
Supporting more able and talented pupils

How best to challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils:
Key stages 2 to 4

March 2018



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Contents	Page
Introduction	1
Background	1
Main issues	3
Effective practice	6
Questions for providers	15
1 Standards	16
2 Provision	18
3 Leadership and management	25
4 Support and challenge for schools	28
Case studies of effective practice	30
Appendix 1: Evidence base	40
Appendix 2: Key stage 2 to 4 performance data	41
Glossary	44
References	47

Introduction

This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government. The report examines standards, provision and leadership in meeting the needs of more able and talented pupils in primary and secondary schools in Wales. It provides an evaluation of progress against the recommendations for schools and local authorities in Estyn's previous survey reports on supporting more able and talented pupils in 2011 and 2012.

The report identifies how primary and secondary schools across Wales challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils successfully in key stages 2, 3 and 4. The report includes case studies of effective practice for schools to consider. The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools, local authorities and regional consortia.

The findings of the report are based on a wide range of primary and secondary school inspection evidence. In addition, inspectors visited or held telephone interviews with a range of primary and secondary schools across Wales. Inspectors observed learning activities, interviewed pupils, teachers and school leaders, and scrutinised planning, pupils' work and other school documents. Inspectors also received evidence from representatives from each of the regional consortia (Appendix 1).

Background

The term 'more able and talented' is used in Wales to refer to pupils who are more able across the curriculum and those who show particular ability or aptitude in one or more specific areas, such as art, music, drama or sport (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC), 2003). Pupils may also show exceptional leadership, team working or entrepreneurial skills. It refers to about 20% of pupils who require enriched and extended opportunities across the curriculum to develop their abilities in one or more areas.

Estyn's previous surveys of support for more able and talented pupils in primary schools (Estyn, 2011) and secondary schools (Estyn, 2012) identified that only a few schools provide well for these pupils to enable them to achieve their potential. In the few schools where more able and talented pupils achieve particularly well, all pupils tend to achieve high standards.

In 2008, the Welsh Assembly Government published guidance for schools and local authorities in collaboration with the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE Cymru) called, 'Meeting the Challenge: Quality Standards in Education for More Able and Talented Pupils' (Welsh Government, 2008). This was followed in 2012 with a suite of professional development and training materials to support schools and local authorities to improve their provision for more able and talented pupils (Welsh Assembly Government & NACE Cymru, 2012).

In 2014, the Welsh Government commissioned an independent review to establish the strategies used by schools, further education institutions and local authorities across Wales to identify, support, challenge, monitor and track more able and talented learners. Its final report (Welsh Government, 2015) concluded that considerable variation exists in provision for more able and talented learners across schools.

In 2016, Estyn inspected the regional consortia. Estyn identified shortcomings in three out of the four consortia in their use of data and/or tracking procedures in order to challenge and support schools to improve the performance of groups of pupils, including those who are more able and talented.

Main issues

Standards

- 1 Where outcomes for more able and talented pupils are very strong, pupils are highly engaged independent learners. They develop and apply advanced skills and knowledge confidently to new situations and across areas of learning. They use their literacy, numeracy and information and communication and technology (ICT) skills efficiently, and often creatively, in their work.
- 2 In nearly all schools where more able and talented pupils achieve well, pupils make well-considered choices about how and what they learn. They evaluate their own progress robustly. They know what to do to improve their work and develop a keen sense of responsibility for progressing their own learning. However, in around a third of schools, more able pupils do not achieve as well as they should or use their skills to a level that matches their ability.
- 3 In primary and secondary schools, more able girls perform better than boys at the higher levels and more able pupils eligible for free school meals do not perform as well as other pupils who are more able. By the end of key stages 2 and 3, teacher assessments show that pupils' achievements at the higher than expected levels have improved year-on-year since 2012 (Welsh Government, 2017a & 2017b). At key stage 4, the percentage of pupils achieving five A*-A GCSEs (or equivalent) has increased in 2017, after a period of decline in recent years (Welsh Government, 2017c). For further detail see appendix 2.

