



March 2022

The Curriculum for Wales

How are regional consortia and local authorities supporting schools?

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Introduction

Estyn agreed with the Welsh Government to undertake a thematic survey to review and evaluate the impact of the support and professional learning provided by regional consortia and local authorities to schools and PRUs to support the national delivery of the Curriculum for Wales. There is a particular focus on the impact support has had on practitioners' understanding of curriculum development and design, and on improving teaching and learning to enable strong curricula in all schools in Wales.

This report follows on from our reports about the curriculum published recently. These include Preparing for the Curriculum for Wales – case studies and cameos from secondary, all-age and special schools (Estyn, 2020c) that reports on the strengths and barriers that these schools have experienced as part of their curriculum work. In addition, our report Curriculum innovation in primary schools (Estyn, 2018a) looked at how primary schools were preparing for the new curriculum. This is part of a series of reports providing guidance during this period of change in education. Previous reports include: Improving Teaching (Estyn, 2018b), Preparing for the Digital Competence Framework (Estyn, 2018c), Leadership development – case studies of professional learning for school leadership (Estyn, 2020a) and Partnerships with employers in secondary and special schools (Estyn, 2020b). This report also draws on the findings shared in HMCI's recent annual reports (Estyn, [2018d](#); [2019](#); [2020d](#)).

The intended audience for this report is the Welsh Government, regional consortia, local authorities, schools and pupil referral units.

The activity planned for the thematic review was reviewed and adapted in line with the COVID-19 restrictions. The report draws on findings from inspections undertaken before March 2020, visits to all four consortia, the three local authorities not in a consortium and on-site and virtual visits to a selection of primary, secondary, all-age and special schools across Wales. All of the visits for this thematic report took place during the first half of the autumn term 2021. Our link inspectors, as part of their ongoing work, engaged with the 19 local authorities who work as part of a regional consortium to learn about the support being provided to schools. As part of the evidence gathering, we used an open questionnaire to gather the views of school leaders and staff.

Background

The national model for regional working

In 2014, the Welsh Government published the national model for regional working (Welsh Government, 2014). This aimed to build on collaboration between local authorities in Wales to provide school improvement services. It signalled a deeper commitment to regional working and emphasised a model of school improvement, based on mutual support that was largely new across most of Wales. This model was updated in October 2015 to capture the progress made in regional working and as a guiding document to support future progress (Welsh Government, 2015).

At this time, there were four regional consortia in Wales, GwE (Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd Isle of Anglesey, and Wrexham), ERW (Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Swansea), EAS (Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen) and CSC (Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Vale of Glamorgan). In March 2020, Neath Port Talbot withdrew from ERW and, in 2020, Ceredigion and Powys also gave their notice to withdraw from ERW. In September 2021, Partneriaeth was launched as a partnership of the three remaining local authorities from the original ERW consortium (Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Swansea). Since then, Ceredigion and Powys have created an informal partnership. Neath Port Talbot is not currently working with a regional consortium or a partnership.

In the national model for regional working, the Welsh Government makes clear that “Local authorities retain the statutory responsibility for schools and school improvement. The national model is based on a vision of regional school improvement consortia working on behalf of local authorities to lead, orchestrate and co-ordinate the improvement in the performance of schools and education of young people. The prime mission and purpose of regional consortia is to help those who educate our children and young people. So, their job is to support schools and local authorities in their efforts to:

- improve learner outcomes for all young people;
- ensure the delivery of high-quality teaching and learning; and
- support and empower school leaders to better lead their schools.” (Welsh Government, 2015, p.5)

Successful Futures

In 2014, the Minister for Education and Skills asked Professor Donaldson to conduct a review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales from the foundation phase to key stage 4. The resulting report, Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015), outlines proposals for a new curriculum that builds on the existing strengths of Welsh education. The report identifies four purposes that provide a starting point for a new Curriculum for Wales:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives

- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Donaldson, 2015, p.29)

The Successful Futures report recognises that the four purposes will ‘inevitably require a wide repertoire of teaching and learning approaches’ and that there is a ‘fundamental interdependency between the purposes of the curriculum and pedagogy’ (Donaldson, 2015, pp.63-64).

Following the publication of The Successful Futures report, the Welsh Government recruited pioneer schools from across Wales to support the design of the Curriculum for Wales. Throughout this report, this will be referred to as the national design phase.

Draft Curriculum for Wales

In April 2019, the Welsh Government published and consulted on a draft curriculum that was co-constructed with pioneer schools drawn from across Wales. There was a strong response to the consultation and in January 2020 the Welsh Government published the final curriculum guidance, which was updated to take into account the feedback provided (Welsh Government, 2020a).

The Journey to 2022

In October 2020, the Welsh Government published ‘The Journey to 2022’ (Welsh Government, 2020b). This guidance sets shared expectations of what curriculum realisation means for practitioners, schools and settings from 2022. It aims to help schools to prepare for designing and implementing their curriculum. As a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language announced that secondary schools would have an optional implementation date of September 2023 and all other providers would implement the Curriculum for Wales as planned in September 2022. In order to take account of the impact of the pandemic, the Welsh Government also updated ‘The Journey to 2022’ and renamed the document as The Journey to Curriculum Rollout (Welsh Government, 2021a). The Journey to Curriculum Rollout considers both renew and reform and provides shared expectations for schools and PRUs as they move out of the pandemic and towards implementing the Curriculum for Wales.

Improving schools in Wales: an OECD perspective

In 2014, the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) published a review of education in Wales, ‘Improving schools in Wales: an OECD perspective’ (OECD, 2014). The report provides recommendations to strengthen the education system in the long term. The report notes that schools were facing challenges in implementing a range of policies and frameworks, and that the scale of reform over a short timescale meant that only partial implementation of some policies was occurring. The OECD published a follow-up report in 2017, ‘The Welsh Education Reform Journey: A rapid policy assessment’ (OECD, 2017). This report “analyses the reforms adopted since 2014 and offers recommendations to inform next steps”

(OECD, 2017, p.7). These recommendations focused on important aspects such as building 'professional capital', 'meet the learning requirements of its students and deliver equity and quality' and to 'create a coherent assessment and accountability framework' (OECD, 2017, p.8)

In 2021 the OECD published the latest review of the Welsh education system and considered more closely teachers' continual professional learning (OECD, 2021). This review identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. In this report, the OECD recognises the "political commitment to a cultural shift that is conducive to professional learning" (OECD 2021, p.12). It also identified a need to improve the system level evaluation of professional learning. The report also noted that there was "a shift in the balance from challenge to support within the regional consortia" (OECD 2021, p.18) but suggested that this is not always clear at a school level.

Education in Wales: Our National Mission: Action Plan 2017-21, (Welsh Government, 2017)

This plan states that developing transformational curriculum and assessment arrangements is an integral aim of the National Mission and that work to realise the new curriculum will require a focus on the following four key enabling objectives:

- 1 Developing a high-quality education profession
- 2 Inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards
- 3 Strong and inclusive schools, committed to excellence, equity and wellbeing
- 4 Robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system (Welsh Government, 2017, p.3)

Aims for 2021 include:

- using pedagogic research and effective collaboration to support the development of a world-class curriculum that will help raise standards in Wales
- developing a transformational approach to the learning teaching and assessment of the Welsh language
- extending and promoting pupils' wider experiences so that the curriculum is rich and varied as well as being inclusive, broad and balanced (Welsh Government, 2017, p.18).

Renew and Reform Plan

In 2021, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language published the 'Renew and Reform Plan' in response to the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic (Welsh Government, 2021b). The plan sets out the Welsh Government's approach to supporting schools to enable their pupils to make strong and meaningful progress. The Welsh Government has built upon what they "know helped to support learners' progress and wellbeing" (Welsh Government 2021b, p.8) both during and before the pandemic.

