive impact on provision and pupil outcomes as well as reducing variation within schools. The support has also ensured a deeper understanding of Foundation Phase principles and pedagogy, in line with the Curriculum for Wales 'Enabling Learning' and 'Pedagogy' guidance. The toolkit includes a professional offer for SLT, teachers and assistants of 3-8-year-olds in the form of termly networks, a regional training programme and bespoke cluster training. The focus is primarily on developing aspects of pedagogy, teaching and well-being within practical and holistic learning experiences, and training practitioners to develop as effective learning facilitators. All practitioners have access to the professional offer and resources to support learning via GwE's Support Centre. Many schools within the Authority use the webinars in staff meetings and INSET to up-skill the workforce. Evidence from schools note that this has a positive impact on the quality of provision (teaching and learning experiences) and on pupil outcomes.

Since 2019, the professional offer has involved Year 3 practitioners in order to build on some of the Foundation Principles in KS2 in preparation for Curriculum for Wales. The professional offer continued throughout lockdown with the provision planned to target those aspects identified by schools as needing to be prioritised following Covid-19, e.g., pupils' communication skills and health and well-being. The focus was upon developing these skills within appropriate developmental pedagogy. Evidence of the impact of this support programme includes:

- deepening practitioners' understanding of how the pedagogical principles (including 12 CfW principles) link with one another to create productive and effective learning experiences.
- practitioners using a range of developmentally appropriate pedagogical methods that meet the needs of learners (including emotional and social skills).
- practitioners creating effective cross-curricular links to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, drawing on learners' previous knowledge and experiences.
- practitioners not only considering the physical learning environment, but also the emotional climate that supports learners to reach their potential.
- practitioners deepening their understanding of the importance of daily practice in order to improve their understanding of pupils' needs, skills and progress; allowing practitioners to find the preferred learning approaches of children and young people and how best to engage them in learning; identifying those pupils who might require extra support to help them reach their full potential.

- practitioners understanding that effective observations enable them to plan an appropriate provision that supports learner commitment and enjoyment within their learning activities, as well as planning to support them to move on to the next stage in their learning.
- practitioners understanding the need for assessment to be an ongoing process rooted in day-to-day practices, invisible within teaching and learning.

Overall, observations by Supporting Improvement Advisers and Estyn inspection findings where relevant, note that the support programme has a positive impact on the quality of provision and pupil outcomes with practitioners making better use of observations and Assessment for Learning strategies to plan the next stages of learning to allow for progress.

Effective collaboration and engagement between the LA, GwE and schools during and post-COVID further developed approaches to supporting learners who have additional learning needs. As a result, nearly all schools are developing their provision to provide educational equity to all learners and have an inclusive learning environment to support children and young people who are vulnerable to learning so that they achieve more positive outcomes.

Almost all primary schools agree that the support of the Accelerated Learning Programme had a positive impact on basic skills and well-being once children returned to formal education after lockdown periods. All schools had ensured that they carried out an internal assessment procedure, whether qualitative or quantitative, in order to identify the impact of lockdown on children's well-being and learning. Teachers deemed that lockdown affected the confidence and well-being of the majority of pupils, with the behaviour of some pupils having worsened. The accelerated support work was successfully driven by school leaders once baseline standards had been identified.

Nearly all schools have made purposeful use of the various grants, and most have employed or extended teachers' or assistants' hours in order to target groups and individuals in literacy, numeracy and well-being. GwE provided guidance and guidelines, with a good number of schools accessing specific training such as Trauma Informed Schools well-being sessions, SAFMEDS, (Say All Fast Minute Every Day Shuffled), a project to improve pupils basic mathematics fluency skills using an evidence-based teaching strategy, Headsprout (reading programme) and Eiklan training (speech and language). Overall, schools have responded well to the challenge and can testify to clear improvements and progress in the basic skills of many of the pupils targeted through these accelerated programmes.

In secondary schools, there was a specific focus on supporting accelerated learning programmes and providing intervention resources in KS3 and guidance on strategies to improve parental engagement. Moreover, a toolkit was developed for Literacy which supports planning and scaffolding opportunities for reading and writing and assisting with learning and developing vocabulary along with revision and recall materials. These have been shared with schools via the Tanio website and GwE's Support Centre. This has resulted in better quality intervention programmes and schools report improved fluency and confidence in learners and a better understanding amongst staff of how to approach scaffolding and planning.

In Digital Competence, the professional learning offer has been in place in all schools in the Authority. The offer focuses on making effective use of the services available through Hwb to develop teaching and learning and to develop learners' digital competence. In light of training, there has been an average increase of over 500% in the number of learners logging on to Hwb every month. There has been an average monthly increase of nearly 300% in the number of times every learner engages with Hwb, compared to 2017. By now, all schools in the Authority engage with Hwb with almost all schools making regular and effective use.

A Digital Facilitator Programme has been introduced where each cluster has nominated an individual to be a Digital Facilitator - to work closely with the Learning Service and GwE in order to develop strategic leadership from the digital field within the cluster. 90% of the clusters in Flintshire have formed a digital learning working group to lead developments within the field, and 93% of schools engage with these groups. 90% of the clusters have formed a shared vision for digital learning. So far, 226 practitioners across Flintshire have received training through this programme.