Provision

- 4 Most primary and secondary schools have an appropriate, shared understanding of how they define 'more able and talented' pupils within their individual schools.
- 5 In a very few schools, staff provide a valuable range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities to cater for the needs of pupils who have more advanced skills. However, in general, schools place more emphasis on provision for 'more able' pupils than they do for 'talented' pupils. The provision for 'talented pupils' remains limited in many schools across Wales. In a minority of schools, changes to the curriculum, for example the introduction of the literacy and numeracy framework (LNF: Welsh Government, 2013) and national tests in reading and numeracy, have led to a narrowing of opportunities for pupils to develop their creative, sporting and technological skills.
- 6 In schools that are most successful in challenging more able and talented pupils, teachers have very high expectations of all pupils. They plan and match work to individual pupils' abilities exceptionally well and they use the outcomes of assessment skilfully to plan next steps in pupils' learning. However, too many teachers do not ensure that there is sufficient challenge in tasks to stretch more able and talented pupils.

- 7 Early entry for GCSE examinations can help more able pupils who have mastered subject content before the end of their course of study. Many of these pupils achieve very high grades and then progress to additional qualifications or further study at an accelerated rate, for example in mathematics. However, not all schools consider the individual needs of pupils well enough when entering them early for examinations.
- 8 Many schools have clear and systematic procedures for identifying pupils' particular strengths using a wide range of information. Most schools track the progress of more able pupils well. However, even in schools where more able pupils attain high standards, very few monitor and track the achievements and progress of talented pupils.
- 9 Where schools place a strong emphasis on nurturing more able and talented pupils, staff provide regular opportunities and structured support for pupils to share any concerns, challenges or barriers that they face. They help pupils to overcome these sensitively, for example through targeted intervention such as mentoring or coaching. However, this happens only in a very few schools.
- 10 Access to additional provision and targeted support that is relevant to the needs of more able and talented pupils in key stages 2 to 4 is uneven across Wales. The quality and breadth of additional opportunities depend too much on the skills and resources in individual schools rather than being a systematic expectation across schools and within regions.
- 11 Overall, in many primary and secondary schools, partnership working is a strength. In the best examples, primary and secondary schools use a wide range of partners to enhance the learning experiences of more able and talented pupils. However, often schools do not develop processes to evaluate the impact of joint projects or partnership working on outcomes for these pupils well enough.
- 12 A few schools communicate effectively with parents, so that they know how they can support the education of their more able or talented child. However, many schools do not pay enough attention to engaging parents of more able and talented pupils from all backgrounds as partners in their children's learning.
- 13 Since Estyn's previous reports (Estyn 2011 & 2012), there has not been enough progress in around half of primary and secondary schools to build on transition arrangements to provide effective challenge for more able and talented pupils in key stage 3. Generally, too many secondary teachers do not provide sufficient continuity and progression in pupils' learning.

Leadership and management

- 14 The quality of schools' provision for more able and talented pupils depends upon effective leaders placing an appropriate emphasis on improving standards and provision for these pupils. Where this is the case, schools have developed highly successful whole-school approaches. For example, they use grant funding such as the pupil development grant (PDG) and lead creative schools scheme to support and nurture these pupils to achieve well. School staff participate effectively in professional learning experiences to support more able and talented pupils. They also engage well with external organisations such as NACE Cymru to develop aspects of their practice.

- 15 In a few schools, leaders and staff have reviewed their policies and practices to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils, as part of a wider consideration of their school values and aims in the context of curriculum reform in Wales.
- 16 Where there are shortcomings in provision for more able and talented pupils, leaders do not ensure that strategic planning pays good enough attention to supporting staff to meet the needs of these pupils. As a result, practices for challenging and nurturing their progress vary too much between classes in primary schools and by class and department in secondary schools. Across Wales, school-to-school collaboration, which focuses upon how best to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils, is at an early stage of development.
- 17 In around a third of primary schools and in a majority of secondary schools, processes for improving quality are weak. Too few schools monitor and evaluate how well their provision meets the needs of more able and talented pupils rigorously enough.