The principle of subsidiarity

The Successful Futures report (Donaldson, 2015) recommended that the principle of subsidiarity be applied to the process of curriculum reform. At the heart of this

approach was the pioneer school model. This entailed an evolving network of pioneer schools working with the Welsh Government, Estyn, regional consortia and other key partners across the Welsh education system to develop the Curriculum for Wales. In 2018, the Welsh Government (2018) produced a report evaluating the pioneer school model. It contains five recommendations:

- 1 A need for greater engagement with all partner schools in Wales
- 2 A need to continue to monitor and review the ways in which the roles and responsibilities of all partners are delivered
- 3 A need to ensure that robust risk management processes are in place
- 4 A need to engage with universities, research centres and experts in curriculum development
- 5 A need for stronger links between curriculum pioneers and professional learning pioneers (Welsh Government, 2018)

Curriculum and Assessment Wales Bill

Following the publication of the curriculum in April 2019, the Minister for Education and Skills launched the consultation for the Curriculum and Assessment Wales Bill in September 2019, which can be found [here](#) (Senedd Cymru, 2021). This sets out the legislative requirements for the Curriculum for Wales and received royal assent in April 2021. These legislative requirements include the need for schools to develop a curriculum that:

- enables learners to develop towards the four purposes so that they 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
 - healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Senedd Cymru, 2021, p.1-2)
- establishes the six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs):
 - expressive arts
 - health and well-being
 - humanities
 - languages, literacy and communication
 - mathematics and numeracy
 - science and technology (Senedd Cymru, 2021, p.2)
- sets three mandatory cross-curricular skills:
 - digital competence
 - literacy
 - numeracy (Senedd Cymru, 2021, p.2)

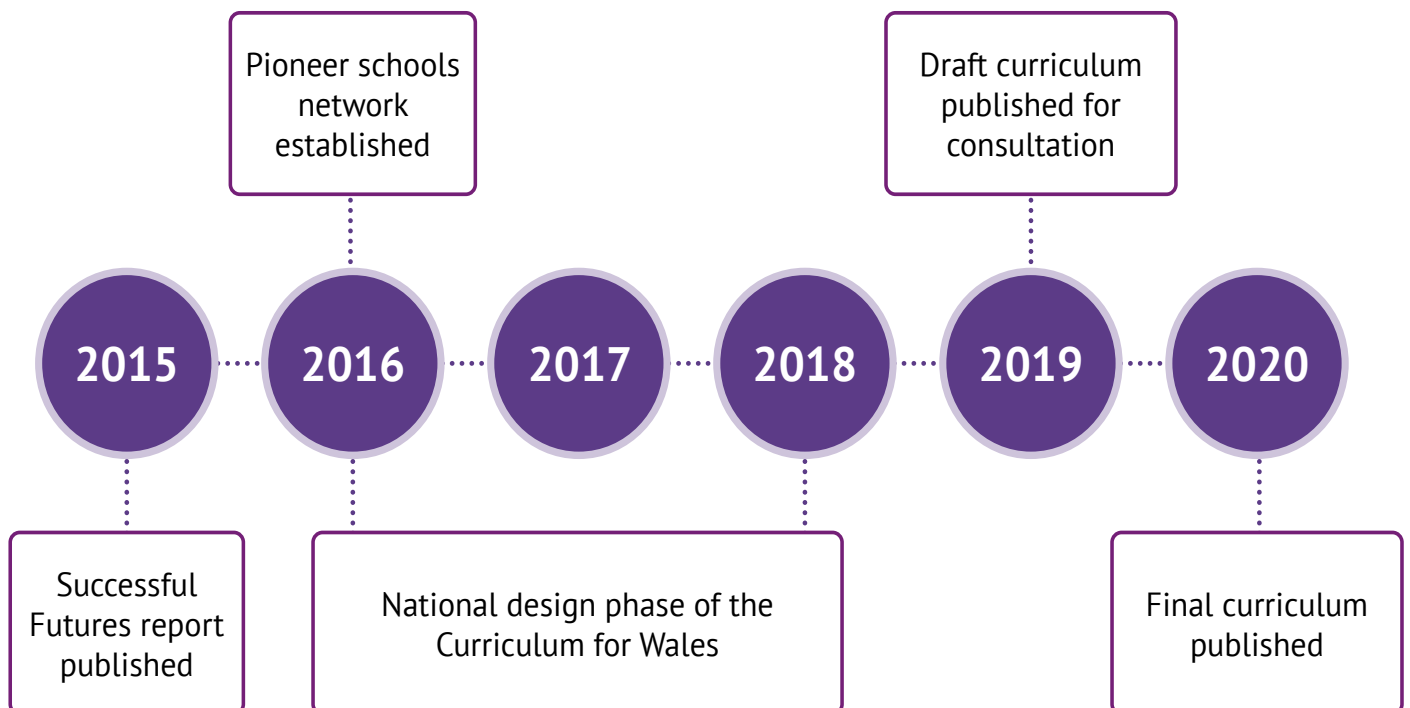
Since the publication of the Successful Futures report (Donaldson, 2015), local authorities generally commissioned the regional consortia to work with Welsh Government to support the design and delivery of the Curriculum for Wales. This work included developing a professional learning programme to support all schools to

engage with curriculum design and delivery and working with pioneer schools during the initial design process. During this period, the regional consortia's school improvement work to support teaching, leadership and other aspects of the work of schools has continued.

The importance of curriculum, pedagogy and high-quality teaching

The Successful Futures report identified the “fundamental interdependency between the purposes of the curriculum and pedagogy” (Donaldson, 2015, pp.63-64). In addition to this, a wide range of education research has highlighted the importance of high-quality teaching as a key enabler to a successful curriculum. The Educational Endowment Foundation acknowledges that “the best available evidence indicates that great teaching is the most important lever schools have to improve pupil attainment. Ensuring every teacher is supported in delivering high-quality teaching is essential to achieving the best outcomes for all pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged among them.” (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021) A review conducted by the Hong Kong Institute for Education and the Oxford University Education Department in 2013 highlighted that effective teachers are knowledgeable about curriculum content and the strategies for teaching it (Ko, Sammons and Bakkum, 2013). Furthermore, the OECD report ‘Teachers Matter’, which drew on results of a study from 25 countries from around the world noted that whilst a range of factors influence student learning, including the quality of a curriculum, “teachers and teaching are the most important influences on student learning. In particular, the broad consensus is that ‘teacher quality’ is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement.” (OECD 2005, p.2)

Curriculum for Wales national development timeline



The impact of the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the regional consortia and local authorities' ability to support schools to prepare for the Curriculum for Wales. This is because schools have, understandably, had to concentrate on responding to the demands of the pandemic and in the early stages did not have the space or capacity to engage with professional learning based on the Curriculum for Wales. During this time period the regional consortia and local authorities have found it more difficult to visit schools and engage with them face-to-face.

Main findings

Support for curriculum design and delivery

- 1 The four regional consortia supported the national development phase of the Curriculum for Wales well. This included supporting the recruitment process of pioneer schools and allocating a substantial number of their officers to support the design process. Being involved in this work helped to develop officers' knowledge of curriculum design to be able to support schools.
- 2 The regional consortia generally supported pioneer schools well to engage in the national development phase. In addition, they provided suitable opportunities for pioneer schools to share updates with those schools who were not in the pioneer schools' network.
- 3 Despite these arrangements, schools that were not in the pioneer schools' network do not feel that there were sufficient opportunities to learn about the work of pioneer schools and develop their understanding of the national design process. A majority of the non-pioneer network schools said that they were not kept informed of national developments regularly enough. Throughout the design process the national expectations of pioneer schools evolved. These involved additional requirements that often affected their capacity to work with schools outside of the pioneer network.
- 4 During the national consultation phase, the four regional consortia and the Welsh Government worked well to develop a series of national events to share the important messages about the Curriculum for Wales and to support practitioners to provide an informed consultation response.
- 5 The four regional consortia and the three local authorities no longer in a consortium have developed a suitable vision for supporting schools to develop their curriculum and improve the quality of teaching. Consortia officers have developed helpful models that demonstrate the curriculum design process. In the best practice, professional learning opportunities link well to the stages of curriculum development.
- 6 The regional consortia worked well together to develop a national professional learning programme for the Curriculum for Wales. This programme provides appropriate support for schools to consider a range of areas, such as approaches to developing a vision for curriculum and teaching and the important principles of the Curriculum for Wales. However, aspects of this programme focus too heavily on the theory of curriculum design and this has delayed the support for schools and PRUs to consider the practicalities of curriculum design.
- 7 The regional consortia and the three local authorities no longer in a consortium are developing stronger approaches to supporting effective collaboration between secondary schools and primary schools. There is an improved focus on helping teachers to understand how to build on pupils' prior learning.
- 8 The Welsh Government recognises the need to align the work of its professional

learning and curriculum departments and this has helped the regional consortia to consider how best to plan their support for curriculum reform. In a few cases, leaders in the regions identify that grant terms and conditions are not always clear or linked well enough to their work on curriculum design and delivery.

Support for improving teaching to enable successful curriculum delivery

- 9 The four regional consortia and the three local authorities not currently in a consortium have suitable plans in place to support their schools and PRUs to consider their approaches to teaching for the Curriculum for Wales. In most cases, this has involved supporting them to engage with the 12 pedagogical principles and consider the theory that underpins them.
- 10 Overall, the support to improve the quality of teaching is too variable. This is because, too often, support for teaching does not identify or target the specific aspects of teaching that require improvement within the context of a particular school. In addition, the support for subject and phase specific approaches to teaching has decreased overtime.
- 11 Generally, the regional consortia and local authorities target their support for improving teaching to schools causing concern, for example those in statutory follow-up categories. Support for these schools is generally more effective in primary schools than it is in secondary schools. Where support is most effective, officers know their schools well and tailor the support to the specific aspects of teaching that require improvement in that school. Where this work is less effective, teachers are not supported well enough to develop their subject and phase specific skills or improve important weakness in teaching.
- 12 Often the regional consortia do not have a clear enough understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in all their schools and PRUs. That is because they do not always work well enough with school leaders to consider the range of first-hand evidence to help leaders to understand the strengths and areas for improving in teaching in their schools.
- 13 During the pandemic the regional consortia developed stronger relationships with their schools. Along with the postponement of the national categorisation process, this has helped to encourage more honest discussions around the quality of teaching.
- 14 The regional consortia have worked well to increase the use of school-to-school support, in line with national guidance. However, officers do not always monitor this support consistently to ensure that it is having the required impact.