## **CURRICULUM AND PROVISION**

### **Summary of main actions, engagement and impact**

Due to effective collaboration and engagement between the LA, GwE and schools:

- all schools are implementing plans to deliver against the four purposes of the new curriculum.
- all schools are working to develop a balanced curriculum offer to meet the needs of their learners including the more able.
- all clusters are implementing transition plans.
- all schools are actively engaging in peer collaboration within and across sectors.

The regional service has effectively supported leaders in preparation for The Reform Journey and Curriculum for Wales and has been flexible in its provision in order to meet schools' various needs during the pandemic. Sessions were held for leaders on leading change, vision and curriculum design and think-pieces shared that were developed in collaboration with Professor Graham Donaldson. These training sessions were run in the form of small clusters of primary schools and their secondary schools in order for a meaningful discussion to take place across the 3-16 continuum. In June and July 2021, Professional Learning sessions were held over a 3-week period for senior leaders, focusing on developing vision, curriculum design and development. These sessions were delivered virtually in clusters and provided rich and regular opportunities for breakout discussions with peers. Successful follow-up catchment area sessions were run by supporting improvement advisers to drive further collaboration and create a joint catchment area vision.

A high-level of engagement has ensured that schools are more confident in implementing the Curriculum for Wales. Primary/secondary collaboration has been strengthened significantly and the four transversal themes of Schools as Learning Organisations have emerged in their approach - Time, Technology, Trust and Thinking Together. The Professional Learning presentations to senior leaders have been cascaded to teachers and assistants via staff meetings and/or specific INSET, meaning that all staff now have a better understanding of the framework. Effective use is made of the resources presented in the leaders' sessions in order to continue with discussions and deepen understanding back at school.

Representatives from most clusters attended a recent GwE professional learning workshop on transition, where each cluster planned their next steps collaboratively in order to improve pupils' progression across the learning continuum. This professional learning built upon a regional two-day conference which included updates from Estyn, Welsh Government and educational experts in order to set our shared approach to school improvement. As a result, all primary catchment areas have started working on a joint action plan in order to plan curriculum delivery and a consistent approach towards progression. SIAs have continued to support all clusters in developing their approaches to transition throughout this year. This has led to a greater consistency in the quality of curriculum planning within and across schools.

## **LEARNER PROGRESS AND STANDARDS**

## **Summary of learner progress and standards across the Local Authority**

### **Secondary schools**

The increased focus on supporting schools to improve the quality and consistency of leadership and pedagogy has led to improved standards across nearly all secondary schools. Impact of teaching and provision on pupils' progress continues to be a priority in all secondary schools. Impact to date:

- all secondary schools are making more intelligent use of data and teaching, learning and assessment information to evaluate standards and to identify priorities for further improvement. In a few schools, these processes require further strengthening to ensure a greater focus on pupil progress.
- all secondary schools are delivering tracking and intervention programmes to address identified underperformance and in-school variance. In a few schools, these approaches need to be further strengthened and honed.
- nearly all secondary schools are developing a purposeful offer for KS4 pupils so that when they leave school there is a clear progression to further education, training or employment.
- all secondary schools are using a wide range of qualitative and quantitative information to monitor progress in learning.
- all secondary schools are strengthening their provision to ensure that pupils make expected progress in literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

In most cases pupils respond to feedback and this provides an opportunity for them to make further progress. Many pupils are making meaningful progress to develop their skills through consistent and effective questioning and feedback including peer feedback.

In many Flintshire secondary schools most of the pupils listen with attention and show respect to their teachers and to each other. Many are eager to contribute to class discussions, are secure in their use of subject-specific vocabulary and offer suitable verbal responses. Across the authority around half of the pupils have a wide vocabulary and express themselves well verbally. Currently, however, a few pupils lack confidence in their verbal skills. A few do not provide fluent responses and struggle to express themselves clearly. Pupils' use of reading strategies across the curriculum in KS3 and KS4 is much more variable from school to school. A majority of pupils use subject-specific vocabulary securely while a few pupils are encouraged to use more ambitious vocabulary. Many of the pupils have sound basic number skills. The majority of pupils can interpret questions and solve problems when guided by the teacher, but a minority struggle to do so independently. Pupils in Flintshire have appropriate opportunities to practise their digital competence skills during lessons.

Examination outcomes, in the main, are a true reflection of schools' own tracking of data and evaluation of standards.

### **Primary schools**

The increased focus on supporting schools to improve the quality and consistency of leadership and pedagogy has led to improved standards across nearly all primary schools. Pace of improvement needs further acceleration in a minority of primary schools.

- the literacy, numeracy and digital skills of most pupils are developing well, with a range of opportunities to apply these skills across the curriculum in most schools. Through regular assessments and self-evaluation processes, school leaders recognise where learners need a range of interventions and whole school approaches are identified and implemented. Nearly all schools report that these interventions have aided their pupils in returning to school and that nearly all pupils, including ALN and more vulnerable pupils, are making good progress, with the interventions having a positive impact on

standards. Pupils in many schools are developing good Welsh skills and they communicate with increasing confidence. However, the impact of the pandemic has adversely affected the literacy skills of the minority of pupils in both English and Welsh. These aspects have been addressed within individual school improvement plans and actions identified to support this.