Support and challenge for schools

- 18 Support from local authorities and regional consortia to develop effective provision for more able and talented pupils has been inconsistent and, until very recently, received less attention than at the time of Estyn's previous thematic reports (Estyn, 2011 & 2012). This is because education consortia over-emphasised a focus on improving academic outcomes at 'expected' attainment thresholds in response to national performance measures. Consequently, access to appropriate learning experiences for more able and talented pupils is not good enough across regions and across Wales. Our recent monitoring of the consortia indicates that there is now greater emphasis on the whole range of performance indicators when considering outcomes of pupils.
- 19 Where schools have used training materials developed by the Welsh Government and NACE Cymru (Welsh Government & NACE Cymru, 2012), these have supported the development of provision for more able and talented pupils well. However, this guidance has had little impact on local authority and regional consortia's work with schools.
- 20 The Welsh Government's 'Education in Wales: Our national mission 2017-21' (Welsh Government, 2017d) action plan places valuable emphasis on the need to improve the quality of teaching through professional learning to meet the needs of Wales' most able learners. The plan identifies 'strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being' as one of its key enabling objectives (Welsh Government, 2017d, p.31). However, schools are not always clear as to how they can be inclusive and equitable to all pupils while, at the same time, meeting the needs of their more able and talented pupils who may require additional opportunities.

Effective practice

- 21 This section describes the common characteristics of effective practice for more able and talented pupils in schools in Wales.

Teaching and learning experiences

Common characteristics of effective teaching and learning experiences for more able and talented pupils:

- An agreed whole-school definition and shared understanding of the term 'more able and talented'
- A consistent whole-school philosophy for meeting the needs of more able and talented pupils that is well understood by all staff
- Broad and varied learning opportunities for more able and talented pupils to develop to a very high level in academic, sporting, creative and technological skills
- Stimulating and challenging learning experiences that promote pupils' independence, problem-solving, decision-making, thinking and collaboration effectively and also develop pupils' literacy, numeracy or ICT skills to a high level
- Flexible use of groupings and tasks that enable more able and talented pupils to deepen their knowledge and consolidate and extend their skills at an appropriate level
- High expectations of pupils' achievement and use of a range of creative strategies to challenge and extend pupils' learning
- High quality questioning, which probes and challenges pupils' thinking
- Very strong subject knowledge and teaching expertise, for example an understanding of effective pedagogy for more able or talented pupils in a particular subject or area of learning
- Enrichment activities and the use of subject experts to enhance teaching and learning, where appropriate
- Exemplary use of assessment to inform teachers' planning so that it meets the needs of individual pupils
- High-quality feedback to pupils that helps to nurture their reflective and evaluative skills

- 22 The most effective schools provide more able and talented pupils with a high degree of autonomy within carefully structured longer-term planning. This ensures that they receive a suitably broad and balanced curriculum that develops their knowledge and skills progressively, while also allowing them to make choices and pursue their own interests.

‘Learning together’ weeks: A whole-school approach to meeting the needs of more able and talented pupils in a primary school

A primary school holds a ‘Learning together’ week twice a year. This is designed to stimulate and motivate all pupils to learn, and to provide more able and talented pupils with an opportunity to take ownership of curriculum planning to reach agreed learning goals. The whole school works on a theme for the week, for example: ‘Share your passion’ and ‘Putting on a show’. Teachers provide the whole-school theme and pupil-friendly statements of the literacy and numeracy skills that pupils in each class must develop during the week. Pupils have full autonomy over what they learn and how they represent their learning, including organising and leading activities for parents to take part in on the final day of the week.

In the ‘Putting on a show’ learning week, Year 3 pupils research carnivals around the world, make information posters using ICT, learn Brazilian dances and write a class poem, to which they add movement for a whole-class performance. Year 4 pupils choose to study the general election. They research the Houses of Parliament and its famous artwork. They create their own election ‘parties’ and develop campaign strategies in three teams with a comedic ‘twist’. In Year 5, pupils create a television script based on Doctor Who, demonstrating a strong awareness of script writing conventions, and Year 6 pupils take parents ‘back to the past’ with a project based on the 1960s to 1990s.

Across all classes, more able and talented pupils take a strong lead in planning and organising the work. This develops their leadership skills, including making decisions, organising and supporting teams, conflict management and meeting deadlines, as well as the development of core literacy and numeracy skills.