Support for improving the leadership of teaching

- 15 The national professional learning programme, developed by regional consortia to develop leadership skills in schools, has been endorsed by the National Academy for Educational Leadership. It provides suitable opportunities for leaders to engage with important aspects of leadership, including the principles of the Curriculum for Wales and leading change. Despite this, the support for the leadership of teaching is limited and does not enable school leaders to improve their ability to evaluate and improve

the quality of teaching at a whole school level. Too often leaders are not supported well enough to consider the impact that teaching has on pupils' progress and learning.

- 16 The regional consortia and local authorities do not always identify issues in teaching and leadership quickly enough. This means that a few schools and PRUs are not provided with targeted support that is timely enough to secure the required improvements.

Evaluating the impact of support

- 17 The regional consortia and the three local authorities not currently in a consortium gather a range of evidence to consider the views of stakeholders about their work. They make suitable use of the feedback from delegates who engage in professional learning to consider the effectiveness of their support.
- 18 Leaders of the regional consortia make appropriate use of external consultants to help them to review their work. They respond to the recommendations from these reviews well and adapt their work in response.
- 19 Overall, the regional consortia and the three local authorities not currently in a consortium do not evaluate the impact of their professional learning and support for curriculum and teaching well enough. They do not make strong enough use of first-hand evidence of the impact of professional learning on schools and pupils or identify clear enough success criteria when planning their professional learning. This work has also been made more challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations

The regional consortia and local authorities should:

- R1 Improve the quality and impact of the support for leaders to improve teaching and learning in their schools
- R2 Improve the support across all subject disciplines
- R3 Provide practical professional learning opportunities that support leaders and teachers to understand better how they can design and deliver their curriculum
- R4 Improve evaluation processes so leaders and officers monitor the impact of support for curriculum reform and teaching

The Welsh Government should:

- R5 Consider how lessons learnt from the pioneer schools programme can influence future national projects
- R6 Clarify and streamline grant terms and conditions for professional learning and developing curriculum to enable the regional consortia better to evaluate their work
- R7 Consider approaches to enable the regional consortia and local authorities better to evaluate the impact and outcomes of their work for supporting curriculum and teaching and be held to account for it

Support for curriculum design and delivery

Curriculum for Wales design process

Following the publication of *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015), all local authorities in Wales commissioned the regional school improvement services to carry out the support for curriculum development. The Welsh Government has worked closely with the four consortia since the publication of the report and throughout the national design and development process. More recently, Neath Port-Talbot, Ceredigion and Powys left the ERW consortium and now provide curriculum and teaching support directly for their schools.

After the publication of *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015), the four regional consortia worked well with the Welsh Government to implement the recommendations and support the national design and development phase of the Curriculum for Wales. They made important contributions towards the recruitment of curriculum and new deal pioneer schools and supported the ongoing design work.

Throughout the design process regional consortia provided officers to work alongside Welsh Government officials to help lead and facilitate the co-construction of a national design process with pioneer schools. This has supported many regional staff well to develop a detailed knowledge of the underlying principles of the Curriculum for Wales and the design process.

During the national design phase, regional consortia generally worked well with pioneer schools. In many cases, pioneer schools were expected to produce action plans for their regional consortia to demonstrate how they planned to improve their own practice and share the knowledge of the design process with other schools. These plans enabled the regional consortia to gain an overview of the planned activity of their pioneer schools and to identify how to support them to develop and share their practice.

An important role for pioneer schools was to share curriculum reform developments with those schools not in the pioneer schools' network. Overall, regional consortia facilitated opportunities for pioneer schools to engage with other schools in their region appropriately. These included organising events and networks where important information could be shared. However, schools who were not in the pioneer schools' network generally did not feel well enough informed of the developments during the design phase. We found that many schools who were not pioneers generally got information from their regional consortia at events and not from their partner pioneer schools as expected. Throughout the design process, the Welsh Government's expectations of curriculum pioneer schools changed regularly. With changes in expectations and work, most pioneer schools indicated that their time to engage with other schools was limited.

Draft curriculum consultation phase

The draft Curriculum for Wales was published in April 2019 for consultation. During

this consultation phase, the regional consortia worked effectively with the Welsh Government to hold a wide range of 'road show' events aimed at all schools and PRUs across Wales. At these events, alongside pioneer schools, they shared the underlying principles of the Curriculum for Wales and enabled school leaders and staff to engage with the high-level principles of the curriculum and consider the individual content of each of the areas of learning and experience. This is a strong example of regional consortia working closely with the Welsh Government to share consistent system wide messages. Since this time, the regional consortia have continued to work closely with the Welsh Government, for example contributing to the development and publication of ['The Journey to Curriculum Rollout'](#) (Welsh Government, 2021a).

These events provided opportunities for senior and middle leaders, teachers and support staff to gain an understanding of the proposals to support them to provide a more informed responses to the consultation. They were well attended and the response rate to the consultation was high. The responses from schools generally demonstrated a good understanding of the underlying principles of the Curriculum for Wales.

Ongoing support for Curriculum for Wales

The four regional consortia have continued to develop and provide professional learning opportunities for teachers and leaders to develop their knowledge and understanding of the underlying principles of the Curriculum for Wales. This support has generally been provided through professional learning sessions, which include opportunities for reflections and discussion.

All four regions and the three local authorities no longer in a region have developed a vision for supporting schools and PRUs to develop their curriculum and improve teaching. In most cases, the vision is clear and well understood by officers and staff. Generally, these align closely to the underpinning aims of the Curriculum for Wales and they all have learner progress at the centre. The Partneriaeth is currently in the early stages of establishing new ways of working and, as a result, it has been more difficult for staff to develop and share their vision with schools.

All four regions have developed helpful models that highlight the important principles of successful curriculum design in schools and PRUs. Whilst the way these models are presented differs across the regional consortia, they have the same underlying principles at the centre and, overall, they provide a useful oversight of effective curriculum design. In many regions, they have linked their professional learning closely to these models to make it easier for schools to identify their support and professional learning needs.

Journey to 2022: Design Thinking Model

The Central South Consortium has developed a design thinking model to support their schools and PRUs to understand the curriculum design process. Design thinking is an approach used for practical and creative problem-solving. Officers from Central South Consortium have applied this design thinking approach to support their thinking around curriculum design. As part of this approach they have identified three main stages, understand, explore and materialise. These have been aligned to the stages in The Journey to Curriculum Roll-out guidance. This helps Central South Consortium officers to support schools in developing design processes and align their support with these shared expectations. To support schools to develop these aspects of their work they have identified sub stages and outlined to schools how they can approach this stage of their design process.

Officers have linked their Curriculum for Wales professional learning programme to each of the stages outlined in the design thinking model so that schools can access the professional learning suitable to them at specific phases of curriculum development.

Milestones for Curriculum design and delivery

To support their schools and PRUs to map their progress towards curriculum reform, GwE developed a series of milestones that are linked with the Journey to Curriculum rollout and their curriculum design processes. These milestones provide success criteria for schools to consider and evaluate their progress against. GwE officers have linked their professional learning programme to these milestones so that schools can identify their learning and support needs.

The milestones are updated on a termly basis and school improvement advisers work with schools to consider progress and identify next steps.

While these models are useful, they do not always make clear enough the link to improving teaching as the key enabler to successful curriculum delivery. Where leadership is less effective, schools occasionally design and develop their curriculum without thinking carefully enough about how they will improve the quality of teaching to support the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales.

The four regional consortia have worked well together to develop a national professional learning programme to support schools and PRUs to develop their understanding of the Curriculum for Wales and the underlying principles of curriculum design, such as types of curriculum delivery models, understanding the four purposes, the principles of progression and the importance of cross curricular skills. This programme includes sessions that focus on developing a vision for curriculum and teaching, planning for curriculum change and the underlying principles of the Curriculum for Wales. The programmes have been developed for senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and support staff and messages are tailored to suit the needs of the specific audiences. These sessions generally provide a useful theoretical overview of curriculum design principles and a majority of the schools

indicated that they have found them to be helpful. However, schools in one local authority no longer in a consortium do not have access to this national professional learning offer. This limits these schools from having access to important national developments and from the common professional learning offer available across Wales. A few of the schools in this local authority indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to engage with these regionally developed national programmes to support their curriculum development.

The regionally developed national programme for curriculum provides generic support for schools and PRUs to develop their approaches to the Curriculum for Wales. This programme provides clear and consistent messages. Although schools have found the support from regions on 'developing a whole school vision' useful, around half of schools visited and of those who responded to our survey felt that the focus needs to move quickly to supporting schools with the practicalities of curriculum design and delivery. These schools indicated that the quality of delivery of this professional learning is variable and the generic nature of the programme means that it does not always cater well enough to the specific needs of individual schools. In a few cases, this extended work on vision has developed an unhelpful misconception that all schools have to develop a vision for curriculum and teaching in each area of learning and experience and for all of the cross curricular skills. In addition, the extended time spent on vision has limited the time that a few schools have spent focusing on developing effective teaching, including improving subject and discipline specific approaches, and has limited their engagement with the practical elements of curriculum design.