- nearly all primary schools are making effective use of observations and Assessment for Learning strategies to plan the next stages of learning to ensure that pupils make expected progress in literacy, numeracy and digital skills and to identify priorities for further improvement. In a few schools, these processes require further strengthening to ensure a greater focus on pupil progress.
- schools are beginning to establish a shared understanding of progress within their individual settings and are beginning to develop opportunities to ensure a shared understanding of progression and standards across their clusters, working to share expertise across the schools.

## **SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN**

### **Summary of actions and impact**

Flintshire Local Authority responds promptly and firmly where there are schools causing concern. There are specific examples where intensifying the challenge and support alongside robust and prompt action have directly resulted in improvements. There is strong evidence that the Local Authority's actions to support schools causing concern is effective.

As part of the regional approach, the Local Authority has further strengthened its support and challenge procedures. A clear school causing concern strategy is in place and all schools identified have a holistic support plan clearly articulating the nature and intensity of the support provided and the improvements needed.

For schools whose performance is consistently strong or strong overall, improvements are addressed through peer collaboration, LA and GwE generic Professional Learning Programme and the bespoke support plan for the school. However, when Flintshire and GwE procedures highlight a concern, more intense support is targeted through the local multi-agency approach and the regular Standards and Quality Board meetings.

Lead officers from the relevant services meet regularly to share information and evidence so that concerns are identified at an early stage and shared with the GwE Core Lead in Standards meetings. Thresholds and triggers have been adopted to ensure consistency in identifying concerns in relation to standards, teaching and learning, assessment, leadership, inclusion or managerial matters. Once a school is identified as causing concern, the Lead Officer, Core Lead and Supporting Improvement Adviser will work with the school's leadership team to develop a holistic 360° support plan. In Flintshire, the Standards group monitors on a twice-monthly basis and will refer to the Quality Board for placement on, or removal off, a 360° support plan. GwE take responsibility for ensuring that the 360° support plan is developed, delivered and monitored. Where concerns arise about lack or pace of progress, these are escalated to the Chief Education Officer and the Quality Board so that an appropriate decision is taken regarding whether or not to execute statutory powers. In Flintshire there is a regular and effective flow of information between LA officers and GwE advisers.

## **Appendix 1**

### **FLINTSHIRE SECONDARY SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT**

## IMPROVING LEADERSHIP

Many leadership teams in Flintshire have had significant personnel changes in the last few years with the aim of strengthening leadership across the whole school and to fostering a real sense of teamwork in the work that they do. This is contributing to a change in the culture and ethos of the schools. The senior leadership teams, in general, work cohesively and the clarity of roles enable them to work according to their strengths. In a few schools they have experienced significant challenges around leadership over the last three years, experiencing periods of interim leadership. However, all secondary schools now have a substantive headteacher in post. In one school this coincided with the school's Estyn inspection which resulted in a judgment of 'significant improvement' and a recommendation around leadership. The new headteacher is now working on redefining and aligning the responsibilities of the leadership team, ensuring, for example, that there is sufficient capacity within the team to support wellbeing and care, support and guidance.

Regular and focused meetings, as well as effective line management meetings have improved the quality of leadership across the LA. Robust self-evaluation systems, lead to schools having a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for development, the recognition of appropriate priorities and accurate improvement planning.

Detailed analysis of assessment data, pre and post pandemic, allows the schools to have confidence in the accuracy of their data for tracking purposes, which in turn allows for effective intervention to be put in place. The rigour of support and challenge provided by senior leaders, with the support of GwE and the LA, is on the whole effective and contributes towards the increased impact in learning outcomes.

Following reviews with the regional consortium, the Professional Learning models and lesson observation focus on continually improving quality of teaching and learning has given rise to opportunities for coaching conversations. This has led to a narrowing of in-school variance in terms of quality of teaching. Joint lesson observation allows SLT to model effective feedback across the whole staff. Across the LA there is a clear commitment to professional learning which contributes to the consistent quality of teaching. In a minority of schools there is a need for greater consistency from Middle Leaders in their approaches, and for a more accurate evaluation of standards in the areas they oversee.

Staff from the regional service have worked alongside the senior leadership teams in reviews of provision in their predominantly core areas and emerging Areas of Learning Experience (AoLEs). Collaboration has shown that most senior leaders know their school well and identify strengths and areas for improvement accurately.

In most secondary schools there is clear vision for the development of the new curriculum and nearly all members of staff are challenged to ensure the curriculum is 'better not just different.' Effective practice of research and enquiry, supported by GwE, show that members of school leadership teams in Flintshire have a developing philosophy for curriculum design and effective pedagogy. A majority of staff are embracing change, inspired to trial and reflect and leaders are empowered to challenge and support to ensure further improvement.

Across the authority a majority of secondary schools have clear and effective processes in place for appropriate and accurate self-evaluation. The schools' improvement planning processes have been further developed as a result of regional consortium training on self-evaluation and improvement planning. In many schools improved Quality Enhancement work, which includes a more structured framework around teaching and learning alongside the evaluation of it, has led to greater impact, In Flintshire schools there has been a focus this

year on the further development of senior and middle leaders' ability to evaluate and plan for improvement so that it becomes a team process where all are involved and have ownership.