The final Friday event is very well-attended by parents, who take an active part in the activities the pupils have planned for them.

- 23 Effective schools plan appropriate additional enrichment activities for more able and talented pupils to extend their learning. These enrichment approaches have a positive impact on pupils’ attainment and self-esteem.

Extending the literacy skills of pupils who are more able in English

A secondary school provides a literacy enrichment programme where a higher level teaching assistant extends the literacy skills of pupils who are more able in English. The assistant visits all partner primary schools and works closely with primary teachers to identify Year 6 pupils who are more able in English before they move to key stage 3. The outcomes from the national reading tests and teacher assessments at the end of key stage 2 are used to support the identification process. The assistant works with these pupils in groups as they move through Years 7, 8 and 9 to study a variety of additional literature texts to extend their thinking skills and to develop their higher-order literacy skills. For example, pupils review the works of Carnegie prize authors. These activities stimulate and sustain more able pupils' interest. They benefit successfully from reading and discussing a wider variety of literature than they would usually experience in small, focused groups. As a result of this work, most pupils make very good progress in English throughout key stage 3 and achieve high standards in oracy, reading and writing. Most pupils who attend these groups go on to achieve an A* grade in English at GCSE.

Extending the numeracy skills of pupils who are more able in mathematics

A primary school provides a numeracy enrichment programme where a higher level teaching assistant with secondary school teaching experience extends the numeracy skills of pupils who are more able in mathematics. The assistant leads small group sessions twice a week, with a focus on problem-solving linked to the mathematical concepts that the more able pupils are studying in class.

Pupils who attend these groups are highly motivated and enjoy developing their reasoning skills and competing with each other. As a result of this work, more able pupils progress very well in mathematics in Year 6, with a few pupils attaining level 6 by the end of the key stage.

Identification, tracking and support

- 24 Schools that provide exceptional challenge and support for more able and talented pupils have highly robust assessment approaches. These include clear and systematic procedures for the identification of pupils' strengths using a wide range of information, setting rigorous targets and monitoring and tracking pupils' progress and achievements effectively over time.

Criteria for identifying more able and talented pupils in secondary subjects

Leaders in a secondary school have developed detailed criteria for identifying more able and talented pupils for each subject supported by NACE. Each department uses these criteria consistently to identify pupils. Teachers place these pupils on the school's more able and talented register. For example, in ICT, staff look out for, and identify, those pupils who:

- **demonstrate ICT capability significantly above that expected for their age**
- **learn and apply new ICT techniques quickly:** for example, pupils use shortcut keys for routine tasks effectively and appropriately; they quickly apply techniques for integrating applications such as mail merge and databases
- **use initiative to exploit the potential of more advanced features of ICT tools:** for example, pupils investigate the HTML source code of a website and apply features such as counters or frames to their own web designs
- **transfer and apply ICT skills and techniques confidently in new contexts:** for example, they recognise the potential of applying spreadsheet modelling from their mathematics work to a science investigation
- **explore independently beyond the given breadth of an ICT topic**
- **initiate ideas and solve problems, use ICT effectively and creatively, and develop systems that meet personal needs and interests:** for example, they create an interactive fan club website that sends out a monthly newsletter to electronic subscribers either working on their own, or collaboratively with peers

Throughout key stage 3 and key stage 4, staff review the register on a termly basis. This provides them with regular and timely opportunities to add pupils to the register when needed, recognising that pupils develop at different rates. Where teachers have a concern about the standards or the progress of pupils on the register, leaders instigate a departmental discussion to find out the cause. Where issues exist, teachers may move pupils to a 'shadow register'. This too has clear, set criteria. Leaders use this register to provide bespoke support for individuals, such as academic intervention, mentoring or wellbeing support. These practices ensure that those identified as more able continue to receive help when necessary.

- 25 The most successful schools support the wellbeing of pupils who are more able and talented specifically. They are aware of the barriers or challenges that more able and talented pupils might be facing, for example peer pressure not to appear 'clever', for fear of isolation, or a lack of confidence in talking to others.