Secondary curriculum design leaders' network

The EAS has recently established a secondary curriculum design leaders' network. This network provides helpful opportunities for leaders from all of the secondary schools in EAS to discuss their plans for designing and developing their curriculum.

These discussions are informed by research and, when possible, visits to schools within and outside of Wales. They provide a helpful starting point for schools to consider some of the practicalities about curriculum design.

As part of their early support for curriculum reform, all four regional consortia provided a useful change management programme for school leaders and regional staff. Overall, this helped leaders and officers to understand the important factors to consider when planning and implementing change and encouraged school leaders to consider how staff may be best supported to address concerns and embrace curriculum reform.

Change management support

GwE provided professional learning to their schools and PRUs to support them to engage with change management in an educational context. This support focussed on leading change to support with educational reform and aligned to the principles outlined in the schools as learning organisations work. Schools visited during this thematic felt that this training was useful in enabling leaders to develop

their knowledge of the change management process and to identify how best to approach change with their staff.

The support provided a range of practical approaches which enabled leaders to plan a calm and measured approach to their curriculum design and delivery.

When responding to our survey, many leaders and teachers indicated that they had received support for the Curriculum for Wales through engagement with the national programme or curriculum officers. Most commonly this support related to developing an understanding of the underlying principles of the Curriculum for Wales, the sharing of high-level information around each of the areas of learning and experience and developing a vision for curriculum and teaching. The majority of those surveyed felt that the support they had received was useful and around half felt that the support had a positive impact on their understanding of curriculum design and delivery.

During the pandemic, the regional consortia and local authorities have continued to be sensitive in their approach towards supporting curriculum reform. The regional consortia and local authorities responded to schools' needs and provided space for schools to refocus their efforts. They provided high levels of support for digital learning and supported schools to develop their approaches to distance and blended learning. Regional consortia and local authorities have built on the learning from this period and continue to adapt and develop their support for schools. For example, they continue to provide a substantial amount of professional learning online and are continuing to identify and share effective practice through the platforms developed during the national lockdowns.

In order to create space for schools and PRUs during the pandemic, regional consortia postponed the national support programme for the Curriculum for Wales and only began to offer it when schools indicated that the time was appropriate for them. All sessions were delivered virtually and regional consortia recorded these to enable all schools to have the opportunity to engage at a time that worked best for them. Overall, schools have welcomed the approach to remote professional learning. All four consortia and the three local authorities not currently in a consortium continue to offer most of their professional learning online.

During the early stages of the pandemic, officers from the regional consortia developed more open, honest and transparent relationships with their schools and school leaders, which they feel will enable them to better support schools with the curriculum reform process. The consortia have developed and provided comprehensive training for their improvement officers which has supported them well to improve their understanding of the Curriculum for Wales to help them to support schools. However, a minority of headteachers feel that the work of improvement officers in supporting curriculum design and delivery is too variable.

Leaders indicated that the quality of the support from their improvement officer was an important factor in the quality and impact of the support they receive overall. Where this is most effective, improvement officers work alongside school leaders to identify clear and well understood strengths and areas for improvement. They align

the support for curriculum reform with the whole school priorities and plan tailored support for staff that supplements the generic programme of support available to all schools. In particular, headteachers have welcomed support visits from lead officers for curriculum. This support has provided school leaders with opportunities to discuss their current plans with officers who have challenged, supported and developed their thinking to enhance their planning and improvement processes. In these cases, officers support leaders to develop a strong understanding of the principles of the Curriculum for Wales and curriculum design more generally. This helps leaders to share clear principles for their curriculum design and development process.

Supporting schools

Central South Consortium provided helpful support to Corpus Christi Catholic High School to develop their approaches towards curriculum design and delivery.

The curriculum team have provided whole school professional learning for staff and have continued to engage with the school on a regular basis. This engagement had enabled the school to discuss and develop their approaches to curriculum design and delivery and enabled them to access a more tailored support programme.

Leaders believe that this support has evolved overtime and has helped them to understanding important misconceptions. For example, they now understand that they are not required to develop a vision for each of the areas of learning and experience. In addition, they welcome the important focus on supporting individual subject areas.

Supporting schools

Clase Primary School worked in partnership with ERW and Swansea local authority to develop their approach to the Curriculum for Wales. The school has had a range of professional learning from regional curriculum officers to consider approaches to developing teaching and considering the theory that underpins curriculum design.

This has helped leaders to develop their vision for curriculum and teaching and leaders feel that staff are developing a strong understanding of the underlying principles of the Curriculum for Wales.

The school is working closely with their feeder secondary school and the other feeder primary schools to consider how they can develop approaches to teaching and curriculum to support the continuum in learning.

As part of their work to support the Curriculum for Wales, the four regional consortia have worked to develop approaches to schools working in clusters. This work focuses on improving the collaboration between all schools, including between secondary and primary schools. In the past, this work has focused too heavily on pastoral transition and not strongly enough on supporting pupils to build on their learning from primary school and accelerate progress during secondary school.

Regional consortia officers have recognised this and are beginning to implement approaches that supported schools to focus more closely on pupil progress and assessment as they move between schools. In most cases, regional consortia fund this cluster work and expect schools to develop a plan for how they will work together to improve their curriculum offer and the learning experiences of pupils and to measure the impact this work has on pupils' progress. However, at times, the focus of these plans is too broad, and this limits the ability of regional consortia officers to evaluate the impact of this work.

Supporting progress and transition

Officers in GwE have worked to ensure that partnerships between secondary schools and primary schools are strengthened. They have funded the work of a cluster Curriculum for Wales facilitator (lead teacher) for the last three years. This teacher works with the cluster to share important messages around national developments with the Curriculum for Wales, co-ordinates the work of the schools and works closely with the GwE curriculum team.

To support this work, each cluster of schools is expected to produce a plan that outlines the expected activity to meet commonly agreed success criteria for supporting their staff to develop their knowledge and skills of curriculum and teaching. In addition, these plans must consider how the schools will develop their approaches to supporting pupils' progress as they transition between different phases.

This work is helping groups of schools to develop their understanding of pupil progress and the continuum of learning.

As a result of their strong involvement in the national design phase, regional officers generally have a good understanding of the underlying principles of the Curriculum for Wales and the unhelpful misconceptions related to it. In a few cases, officers have developed useful ways of exposing some of these misconceptions to help schools in their design process, for example through quick fire question and answer activities at the start of professional learning sessions or through the publishing of blogs. However, these are not consistently shared with school leaders well enough. As a result, in a few schools, senior leaders do not fully understand or embrace the underpinning aims of the new curriculum. These leaders do not think or plan strategically enough when developing their vision for the curriculum, learning and teaching in their schools. A few schools copy the approach, structures and content of the curriculum of other schools rather than developing their own arrangements. In addition, a few secondary schools in particular have moved to delivering individual lessons for the whole of an area of learning and experience without thinking carefully enough about how they will develop pupils' subject specific knowledge to develop and improve their learning. As a result, curriculum development is often too superficial and does not support pupils well enough to make the strong interdisciplinary links that the Curriculum for Wales promotes. Similarly, a few schools have moved towards thematic based approaches without thinking well enough about their vision for curriculum and teaching or the discipline and phase specific knowledge and experiences they need to develop. This has sometimes led to

superficial links being made and pupils not making strong enough progress in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding.

Considering misconceptions

Central South Consortium has developed a helpful approach to consider and expose some of the unhelpful misconceptions around curriculum design and the Curriculum for Wales.

At the beginning of any professional learning sessions, delegates consider a round of 'quick fire' multiple choice questions. These questions focus closely on important misconceptions and help delegates to consider how they might address these in their settings.

The four regional consortia have developed approaches to promote the development of research informed practice in their schools. They provide a wide range of professional learning to develop teachers' ability to engage with professional enquiry and officers use a wide range of research to inform their professional learning. Leaders in the regional consortia are committed to using relevant research to develop their own practice and have worked well with the Welsh Government to support the national approach to improving the use of research in education.

Professional enquiry and curriculum design

Nant Y Parc Primary School engaged with an EAS brokered professional enquiry programme with the University of Stirling to develop their approaches to enquiry to support curriculum design.

Leaders and staff have benefited from professional learning opportunities to develop their approaches to research and enquiry. As a result, all staff, including support staff, have engaged in meaningful professional enquiries linked to the school's priorities. The findings from this research helped to inform the school's curriculum design approaches.

Leaders in this school have a clear approach to curriculum design and delivery that is understood well by all staff. They feel well supported to develop their approaches to the Curriculum for Wales and in particular have been supported by external visits to schools in Scotland and from within Wales.

Leaders in Nant Y Parc have identified that these approaches to enquiry have supported them to improve approaches to evaluating their curriculum and have supported all staff well to identify how best their pupils can develop their knowledge and skills through high quality learning experiences.