In nearly all Flintshire secondary schools, senior leaders hold middle leaders to account through regular line management meetings. These meetings tend to focus on addressing the findings from evaluation processes and reviewing improvement priorities. In the majority of schools senior leaders know their school well and identify strengths and areas for improvement accurately and middle leaders are increasingly able to do so. The rigour of support and challenge provided by senior leaders is more consistent and contributes towards the improved impact of middle leaders on schools' work.

Many Flintshire secondary schools address any underperformance of teachers effectively through targeted support plans. Performance management arrangements are on the whole robust, with targets based on the school's main priorities. In the majority of schools, lines of accountability are clear to all staff and robust self-evaluation systems, lead to the school having a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for development, the recognition of appropriate priorities and accurate improvement planning.

Staff from the regional service have worked alongside middle leaders to complete reviews of provision in their areas. In many schools, middle leaders' evaluation of teaching considers a suitable range of evidence including assessment data and canvassing the opinions of pupils. Most middle leaders identify strengths and areas for improvement in teaching in their faculties/departments appropriately, but more support is needed to enable them all to focus closely enough on the progress made by pupils and the impact of teaching on standards.

### **Addressing Further Improvements for Flintshire High Schools**

- Continue to provide coaching for headteachers that will contribute to effectiveness, resilience and wellbeing.
- Continue to work alongside, support and improve the quality of improvement planning at all levels.
- Further improve the skill and ability of middle leaders to effectively lead on developing teaching and learning within their respective departments.
- In some schools, there is a need to move from focusing over-strongly on compliance to a more rounded understanding of standards and progress.
- In nearly all schools, there is more work to do on cementing strong links between self-evaluation and development planning.
- Some schools are in areas of significant deprivation and have been significantly impacted by the pandemic; this has manifested in an increase in non-attendance in key groups of learners in addition to an increase in safeguarding referrals, both of which place the senior team under challenge and pressure. We need to continue to work to mitigate covid impacts moving forward.

### **IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING**

In nearly all Flintshire secondary schools, regular reviews of teaching are completed by school leaders at all levels alongside GwE verification and in most cases, there was at least good standards in the quality of teaching. Senior leaders strive to establish a clear vision for teaching, and this is understood well by almost all staff members. Many schools have made priority areas for this year the development of oral skills in the classroom and ensuring that feedback is effective. Many schools have a sound understanding of the principles of what constitutes effective assessment and understand how approaches need to evolve further and where support may be needed. Book reviews undertaken this year have showed that while practice is improving in this area there is further room for development.

Strategies for identifying and sharing effective practice are well developed and Professional Learning Communities are giving the majority of teachers opportunity to contribute to and develop their practices. In the best examples in schools in Flintshire, questioning is good and used to develop learner response and understanding. However in some lessons, schools have identified that learners are too passive. Professional learning is being undertaken to support improvement and to equip teachers with a repertoire of skills to engage learners in oracy.

In many schools, senior leaders have established a clear vision for teaching, and this is understood well by almost all staff members in respective schools. In many lessons, teachers foster strong working relationships with pupils and are good language models. They have sound subject knowledge and use this to provide helpful verbal feedback to pupils. In many schools, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well. A majority of Flintshire secondary school teachers provide clear explanations of important concepts and helpful instructions that support pupils to engage in activities. They have appropriate expectations of their pupils, plan engaging tasks that build suitably on pupils' prior learning and provide useful feedback to pupils about their work.

In schools with sixth forms most post-16 pupils have positive attitudes towards learning, and many main-school pupils continue into the sixth form and successfully transition into post-18 study, apprenticeships, or work. Those pupils not continuing into the sixth form are offered a high level of support and commitment to ensure they have the most appropriate learning or work-based pathway to follow.

### **Addressing Further Improvements for Flintshire High schools**

- Continue to develop pupils' oracy and writing skills across the curriculum. Effectively address accuracy in writing, particularly with boys.
- Continue to raise aspirations with more consistently high levels of challenge and expectation.
- Embed best practice in feedback and ensuring greater consistency
- Ensure 'coaching' support for teaching and learning leads.
- Support leaders at all levels to effectively evaluate the impact of initiatives.
- Further enhance and augment opportunities for the development of digital skills.

### **CURRICULUM AND PROVISION**

In nearly all Flintshire secondary schools, senior leaders and learning directors are working diligently on consolidating the vision for designing a curriculum, recognising strengths as well as areas for development alongside all stakeholders. In general, staff are committed and motivated and there exists cultures within the schools to innovate and change the curriculum in order to better meet the needs of pupils. Members of school senior leadership teams across Flintshire have attended GwE webinars, workshops and forums and have a firm understanding of curriculum design considerations. In the majority of schools, senior leaders have carried out extensive work to support middle leaders to drive curriculum changes including the challenges associated with working with the structure of the framework. The Flintshire Deputy Heads' forum has provided colleagues with an understanding of a clear route through the framework in order to ensure sense making. Most schools are adopting a largely disciplinary approach but with some they are undertaking multi-disciplinary 'trials' e.g., within Expressive Arts and Science and Technology

Nearly all schools place a high focus on pedagogy, linking this with student progress. They have clear and developing assessment policies linked to the principles of progression.

Although schools in the authority did not commit to curriculum rollout for 2022, senior and middle leaders planned the learning for years 7 and 8 for implementation in September 2023.