An inter-generational ICT workshop develops more able pupils' confidence

One primary school identified a small group of more able Year 6 pupils with exceptional ICT skills who lacked confidence in talking to adults. Leaders set up an 'inter-generational ICT workshop' for pupils to support their grandparents. Pupils planned the session and taught the visitors basic skills, such as how to take pictures with a tablet device, how to search the internet and how to use music and video recording applications. This had a strong impact on improving the more able pupils' inter-personal skills and levels of confidence.

Nurturing more able and talented pupils through one-to-one pupil-teacher conferences in key stage 2

Leaders in a primary school timetable one-to-one meetings between pupils and their teachers once a term. In these meetings, teachers discuss a one-page profile with each individual pupil. The profiles contain information about pupils' progress, achievements, attitudes to learning, behaviour and attendance. Together, the teacher and pupil discuss and agree targets for the next term and talk about how the pupil might achieve these.

The conference also provides an opportunity for the teacher and pupil to discuss any issues that might be a barrier to the pupil's progress and to find a resolution to this, for example a more able pupil struggling with peer pressure and not wanting to appear 'clever' in front of his or her classmates.

More able pupils across key stage 2 talk in depth about how these conferences help them to progress in their learning and the positive impact they have on their wellbeing.

- 26 A very few secondary schools support more able and talented pupils effectively by using cross-phase buddy systems. In these schools, older pupils who act as buddies improve their communication skills and develop effective thinking skills. The younger buddies develop effective literacy and numeracy skills and, in most cases, beyond those expected for their age.

Cross-phase buddy systems to support more able and talented pupils in secondary schools

School A runs an effective cross-phase 'buddy' system to support pupils who are more able. Leaders pair more able pupils in Year 12 with those in key stage 3. The 'buddies' meet at least weekly. Heads of year meet with the Year 12 pupils to discuss the areas on which they need to focus. During the weekly session, pupils focus on priorities that are appropriate to the individual such as exam technique or subject extension work. Teachers provide booklets of exercises to facilitate the sessions but the buddies are able to focus on areas in which they consider the younger pupil needs more challenge or support. Leaders evaluate this work in detail, including for example undertaking video interviews with the pupils involved.

In School B, at least once a week, all pupils identified as more able in Year 7 meet with a 'buddy' from Year 12 who is also identified as more able in the same subject areas. The same system operates between pupils in Year 9 and Year 13. Leaders provide the buddies with a workbook through which they can work to help develop important skills. This effective system provides challenge for the younger pupils. In turn, older pupils improve their communications skills and thinking skills, as they develop explanations for difficult concepts. The system also allows for mentoring and improved wellbeing. The younger pupils enjoy having an older 'buddy' whom they can trust and ask questions, such as about examinations and homework. In a very few cases, older 'buddies' have begun to develop their own resources to personalise learning for their younger partners, for example resources to challenge more able mathematicians' understanding of trigonometry. As a result, these pupils receive purposeful challenge.

Partnerships and transition

- 27 In the best examples, primary and secondary schools use a wide range of partners to enhance the learning experiences of more able and talented pupils. For example, in many primary schools and good secondary arts departments, extra-curricular provision for more able and talented pupils linked to arts agencies and practitioners helps them to make the most of their abilities (Estyn, 2016a). Most primary and secondary schools use parent consultation meetings and annual written reports appropriately to share information with parents and carers of more able and talented pupils about their children's achievements and progress.

Nurturing more able and talented pupils through effective cluster school partnership working

In School Cluster A, more able pupils in key stage 2 take part in a cluster schools' writing project, working with an author to improve their story writing and producing a termly magazine. These collaborative activities contribute strongly to improving outcomes for more able boys in literacy.

Primary schools in School Cluster B pool their staff expertise so that pupils across the cluster benefit from specialist teaching. For example, a teaching assistant who is a former British gymnast leads physical education workshops for talented pupils in Years 3 and 4, who come together in the host school for these sessions. Before and after each session, pupils complete an 'impact form', where they reflect upon their skill levels, their enjoyment and motivation in the session and how the activities they took part in have improved their abilities. The outcomes of these sessions are later reviewed by leaders at their 'more able and talented cluster group' meetings.