In the most effective examples, schools have been supported well to consider their approaches to curriculum design. In these cases, school improvement officers work closely with school leaders to identify strengths and areas for improvement and support the school to develop a clear, considered approach to their curriculum design. This is informed well by the school's approach to high quality teaching and enables all staff to understand the whole school vision for curriculum and teaching.

These schools provide the space for staff to develop their understanding of the principles of the Curriculum for Wales and to understand the individual Areas of Learning and experiences. In the best examples, they are supported well to consider how subject disciplines contribute towards pupils' learning so they can make strong and meaningful links throughout their curriculum and teaching.

The professional learning for curriculum design provides useful opportunities for leaders and teachers to understand the different models of curriculum delivery but does not support them well enough to understand how to apply the curriculum design process practically in their schools. Teachers are not supported well enough to develop the skills they need to design a curriculum for their age range, subject or area. Overall, the curriculum support provided for schools so far does not focus closely enough on supporting schools with the practicalities of curriculum design and delivery. Officers recognise this and are beginning to consider ways to address this area.

The four regional consortia have ensured that the national programme of support is available to all schools including special schools and PRUs. During the national design phase, regional consortia supported the special schools in the pioneer schools' network suitably and facilitated opportunities for these schools to meet as a group. Special schools in Wales have used their strong networks to work collaboratively to develop their understanding of curriculum design and delivery and have engaged with the national programme. However, regional consortia have not tailored bespoke support well enough to meet the individual needs of special schools and PRUs.

The regional consortia and the Welsh Government worked well together to establish national networks which facilitate discussions around curriculum change and reform. The Welsh Government provides a range of grants to regional consortia to enable them to provide support to schools for develop their curriculum and implement educational reform. These grants have clear terms and conditions and the regional consortia plan their support in line with these. However, overall, regional consortia find it difficult to plan for future delivery as, too often, they are not made aware of grant funding or the terms and conditions with sufficient time to plan their use effectively. In addition, the regional consortia occasionally find that the grant terms for professional learning and curriculum development do not align well enough. This sometimes restricts their work and diverts officers to meeting certain grant conditions.

When considering the support of the three local authorities not currently in a region, overall, it is too early to measure the impact of their work in improving leaders' and teachers' knowledge of curriculum design and delivery. While the three local authorities are developing suitable structures to support their schools, currently their work is in the early stages of development. Neath Port Talbot left the ERW region in 2019 and since then officers have worked to establish a clear understanding of the Curriculum for Wales and have considered approaches to evaluation and improvement. Their main focus is on developing pedagogy and practice. However, the plans to support schools with curriculum design and delivery are in the early stages of development. Much of the support in Neath Port Talbot is focused on developing curricula in the primary phase and, overall, plans to support secondary schools are underdeveloped.

Support to improve the quality of teaching as the key enabler to curriculum reform

A wide range of research has indicated that teaching is one of the most important contributors to strong curricular and pupil progress. The Education Endowment Foundation (2021) has highlighted that “the best available evidence indicates that great teaching is the most important lever schools have to improve pupil attainment”. It also suggests that “every teacher should be supported in delivering high-quality teaching”. “We know from this and other research that it is important that schools consider how children learn, how they develop knowledge and skills, and how they can be supported to lay firm foundations for later learning” (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021). John Hattie (2003) echoes this view, writing that “we should focus on the greatest source of variance that can make the difference – the teacher” (Hattie, 2003, p.2).

All four regional consortia and the three local authorities not currently in a regional consortium have a clear understanding of the importance of high-quality teaching as the key enabler to successful curriculum reform and all have set clear priorities as part of their business planning to improve the quality of teaching in their schools.

As part of their work to support the development of the Curriculum for Wales, regional consortia and local authorities have all developed professional learning programmes that enable leaders and teachers to engage with the 12 pedagogical principles. This professional learning programme provides a theoretical overview of each of the principles and encourages teachers to reflect on how they might use these in practice.

In HMCI’s annual reports there has been a clear indication that the quality of teaching across the system is generally too variable, particularly in secondary schools (Estyn, 2018d; 2019; 2020d). These reports have identified that, where teaching is effective, teachers know their pupils well, plan learning experiences that engage them, build on prior learning and ensure that tasks and resources support and challenge all pupils well. They ask incisive questions that deepen learning and stimulate pupils to think deeply and they challenge them to develop their responses. In these cases, teachers have high expectations of their pupils and have strong subject knowledge that they use to plan carefully to build on pupils’ learning well. They employ an effective blend of teaching approaches, including direct teaching, based on a strong understanding of pupils’ prior learning and what they need to do to improve. Chapter 5 of ‘Successful Futures: Independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales’, (Donaldson, 2015) provides a useful guide to effective teaching approaches such as those outlined above.

Where teaching is less effective, generally it is because of low expectations and weak planning. In these cases, teachers do not build on pupils’ prior learning well enough and they do not provide an appropriate level of challenge and this limits the progress that pupils make. Tasks keep pupils busy, but do not challenge them to extend their knowledge and understanding or allow them to develop their skills in

meaningful contexts. In these schools, teachers often over-direct learning, and limit opportunities for pupils to think or work independently. They persist with lesson structures that may comply with school policy, but that do not help pupils to progress. They check pupils' recall, but do not probe their understanding.

Over time regional consortia and local authorities have developed support to address the important areas of teaching that require improvement. However, overall, the quality and impact of the support to improve the quality of teaching are too variable.

Regional consortia target their resources to work appropriately at those schools that need the most support, for example those that have been placed in a statutory follow-up category following inspection. Where schools and PRUs have had access to this support, our survey findings show that many find this useful and feel it has supported them to develop a more consistent understanding of effective teaching and to improve collaboration between teachers and across schools.

When supporting schools in a statutory category, to improve the quality of teaching, the regional consortia generally enable teachers to develop an understanding of some of the characteristics of effective teaching, such as establishing routines for learning, developing their questioning and improving challenge for all pupils. This support is generally more effective in primary schools than it is in secondary schools. Secondary schools in a statutory follow-up category often remain in the category for too long. Mainly this is because teaching is not effective enough and the support provided does not enable teaching to improve rapidly enough. Regional consortia have committed substantial resources to supporting many of these schools but overall the impact of this support is too variable and the pace of improvement is too slow.

Where support for teaching is most effective, the regional consortia and local authorities target the resource well and gather a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching. They provide helpful phase and subject specific support that helps teaching to improve planning and delivery, which supports the school to make suitable progress. In these cases, the support is targeted to the individual needs and improvement priorities of the school and individual teachers. School improvement officers use a range of first-hand evidence to monitor the impact of this support regularly and make changes where necessary. Where this support is less effective, the support offer does not focus closely enough on the specific aspects of teaching that require improvement and teachers are not supported well enough to develop their phase or subject specific pedagogies or to understand what effective teaching and progress looks like.

Supporting pedagogy development

GwE has developed a programme of support for developing approaches to teaching.

These are underpinned by the twelve pedagogical principles outlined in the Successful Futures report and take into account other aspects, such as considering how best young children learn in Foundation Phase.

Teachers engage with this professional learning programme through a series of events with activities to complete between sessions which aim to target and refine approaches to teaching.

During the final session GwE officers invite staff to share the effective practice they have developed during the programme.

Regional consortia and the three local authorities not currently in a consortium are improving their approaches to identifying the strengths and areas for improvements in teaching in their schools and PRUs. Generally, effectiveness of this work relies on the quality of the work of the school improvement officer and how well they work with leaders to consider a range of first-hand evidence to inform these evaluations. In the best cases, these evaluations are conducted alongside school leaders to support them to develop a good understanding of strengths and areas for improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in their school. This supports them to identify clear priorities for improvement and to plan a strong professional learning programme that provides effective support for all teachers to improve their practice. Overall, the impact of support to improve the quality of teaching is too variable. This is because, often, evaluation does not make the link between weaknesses in the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make. In the minority of cases, where school leaders are overly positive about the quality of teaching and the progress they have made or where a school's progress is not consistently strong, the regional consortia are not always able to identify specific enough support requirements. As a result, these schools do not improve well enough and in a few instances are placed into follow-up or a statutory category, which then triggers high levels of support.

The regional consortia and the three local authorities no longer in a consortium have plans in place to support the development subject and phase specific teaching. This is mainly for Welsh, English, mathematics and science. Where schools have access to this support, they appreciate the opportunities to develop their understanding of subject specific pedagogy. However, the availability of this support has decreased overtime and overall, and as a result the impact across consortia and local authority is too variable. Where this support is most effective, subject officers or lead practitioners from schools work closely with senior and middle leaders to identify the specific aspects of teaching and learning that require improvement. They consider carefully the subject and phase specific pedagogies and develop approaches to improve teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. These officers plan a range of support that includes professional learning sessions, joint planning and delivery of lessons, and these support teachers to develop their teaching skills well. They monitor the impact of their work closely and make good use of first-hand evidence to

adapt and change their approaches. Coe *et al.* (2014) identified that pedagogical content knowledge, a teacher's ability to use their strong subject knowledge to understand the ways pupils learn best in that subject, has a strong impact on pupil progress.