A majority of schools have undertaken curriculum mapping in order to support the linking of experiences, sequencing of learning and also to allow for more effective transition. Schools have also taken part in GwE's Transition Project. Transition plans are strengthening with effective collaboration taking place across AOLEs. In the majority of schools progression of curriculum and rich transition events allow smooth transfer from year 6 to 7.

All Flintshire secondary schools are involved in at least one alliance, and this brings peer evaluation, verification, and challenge to the partner schools in a collegiate framework.

### **Addressing Further Improvements for Flintshire High Schools**

- Continue focused work on Transition Projects around developing consistent teaching approaches from years 5-8.
- Continue to hold regular meetings with Alliance schools to ensure emerging good practice can be shared.
- GwE and Flintshire LA to continue to work alongside schools to construct, trial and evaluate a curriculum in line with CfW framework for initially Year 7 and Year 8, that promotes a broad range of knowledge, skills and experiences and that learners are making progress towards the four purposes.
- GwE and Flintshire LA to work alongside the schools to develop a range of assessment approaches to track pupil progress in line with curricular changes.
- Teachers' planning needs to focus more sharply on the specific skills, knowledge and understanding that they want pupils to learn.

## **LEARNER PROGRESS AND STANDARDS**

In most cases in Flintshire secondary schools, pupils respond to feedback and this provides an opportunity for them to make further progress. Many pupils are making meaningful progress to develop their skills through consistent and effective questioning and feedback including peer feedback.

In many Flintshire schools most pupils listen with attention and show respect to their teachers and to each other. Many are eager to contribute to class discussions, are secure in their use of subject-specific vocabulary and offer suitable verbal responses. Across the authority around half of the pupils have a wide vocabulary and express themselves well verbally. Currently, however, a few pupils lack confidence in their verbal skills. A few do not provide fluent responses and struggle to express themselves clearly. Pupils' use of reading strategies across the curriculum in KS3 and KS4 is much more variable from school to school. A majority of pupils use subject-specific vocabulary securely while a few pupils are encouraged to use more ambitious vocabulary. Many pupils have sound basic number skills. The majority of pupils can interpret questions and solve problems when guided by the teacher, but a minority struggle to do so independently. Pupils in Flintshire have appropriate opportunities to practise their digital competence skills during lessons.

Examination outcomes are, in the main, a true reflection of the school's own tracking data and evaluation of standards.

### **Addressing Further Improvements for Flintshire High Schools**

- To work with GwE and the LA to continue to improve standards in Welsh.

- Improve opportunities for pupils to develop their extended writing skills across the curriculum.
- Improve consistency and quality of feedback so that pupils can engage with and respond to feedback in a timely manner.
- Increase quality opportunities for pupils to apply numeracy and digital competence skills across the curriculum.
- Addressing concerns that a minority of pupils make only limited progress and are too passive in their lessons, often as the result of shortcomings in teaching.

## **SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN**

### **Summary of actions and impact**

There are currently three secondary schools under a 360° support plan in Flintshire. Across these schools there is a need to strengthen senior and middle leadership, to develop a shared understanding of what effective teaching and learning looks like and to enhance the development of skills (literacy, numeracy and digital competence). Further work needs to be done on strengthening assessment and progression and how this is evidenced in books and lesson scrutiny.

Priorities for these schools include:

- SLT roles are equitably shared and clearly understood by the senior leadership team. Leaders at all levels can articulate a clear shared vision.
- Leaders at all levels are held to account through clear line-management which is built on robust quality enhancement procedures and through clear governance.
- Performance management identifies and supports underperformance through challenge, accountability and professional development.
- Reviews of lesson objectives with a view to developing wider use of differentiated learner outcomes. Appropriate challenge and support should be key themes. Personalised learning will be an important lens through which to view the development of all aspects of teaching.
- Development of questioning – central to deeper learner understanding, effective Assessment for Learning and encouraging extended oral responses.
- Development of classroom provision for skills starting with a focus on oracy (speaking and listening). This is a good foundation for reading and writing.
- Improved literacy is the key to curriculum access for the less able (and often socially disadvantaged) learners. These schools will need to continue work on agreed whole school strategies for developing literacy, numeracy and Welsh.
- Developing learner independence – Curriculum for Wales is a vehicle for this.

## Appendix 2

### FLINTSHIRE PRIMARY SCHOOL PROGRESS REPORT

#### IMPROVING LEADERSHIP

Flintshire Local Authority consists of ten primary clusters; the Alun, Argoed/Elfed, Castell Alun, Connah's Quay, Flint, Hawarden, Holywell, Maes Garmon, St. David's and St. Richard Gwyn clusters. These clusters vary in their size, communities, and context, especially in the number of learners entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) and levels of deprivation, with a few clusters also operating over a wide geographical area. In the more rural clusters, most of the head teachers also have a teaching commitment. Headteachers range from the most experienced in the authority to those either appointed to their first headship at the beginning of the pandemic or those newly appointed to their first headteacher post recently. Over the last year ten schools have had an acting headteacher for a period of time. The reasons for having an acting headteacher position are varied and could be a response to long term sickness absence, career secondments or where a school is subject to processes of organisational change where a permanent appointment may not be appropriate. Acting Headteacher arrangements are always agreed between the Local Authority and the school's Governing Body. Five other schools have new heads appointed in the last 2 years. Nearly all clusters have developed a robust, effective, and collaborative approach to working. These models for effective partnership include working towards a shared vision based on honesty and trust to support a self-improving system. In the best practice, schools within the clusters are becoming increasingly accountable to each other and have used the School Partnership Programme framework to facilitate collaborative working. The collaboration with the local secondary school is generally strong across all clusters. There is representation from the secondary school at all head teacher level cluster meetings and cluster working parties.