Supporting subject specific pedagogy and teaching

Partneriaeth has developed their approaches to supporting subject specific teaching and pedagogy. Generally, this support is provided for Welsh, English, mathematics and science.

Schools in the region have benefited from the support for Welsh during the pandemic and their curriculum development process. Professional learning for middle leaders has helped them to understand how to support teachers in their departments to develop their approaches to curriculum and teaching and to understand the important aspects of strong Welsh language teaching. These schools find the resources that are shared with them to be useful and supportive in enabling teachers to consider the best ways to help their pupils to make progress in learning.

Middle leader networks for Welsh, English mathematics and science are generally helpful for middle leaders and provide helpful opportunities to share and develop practice.

A few of the regional consortia have identified the need to increase the resource for supporting all subject areas and have sought to recruit additional staff through secondments or lead schools. Overall, schools do not have enough access to subject specific support beyond the core subjects and support in the core subjects has to be targeted to the schools in most need. As a result, too few teachers are supported to develop their subject and discipline or phase specific approaches to teaching and learning. These approaches play an important contribution in enabling teachers to design and develop their curriculum.

When responding to our survey, a few leaders and teachers indicated that they have received subject or phase specific support from regional consortia and a very few from local authorities. Many of these teachers or leaders found this support to be useful and had a positive impact on their teaching. The most common improvements were improving collaboration and developing a clear understanding of effective teaching.

The regional consortia have provided a wide range of useful professional learning to support staff at all levels to understand the four purposes of the curriculum and how they can ensure the learning experiences that they provide for pupils incorporate these. However, in a few cases, this support has not helped schools to develop an understanding of a purpose driven curriculum. A few schools do not fully understand the need for all learning experiences to have a clear purpose related to their phase, discipline or area of learning and experience as well as supporting the development of the four purposes.

All regional consortia and the three local authorities not in a regional consortium have increased their approach to school to school working to support improvements in teaching and curriculum design. This is helping many schools to learn well from other schools' strengths and has promoted the sharing of effective practice. However, in a, improvement officers do not always monitor or evaluate this school-to-school support well enough to ensure the supported schools benefit from the engagement and that the work has a positive impact on teaching and learning.

Developing school to school support

The EAS have developed a clear strategy for improving the school to school support that they provide.

As part of this plan, they have developed Learning Network Schools. These are schools that the EAS have identified as having a particularly strong area of practice and the leadership and teaching capacity to support other schools in their improvement journey.

These schools are expected to demonstrate their effective practice and to work closely with school to tailor support and monitor improvements. The EAS school improvement teams work closely with this Learning Network schools to ensure that they are effectively supporting targeted schools to bring about improvements.

Many schools visited as part of this thematic welcome this approach and leaders feel that Learning Network Schools have supported them to develop and improve their practice.

The support for teaching and professional learning available to all schools is generally too theoretical and has not enabled teachers to think beyond the 12 pedagogical principles to identify effective teaching and learning approaches. In most cases, support for teaching is not bespoke or targeted enough. As a result, schools are not supported well enough to improve the specific aspects of teaching that are an issue. In addition, a few schools are not supported well enough to understand the importance of teaching as the key enabler to curriculum design and delivery. Where teaching is less effective, schools have difficulty developing and implementing a curriculum and this is limiting the ability of these schools to successfully design and deliver their curriculum in line with the Curriculum for Wales.

The four regional consortia have developed a clear induction programme for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and this provides suitable opportunities for these teachers to engage with the principles of the Curriculum for Wales and supports them to consider how they can plan to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills. In addition, the links the regional consortia have developed with initial teacher education partnerships has enabled them to plan and tailor their programmes to meet the needs of NQTs more effectively.

Support for the leadership of teaching and learning

Estyn's annual reports and thematic reports, such as 'Twelve secondary school improvement journeys' (2013), 'Best practice in leadership development in schools' (2015) and 'Leadership and primary school improvement' (2016) have emphasised that leadership and the development of leadership capacity in schools are fundamental to improving school performance. In particular, in the more recent annual reports, HMCI has highlighted the importance of improving the leadership of teaching (Estyn, 2018d; 2019; 2020d).

Matthews (2007) highlights the importance of strong leadership of teaching and identifies that strong school leaders understand the features of effective teaching well and identify strengths and areas for improvement in their own school to target support and development.

Since teaching is a key enabler to successful curriculum reform, support for developing the capacity of school leaders to continually drive improvements in the quality of teaching is an important factor. In the improving teaching thematic report, we highlighted that effective leaders 'focus well on improving teaching and pedagogy. Generally, they:

- engender a culture of enquiry and engagement
- trust their staff to make professional choices
- have an open classroom policy
- create opportunities for professional dialogue around teaching
- regularly place teaching and pedagogy as agenda items on senior leader and staff meetings
- use professional development days as strategic opportunities to explore further initiatives in teaching and learning
- create dedicated time for teachers to take part in peer observations and action research
- use research to inform the decisions and strategy for their school
- have clear policies for teaching, feedback and curriculum that all staff understand and adhere to
- establish professional relationships within and beyond their region
- seek and act on expert advice'

(Estyn, 2018, p. 5).

The four regional consortia have worked well together overtime to develop national programmes for supporting and improving leadership. These programmes have been endorsed by the National Academy for Educational Leadership and linked to the regional leadership pathway.

These national programmes provide suitable opportunities for leaders to engage with the Curriculum for Wales and to consider the importance of improving teaching. In addition, there are appropriate opportunities for leaders to explore how they may

gather first-hand evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching to identify areas for improvement. However, overall, the support and professional learning for improving the leadership of teaching are too variable. They do not support leaders well enough to understand how they can lead and improve teaching or the importance of high-quality teaching in supporting successful curriculum design and delivery.

In our thematic report 'Leadership Development' we recommended that regional consortia consider how they could "increase the focus on developing leaders' ability to bring about improvement in the quality of teaching and learning" (Estyn, 2020a, p. 5). Whilst the national programmes provide opportunities for leaders to consider how they may approach the evaluation of teaching they do not support them well enough in the practicalities of gathering effective and accurate information to support their evaluation. This is partly because, too often, leaders are not supported to consider the impact that teaching has on pupils' learning and progress. In addition, they do not support leaders well enough to identify priorities for improvement in teaching or to plan and address these priorities so that they can lead teaching in their schools more effectively.

Generally, the impact of support for improving teaching depends on the quality of leadership in the targeted school or PRU. This is because, overall, the regional consortia and local authorities do not follow up well enough on their support to ensure leaders are taking effective actions to improve teaching or supporting them regularly enough to secure improvements. Where leadership capacity for teaching is weaker, these schools take longer to improve.

Regional consortia and local authorities have improved their relationships with their schools and PRUs during the pandemic. This is mainly because they have adapted their support and engaged with leaders to support staff and pupil wellbeing and provided timely support to respond to aspects of the pandemic. This has included support for digital learning and helping schools to respond and plan during the ongoing pandemic. Staff in schools and regional consortia feel that the pausing of national categorisation has supported these open and transparent relationships to develop well. This is because schools feel less worried about sharing weaknesses and are more willing to seek support now that they are not concerned about the publication of their school's category. Both schools and regional consortia officers welcome a process where their support needs are identified and their strengths and areas for improvement are understood and catered for.

School improvement officers regularly engage with school leaders to discuss the quality of teaching and the leadership of teaching and curriculum. In the most effective examples, school improvement officers have strong relationships that allow for transparent and honest conversations with leaders about the strengths and areas for improvement in the quality of teaching and curriculum. These officers also work alongside leaders to gather a range of first-hand evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. This enables leaders to develop stronger approaches to evaluation and improvement and allows school improvement officers to identify a clear baseline for the quality of teaching to ensure that support is tailored, bespoke and effective. Where strong processes enable improvement officers to identify clear priorities for improvement and work well with curriculum officers and other schools to broker tailored support that supports the school to make progress. In these

examples, there are clear support plans in place that identify helpful success criteria and monitoring milestones. These help school leaders and improvement officers closely to monitor the impact of this work effectively. This is further enhanced by bespoke leadership support that enables school leaders to develop their capacity to evaluate and improve teaching. Effective monitoring of the impact of support enables officers to adapt and change to support where necessary and these schools make strong and rapid progress.

Where the support is less effective, generally improvement officers rely too heavily on the information provided by school leaders and do not triangulate these evaluations with a good enough range of first-hand evidence. This is often because school improvement officers have limited time to spend in schools or, in a few cases, because their skills and experiences in evaluation and improvement are not strong enough. Generally, the bespoke support for developing leadership of teaching is not effective enough, particularly in secondary schools. Where the quality of school leadership is less strong, the impact of support for teaching is too variable. This is because the support does not enable leaders at all levels to develop their capacity to improve teaching. In response to this, the regional consortia and the three local authorities not currently in a consortium have refined their approaches to support leaders better at all levels to secure improvements in teaching. However, this bespoke offer sometimes relies on delivering the nationally developed programmes for all leaders in individual schools. These programmes are not always tailored to the specific development needs of the school or their leaders and therefore the impact of this work is too variable.