In the majority of schools across the authority, leadership is very good and very few schools require support to develop leadership capacity. Where leadership is very good, leaders have a clear staffing structure, with leaders on all levels aware of their responsibilities and empowered to contribute well to self-evaluation and improvement processes. Senior leaders hold middle leaders accountable through effective line management. These schools have established robust self-evaluation procedures, gradually evolving them to consider the requirements of the new curriculum and the new school improvement and evaluation framework. In addition, many schools have developed their self-evaluation processes to engage with stakeholders, for example, re-establishing joint learning walks with governors. These schools have a very good understanding of their schools' strengths and areas for improvement and their improvement plans are comprehensive with priorities clearly aligned with findings of the evaluation processes. Leaders ensure that all staff have access to professional learning in line with individual needs and performance management findings. Estyn inspections during 2022-23 recognise that most school leaders know their schools well and that arrangements to monitor and evaluate the school's work and impact using first-hand evidence is well embedded.

Headteachers and senior leaders across most of the authority's schools have engaged well in GwE self-evaluation and improvement planning workshops and have evaluated and identified areas of leadership that need to be strengthened within their schools. There is a high level of collaboration on shared strategic priorities. Within individual schools, teachers work well together and good practices are shared across schools. However, there is less formal collaboration at teacher level between schools. Many schools have committed to the School Partnership Programme to strengthen school to school partnerships and self-evaluation

procedures, with a few asking for bespoke follow up sessions. They all work on the ethos of continuous improvement and share openly across their cluster. A minority of schools have been identified as needing additional support to develop leadership aspects and the Local Authority and GwE have been very active in supporting leadership development within these schools with bespoke 360° plan packages.

The Covid pandemic has had an adverse effect on pupils' Welsh language skills across many Flintshire schools and many of the schools inspected during 2021-23 academic years received an Estyn recommendation to strengthen the provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills. Many schools have identified this as an area for their school development plans for 23-24 and action plans will address this priority. One school has been invited to write a case study for Estyn on their good practice in developing the Welsh language. Two other schools have been identified with particular strength in Welsh to be shared across the region. One has shared its second language provision and another the strong ethos among its pupils of using Welsh fluently and voluntarily in informal and unstructured situations. Nearly all clusters are committed to developing the Welsh language across their schools and the majority ensure that the ethos and provision of the school promotes learners' enjoyment of learning and speaking Welsh. Many schools develop pupils' pride in the language, its heritage and culture as well as a sense of honour in being bilingual citizens. All clusters support the national priority of developing One Million Welsh Speakers by 2050 and are keen to ensure that they work in partnership with the Local Authority to support this priority through actions identified within the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.

### **Addressing Further Improvements**

- Continue to strengthen focused collaboration and peer engagement within the cluster and with other schools to strengthen self-evaluation processes
- Continue to provide La and GWE support during induction of new headteachers.
- Further improve and hone the quality of improvement planning at all leadership levels and continue to promote effective collaboration on a cluster level to meet the requirements of the School Improvement Framework.
- Further develop engagement with the Schools Partnership Programme (SPP) to develop the capability and culture between schools to lead their own improvement through a continuous cycle of school self-review, peer review and school-to-school support and improvement.
- Continue to support leaders and teachers to embed Curriculum for Wales.
- Collaborate fully with the Local Authority to identify clear priorities for developing opportunities in Welsh language and provision.

### **IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING**

In Flintshire, the quality of teaching is generally strong across most primary schools. The majority of schools have prioritised time to focus on the twelve pedagogical principles during staff meetings, using the GwE 12 pedagogical principles reflection tool as a starting point to identify the schools' strengths and areas for further development. In a few clusters, an SIA has delivered bespoke training on deepening understanding of pedagogy within the context of Curriculum for Wales. The pedagogical principles are starting to permeate the planning of rich tasks in many schools with renewed attention given by teachers to authentic and purposeful contexts, outdoor tasks, and exciting creative projects which lead to positive outcomes on pupils' learning. For example, in one school, all teachers plan and evaluate innovations in teaching and learning in order to share more widely across the region, sharing effective practice and professional learning opportunities, holding open days, producing resource packs and hosting one to one visits from other practitioners.

In nearly all schools, teachers foster strong working relationships with pupils and are good language models. Nearly all schools ensure regular opportunities for learners to develop and apply literacy, numeracy, and digital skills across the curriculum. Almost all primary leaders report that the targeting of basic skills post pandemic through the Accelerated Learning Programme had a positive impact on pupil's basic skills. Well-being is considered a strength in nearly all schools, with good teaching of health and well-being, and effective use of interventions post Covid. These interventions impact positively on standards of most pupils' behaviour and readiness/engagement in learning. The arrangements and provision for ALN pupils is another strength within most clusters with many clusters having used grant funding to ensure that schools have an identified Trauma Informed Schools trained member of staff.