Regional consortia have developed approaches and systems to gather an overview of the quality of leadership in all of their schools and PRUs. In a majority of cases, this helps the regional consortia and local authority to prioritise their support and target specific schools. Overtime, the regional consortia have been better at identifying issues in the quality of teaching and the leadership of it in primary schools than they have in secondary schools. In a minority of cases, they rely too heavily on inspection findings to trigger support and are not consistently proactive enough in identifying at risk schools and supporting them prior to being placed into a statutory category. In these instances, school improvement officers do not consider the impact of leadership on teaching and pupil progress well enough. This prevents them from identifying and supporting important weaknesses in the quality of leadership in schools.

Approaches to evaluating the impact of support for schools and PRUs

When considering approaches to evaluating the impact of professional learning, King (2014) noted that often “evaluating the impact of” professional learning “is often the weakest link” (King, 2014, p.3). In this research it was noted that often the evaluation of professional learning is not considered well enough. When considering a range of frameworks for evaluating the impact of professional learning King indicated that for professional learning to be adequately evaluated, we need to move beyond “looking at teacher satisfaction to exploring impact on teacher practices, which in turn aim to enhance pupils’ outcomes and school improvement” (King, 2014, p.18).

The four regional consortia gather a suitable range of evidence of the views of stakeholders and those who have attended their professional learning programmes for curriculum and teaching. These provide officers and leaders with useful information to help them to identify strengths and areas for development in their provision. In the majority of cases, officers use this information to support them to develop and adapt their programmes in order to improve the quality and potential impact.

The regional consortia regularly consider the number of providers and practitioners that engage with their professional learning programmes and use this information to provide local authorities with an overview of the providers that have received support relating to the Curriculum for Wales. This information is used suitably to identify and target schools where engagement causes concerns.

There are strong approaches to business planning in the regional consortia and these plans set out clear milestones to check progress against actions and to monitor officers’ work. When considering their own work, for curriculum development and teaching, generally, the regional consortia set out clear success criteria for the impact they expect for their organisation and this enables them to monitor progress and impact of this aspect of their work well. As part of this planning, the regional consortia identify suitable time frames and milestones for their work on supporting the Curriculum for Wales. These enable leaders to track performance and support and to hold officers to account for this aspect of their work.

All four regional consortia align their business planning priorities closely to the National Mission (Welsh Government, 2017) and consider national policy well to inform their planning of specific actions. In particular they have a clear focus on educational reform and focus strongly on aspects of curriculum design and delivery. These plans are informed suitably by the range of evidence gathered from stakeholders and external experts. Leaders and officers monitor progress against actions regularly.

The four regional consortia regularly seek an external view of their work to support educational reform. This includes commissioning research from universities and other educational professionals to review aspects of their work, such as support for

curriculum, and to provide recommendations for improvement. These usually seek the views of stakeholders across the regional consortia and provide helpful feedback to the region so that they can adapt and improve their work.

The four regional consortia have also engaged with a range of educational professionals to inform their professional learning and support for curriculum design and the Curriculum for Wales. This approach has helped the consortia to develop officers' understanding of the principles of curriculum design and supported the development of the national programme for curriculum reform. The regional consortia regularly engage with these experts to test their ideas and to reflect on the important messages they are sharing with schools. This has supported them well to develop and improve their understanding and to refine their generic curriculum support offer for schools and PRUs.

The local authorities that work as part of a consortium generally feel well informed about the work of their regional consortium and work with regional officers to monitor engagement of their schools in regional and national support for the Curriculum for Wales. The regional consortia provide suitable information to local authority officers and councillors that help them to understand the activity that has taken place and the number of schools that have been involved. This information does not always focus closely enough on the impact of the engagement in professional learning has had on improving curriculum development or teaching.

Where regional consortia work with strong school leaders, these leaders are able to evaluate the impact and quality of professional learning and the regional consortia use this information well to support their evaluations of their business plans. In addition, they use this information effectively to share strong and emerging practice and schools across the regional consortia welcome this approach.

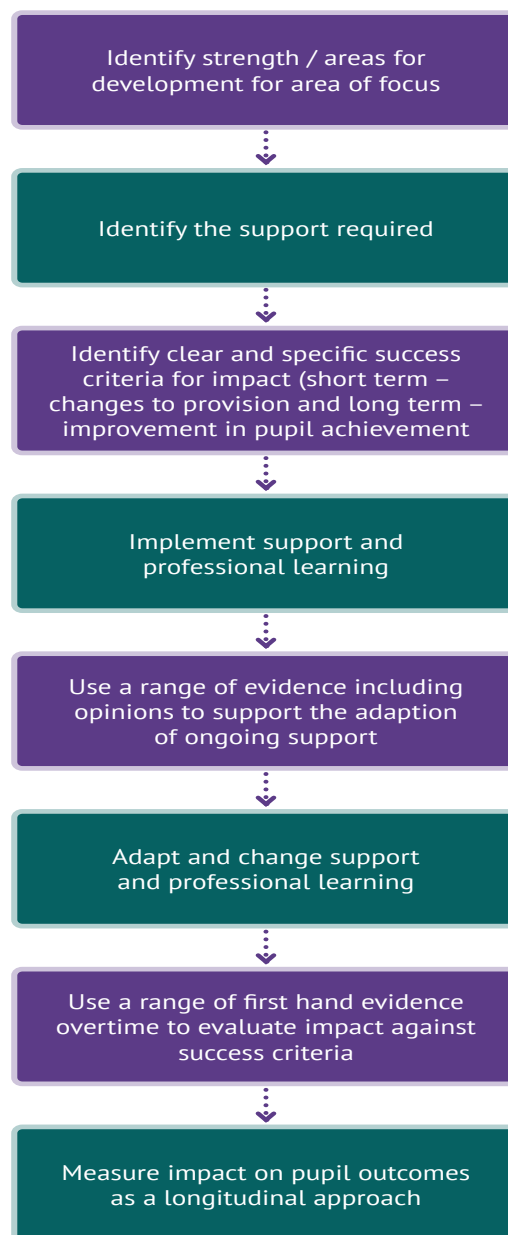
The regional consortia have identified a need to improve the evaluation of professional learning and support for curriculum and teaching and are currently developing their approaches to enable them to use a wider range of evidence to support the evaluation and improvement of this aspect of their work.

Overall, the four regional consortia and the three local authorities not currently in a consortium do not evaluate the impact of their support for curriculum and teaching effectively enough. They rely too heavily on the opinions and feedback from school leaders and delegates and do not gather a wide enough range of first-hand evidence to support their evaluations. Regional consortia recognise these challenges and have identified that evaluating the impact of support for curriculum reform in particular to be challenging. This is in the main because the impact of curricular change will take time to impact on pupil progress and outcomes. However, when planning this aspect of their work, the regional consortia do not always think carefully enough at the planning phase for any support about what success might look like. As a result, they do not set clear success criteria, for example highlighting the aspects of teaching or the curriculum design knowledge that they are aiming to improve at the outset of their work.

Where this works well, leaders identify clear priorities for improvement through the use of first-hand evidence to evaluate their work. Officers align their work to these

priorities closely and provide a range of generic and targeted professional learning and support. Curriculum and school improvement officers work closely together to monitor the impact of their work on teaching and curriculum in schools and they adapt their support accordingly. Where schools have strong improvement officers, they identify clear success criteria for improvement with suitable timescales. This allows school leaders and officers to monitor progress closely and to identify if the support and professional learning is having a positive impact on the school's work. In the best examples, these success criteria identify the specific aspects of teaching and curriculum that need to improve. This supports the school well to understand improvement priorities and enables all of the support in the school to be targeted, monitored and evaluated well.

Diagram – effective approaches to evaluating support and professional learning



When we inspected the regional consortia in 2016, three of the four regional consortia had recommendations to improve the quality of their evaluation processes. In these reports we identified that, generally, improvement plans did not have clear enough success criteria, which made it difficult for leaders to monitor progress. Generally, the evaluation relied too heavily on checking that processes had taken place rather than the quality of support and improvement. In addition, there was variability in the quality of evaluation within and across the consortia. During the monitoring visits in 2017, the three consortia had made strong progress in improving these processes, including improving the use of first-hand evidence and setting clearer success criteria for their work.

Since these monitoring visits, the regional consortia have continued to refine their approaches to business planning and evaluation, and they generally set more clear success criteria for certain aspects of their work and use an appropriate range of first-hand evidence to evaluate much of their work. However, when considering teaching and curriculum, they do not make strong enough use of first-hand evaluation and, when identifying success criteria, do not consider the aspects of teaching or curriculum they wish to improve well enough. This limits leaders' and officers' ability to consider the impact of this work closely enough. In addition, it makes it difficult to identify and plan bespoke support for these aspects.

In 2020, when we published our thematic report 'Leadership Development' we recommended that regional consortia consider how best they could "evaluate the impact of leadership development programmes overtime" (Estyn, 2020a, p. 5). Overall, the evaluation of professional learning and support for curriculum reform and teaching remains underdeveloped and is not supporting leaders to identify and plan for improvements in leadership, curriculum or teaching well enough.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been more difficult for regional consortia to gather and use a range of first-hand evidence and therefore they have had to rely more on opinions of stakeholders to inform their work. In addition, they have worked hard to relieve pressures on schools, which has meant reducing the number of visits and adapting the way in which they support schools. As the regional consortia start to increase this aspect of their work, they are beginning to identify ways in which they can improve their approaches to evaluation and improvement to support them better to understand and monitor the impact of their work for supporting and improving curriculum and teaching.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

The findings and recommendations in this report draw on visits to a range of partners in the Welsh education system including the four regional consortia, the three local authorities not currently in a consortium and a sample of 40 schools across Wales.

In addition to these visits, we also engaged with the 19 other local authorities through our link inspector work and we issued and promoted an open survey targeted at school leaders and practitioners. We also held a focus group of PRU leaders to seek their views on the quality and impact of support.

We received 146 responses for our open survey. A breakdown is presented below:

Figure 1: Responses by region

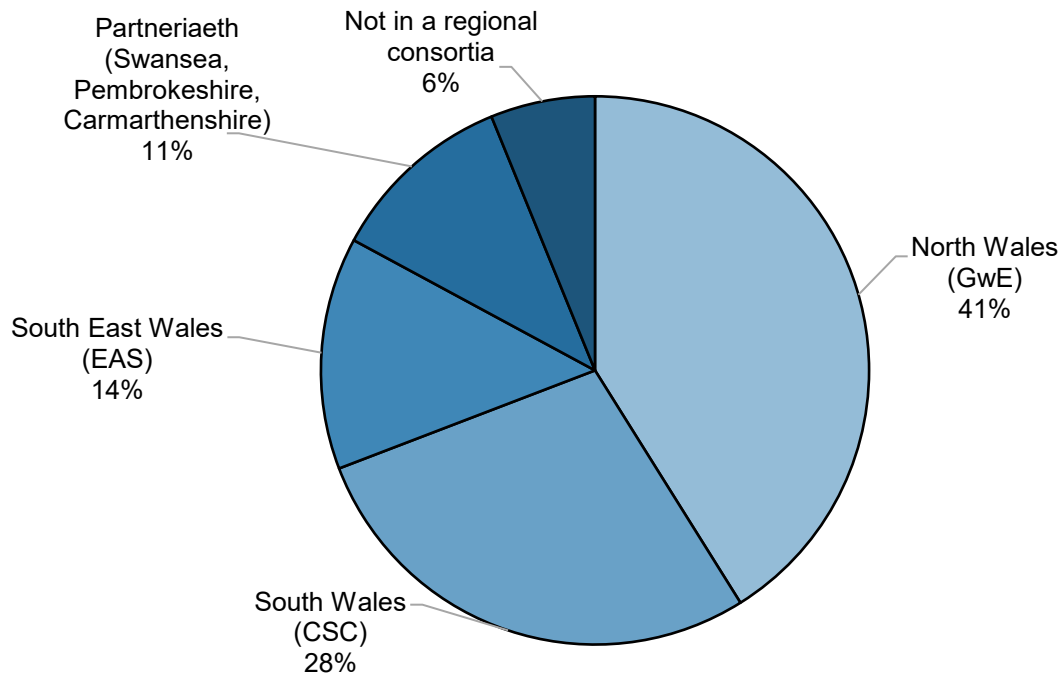
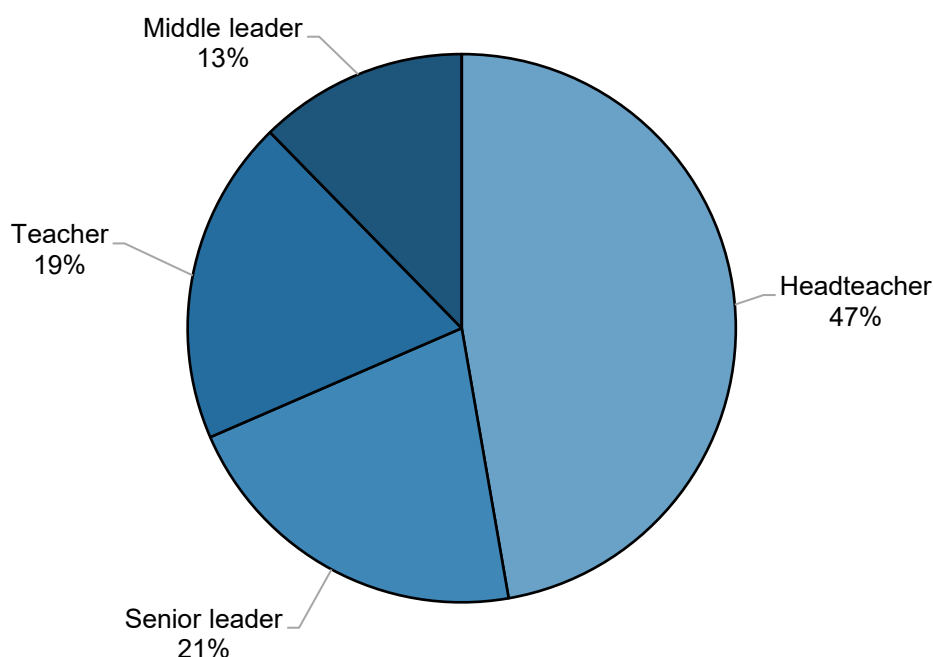


Figure 2: Responses by respondent role



During our visits to the four regional consortia and the three local authorities not currently in a consortium, inspectors:

- interviewed senior and middle leaders and officers from across the organisation
- scrutinised a wide range of evidence

The sample of schools included primary, secondary, all-age and special schools, and English and Welsh medium schools. The school sample represents the range of contexts of schools from across Wales. During these visits, inspectors:

- interviewed senior leaders, middle leaders and class teachers
- scrutinised relevant documentation where appropriate
- conducted learning Walks and lesson observations, where appropriate

All visits took place in the autumn term 2021 and the guidelines for dealing with the COVID 19 pandemic were followed.

Additional evidence was drawn from:

- primary, secondary, all-age and special school inspection reports from 2015 – 2020
- Estyn thematic survey reports
- engagement visits to school
- monitoring reports for schools in statutory categories

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Ysgol Maes Y Gwendraeth, Carmarthenshire
Ysgol Bro Idris, Gwynedd
YGG Garth Olwg, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Dwr-Y-Felin Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot
Corpus Christi Catholic High School, Cardiff
Thornwell Primary School, Monmouthshire
Victoria CP School, Wrexham
Broughton Primary School, Flintshire
Bedlinog Community Primary School, Merthyr Tydfil
Blackwood Primary School, Newport
Llanidloes Primary School, Powys
Llanidloes High School, Powys
West Monmouth School, Torfaen
Ysgol Y Faenol, Denbighshire
Nant-Y-Parc Primary School, Caerphilly
Clase Primary School, Swansea
St Joseph's Catholic and Anglican Secondary School, Wrexham
Gelliswick Primary School, Pembrokeshire
Oakfield Primary School, Cardiff
Ysgol yr Hendy, Carmarthenshire
Ysgol Aberporth, Ceredigion
Ysgol Gwenffrwd, Flintshire
Pendoylan Primary School, Vale of Glamorgan
Ysgol Santes Fair, Anglesey
Windsor Clive Primary School, Cardiff
Glasllwch Primary School, Newport
Berriew C.P. School, Powys
Ysgol Capelulo, Conwy
Darran Park Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Trallwn Primary School, Swansea
Creunant Primary School, Neath Port Talbot
Osbaston CiW Primary School, Monmouthshire
St Andrew's Primary School, Newport
Crownbridge Special School, Torfaen
Ysgol Hafod Lon, Gwynedd
Ysgol Crug Glas, Swansea
The Hollies Special School, Cardiff

Glossary

Areas of learning and experience (Area of learning and experience)	Successful Futures refers to the development of six areas of learning and experience as a way of organising curriculum subjects. These are expressive arts, health and wellbeing, humanities, languages, literacy and communication, mathematics and numeracy, and science and technology (Donaldson, 2015, p. 38-9).
National professional learning programme	A programme of training and support for schools and PRUs with their preparation for the Curriculum for Wales
New Deal pioneer schools	Schools that worked with the Welsh Government to consider professional learning requirements in Wales
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an intergovernmental economic organisation with 35 member countries, founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade.
pedagogy	The method and practice of teaching
pioneer schools	Schools that worked with the Welsh Government and other schools to develop and pilot the new curriculum for Wales. Pioneer Schools have supported the development of aspects of the curriculum and /or professional development.
professional enquiry	A 'finding out' or an investigation with a rationale and approach that can be explained or defended. The findings can then be shared so it becomes more than reflection or personal enquiry.
regional consortia	The provision set up by a group of local authorities to deliver school improvement services as set out in the Welsh Government's National Model for Regional Working
Successful Futures	An independent review of the curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales, published in 2015

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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