Most schools have participated in GwE's Formative Assessment (Shirley Clarke) project over three tiers. In the majority of schools, assessment for learning strategies have been embedded well and this has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching in classes. Many teachers have appropriate expectations of their pupils, plan engaging tasks that build suitably on pupils' prior learning and provide useful feedback to pupils about their work, which has had good impact on pupils' standards and progress. Following return to school from the pandemic a few schools have prioritised re-embedding and further developing formative assessment within their School Development Plans. The GwE literacy, numeracy and foundation learning team have identified areas of good practice across the authority, for example in the development of reading and extended writing, pedagogical approaches in the outside learning environment and in the development of the mathematical proficiencies and have commissioned Flintshire teachers to support other schools across the local authority.

Effective provision for Foundation Learning is well established in nearly all schools, with many experienced and knowledgeable practitioners successfully implementing the 'Foundation Learning' pedagogy. Opportunities for outdoor learning is also established in many schools. One school employs a specialist leader to deliver regular outdoor activities for all pupils. Another school's recent extensive re-modelling of the school has improved the provision of outdoor learning, but this remains an identified priority for the school. Another school has recently enhanced the quality of provision in the shared wet area to ensure pupils experience a wide range of engaging, purposeful experiences to support their learning.

All schools have trialled, amended and adopted a range of new approaches to deliver the curriculum and have worked collaboratively to provide a more a creative and engaging curriculum for their pupils and continue to refine, as necessary. For example, one school introduced a new topic which includes a whole school trip to Chester Zoo. As a result, pupil engagement and enjoyment of learning has improved. The school was praised by Estyn for their engaging curriculum and attention to authentic and purposeful contexts, outdoor tasks, and exciting creative projects.

In one school, the cluster SIA has delivered bespoke training on deepening understanding of the statements of What Matters in the Humanities area of learning and experience within the context of Curriculum for Wales. In another school, the 'narrative curriculum' involves a project to support oracy for writing, which provides relevant and authentic contexts for learning and encourages pupils to take responsibility for their learning. Another example highlights innovative learning through engaging and purposeful outdoor projects planned such as the Community Shop and scrapyard.

In a few schools, where provision for improving teaching and learning needs to be developed, additional support has been provided by the regional consortium. For example, the Literacy, 3-8 Foundation Learning and Digital School Improvement Advisers are working closely with one school on developing reading, writing, Welsh and digital skills.

Well-being is a key priority for schools across the authority. In one cluster for example, a shared strategy has been adopted to address this. The schools used their LAC PDG funding to ensure that all staff had bespoke training on trauma informed schools from Dr Coral Harper. One school delivers the 'Quiet Place' programme and has provided outreach to the other schools in the cluster.

### **Addressing Further Improvements**

- Further develop good practice in pedagogy (teaching and learning) through cluster collaboration and the School Partnership Programme.
- Further develop aspects of formative assessment within individual schools, sharing best practice across the cluster.
- Further develop provision for developing learners' Welsh oral skills
- Continue to strengthen the collaboration of peers, further developing opportunities for teachers to share aspects of excellent teaching of rich learning experiences
- Address any identified in-school variance in quality of learning and teaching.

### **CURRICULUM AND PROVISION**

Good progress has been made in preparing for and implementing the new curriculum with the majority of primary schools in Flintshire engaging in meaningful and robust consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders, to develop a shared vision. These visions are based on the schools' unique factors, values and behaviours and articulate what these mean in practice for learners within the school setting. The work to develop their individual school vision has led to a shared common understanding and vision within the individual clusters. The Welsh language is prominent in schools' curriculum design, and provision reflects this vision appropriately.

In one cluster for example, the vision and key aspects of each schools' respective curriculum designs have been shared with key stakeholders and with other cluster schools in whole day Curriculum for Wales sessions at the secondary school. As a result, many schools have visited each other and /or shared ideas and resources to develop their curriculum and provision further. For example, schools visited one another to observe the implementation of the PSE programme 'Jigsaw.' Additionally, a few schools have also successfully linked this shared vision to church values to reflect the status of the school e.g., the 'pupil purpose values' developed at one church school.

The four purposes have been a key focus for all schools, and they have all engaged their learners in understanding what they mean to them within their individual settings. Many schools have visual representations for the four purposes in classrooms and around the school which have been designed in collaboration with their learners, and in some examples, local artists and designers. In addition to leaders collaborating strategically to develop understanding of curriculum design methodology, teachers across the schools have also had opportunity to work together to develop their planning. Teachers from many primary schools across the local authority have been actively involved in regional and local Curriculum for Wales networks, which has ensured that practice has been shared and local and regional messaging has been disseminated effectively. Teachers in most schools identify opportunities for the four purposes in their planning and have woven them into their curriculum design at a suitable level for their learners to understand. Where appropriate, schools have worked together to develop a shared understanding and to enhance provision. For example, Digi squads from two schools worked together on a Minecraft project mapping the local area. Many schools' websites and social media pages are now celebrating their vision, their direction of the four purposes and their innovative approaches for rich learning experiences. Another school has implemented 'Mastery Mornings' and 'Adventure Afternoons' as a way of implementing the requirements of the curriculum.

To better understand the requirements of the curriculum, all schools have gone through the process of understanding the Curriculum for Wales framework and unpacking the Areas of Learning and Experience. In many schools, the entire staff has been part of this process which has led to a deeper understanding of the requirements as well as an opportunity to discuss how to weave the knowledge, skills and experience identified within an Area of Learning and Experience into authentic and meaningful local contexts. This continues to be refined and developed as schools experiment with teaching methods to ensure rich teaching experiences. As they develop their evaluation processes of the new curriculum, assessment methods to capture progression of learners are being shared. Most schools are beginning to develop new ways of planning for progression within the AoLEs e.g., in one school, teachers assess progression by considering small steps development between progression steps. In another, teachers plan for expressive arts through a local Shakespeare project and celebrate this learning in their purpose-built outdoor amphitheatre.

Work has been undertaken by all primary clusters alongside their secondary schools to consider what constitutes an effective journey for learners along the 3-16 continuum, with a specific focus on transition, and to discuss continuity across phases and the purpose of assessment to support learner progression.

### **Addressing Further Improvements**

- Continue to plan focused collaborative professional learning across individual clusters for teachers and leaders to work together on agreed AOLEs.
- Further develop dialogue on developing assessment approaches across the clusters.
- Continue to hold regular meetings with cluster schools to ensure emerging good practice and successful approaches can be shared.
- Continue to develop a deeper shared understanding of the principles of planning and progression within 3-16 continuum.
- Develop more robust systems to report effectively to parents in line with CfW and the Schools Improvement Framework.

### **LEARNER PROGRESS AND STANDARDS**

Standards and the progress pupils make are good in many schools. Regular assessments and robust self-evaluation processes, which include SIA and AOLE leads' joint book monitoring activities, also point to good progress in literacy and numeracy skills in many schools, with a range of opportunities to apply these skills across the curriculum.

Where the attainment of a few pupils is not as expected, schools have identified aspects of literacy and numeracy as priorities in their School Development Plan, i.e., developing numeracy reasoning, extended writing, reading comprehension and developing literacy interventions for targeted pupils. During the return to school following the Covid pandemic all schools were implementing targeted literacy, numeracy, and well-being interventions, with schools reporting that these interventions helped their pupils to return to school and that nearly all pupils, including ALN pupils, made good progress with the interventions having a positive impact on standards. Nearly all schools continue to target specific learners, depending on school staffing levels and through effective use of grants. As a result, a range of interventions and whole school approaches are being implemented with clear timescales for reviewing progress. Following a successful Estyn inspection, one school in the Local Authority was asked to produce a case study on its successful accelerated learning interventions.

All schools have prioritised wellbeing for learners, recognising the need to support all learners on return to school following the pandemic. Across the clusters, many schools are developing as Trauma Informed Schools and have committed to whole cluster training. Schools note that TIS work has had a positive impact on many pupils' well-being to date. Staff are effectively

sharing strategies that promote positive relationships with learners and support children in their wellbeing thus enabling them to make progress in their learning. Support for wellbeing is a strength across the authority, with examples of successful nurture provision in many schools with examples of provision such as a 'Sunshine Room' at one school. Another school was asked to produce a case study on wellbeing provision, following a recent Estyn inspection.

Many schools are successfully developing learners' integral skills and are able to apply them confidently in their work. Independent learning is also embedding well in many schools. All clusters recognise the priority of developing common understanding of progression and assessment methods and have identified actions to support this development. There are agreed cluster collaboration plans to ensure that this is further developed through professional dialogue across schools.

### **Addressing Further Improvements**

- Ensure teaching staff across the clusters are working together to further develop a common understanding of progression in skills.
- Agree on cross cluster systems to capture progress in skills to support effective transition.
- Continue to collaborate to share practice to develop and improve standards in Welsh, in particular oracy skills.
- Identified schools need to further develop pupils' ability to use and apply their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills across the curriculum in line with improvement priorities.

## **SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN**

### **Summary of actions and impact**

There are currently 5 Flintshire Primary Schools on a 360° Support Plan and one school receiving additional support in implementing its post inspection action plan (PIAP).

Each school has bespoke actions agreed. Examples include:

- Ensuring the school is making appropriate progress against its improvement priorities.
- Ensuring that pupils across the school have regular opportunities to engage in independent writing.
- Involving staff at all levels in strategic processes.
- Improving consistency in the quality of teaching and addressing within school variance
- Improving standards in Welsh.
- Developing effective practice in foundation learning

One school in the authority was inspected in September 2022 and placed in the Estyn statutory category of Significant Improvement. As a result, the LA and GwE allocated an experienced headteacher to work alongside the existing SIA to support the school in preparing the Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) and to support the school with its implementation. Clear progress milestones have been built into a six weekly monitoring cycle in relation to the key issues identified. Monitoring practices involving the senior leadership team and governors are now beginning to impact on standards of learning and provision. For example, a clear system for phonics and guided reading has impacted the use of resources across the school and is beginning to impact on learners' ability to discuss a range of texts. Strategic planning for September 2023 has responded to the need to support progress through the appointment of two experienced practitioners, with all staff moving to new year groups and classroom settings.