Effective primary-secondary transition arrangements for more able and talented pupils

In School Cluster A, primary and secondary teachers begin to discuss pupils in Year 4 using agreed criteria to identify them as more able and/or talented, with the understanding that pupils will develop and 'bloom' at different times. These early discussions help these schools to plan strategically for transition work, as they consider the types of transition activities and approaches that might benefit these cohorts of pupils in the future.

In School Cluster B, more able pupils from Year 7 support the Year 6 pupils on a literacy-based challenge, where pupils use their reading and thinking skills to solve cryptic clues and develop their writing skills by having to write a complete story in no more than 50 words. Pupils enjoy the challenge of these days as well as meeting and working with pupils from other schools who are more able and talented. These collaborative activities support them to develop friendships prior to starting their new school and help to ease anxieties about the transition that they might otherwise experience. The nature of the selection of a very small number of pupils from each school for these visits means that they tend to be more focused on the 'most able' (i.e. those pupils with exceptional academic ability).

In School Cluster C, the secondary school releases their staff to work alongside teachers and pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 over a longer period. For example, the mathematics department work with their transition leader to provide resources and support teaching strategies for more able and talented pupils in key stage 2. This has developed primary teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills in delivering aspects of the key stage 3 mathematics curriculum. As a result, the schools have developed more consistent teaching methods in mathematics between key stages 2 and 3.

Leadership and management

- 28 In primary and secondary schools where leadership is judged to be excellent, leaders act purposefully to ensure that the school meets the needs of all its pupils, including those who are more able and talented. They ensure that all staff and parents understand the policy for identifying more able and talented pupils and the learning experiences the school will provide.

Common characteristics of effective leadership and management in improving standards and provision for more able and talented pupils:

- Leaders make clear who has overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of policy and practice for more able and talented pupils
- Leaders ensure that strategic planning processes pay good enough attention to supporting staff to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils
- Leaders ensure that all staff and parents understand the policy for identifying more able and talented pupils and the learning experiences the school will provide
- Leaders and staff review their policies and practices to ensure that they meet the needs of more able and talented pupils, for example as part of a wider consideration of their school values and aims in the context of curriculum reform in Wales
- They provide a clear rationale for the teaching and learning experiences that they deliver, and for the care, support and guidance that they provide for more able and talented pupils
- They have developed highly successful whole-school approaches where there is a sustained focus on achieving standards above expectations through consistently high-quality teaching and enriching learning experiences
- They use research effectively to inform their strategies
- Leaders and staff monitor and evaluate how well their provision meets the needs of more able and talented pupils rigorously
- Schools use grant funding, such as the pupil development grant, highly effectively to challenge and support eligible pupils who are more able and talented
- Leaders ensure that all staff participate effectively in professional learning experiences to support them to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding of how best to challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils

Support and challenge for schools

- 29 Where most effective, regional consortia support school-to-school collaboration well and develop wider partnerships to enhance the learning experiences for more able and talented pupils, for example through working with higher education institutions.

Raising aspiration for disadvantaged more able and talented secondary pupils

Working in collaboration with First Campus and Cardiff Metropolitan University, Central South Consortium arranged a series of residential experiences for 100 more able and talented Year 10 pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds from eight secondary schools across the region at the University's Cyncoed Campus.

Pupils took part in a range of experiences that reflect university life, including attending lectures in diverse subjects such as law and Japanese, living as a university student with their own budget and cooking for themselves.

All pupils who took part said that they would be more likely to go to university as a result of their experience and all pupils who attended from Ferndale Comprehensive School reported that it was their best experience in Year 10.

A joint research project to inform regional strategy for more able and talented pupils in south east Wales

The EAS commissioned a research programme in 2016-2017 using funding allocated by the Welsh Government specifically for more able and talented pupils, with a particular focus on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The research undertaken by Cardiff Metropolitan University, Arad Research and the University of Bristol (Davies et al, 2017), focused on the following areas:

- the impact of target-setting on the aspirations of more able learners
- specific approaches to teaching and learning and their impact on the performance of more able young people from disadvantaged homes and communities
- key external factors and influencers with the greatest impact on the performance of more able young people from disadvantaged homes and communities
- transition between primary and secondary school to maximise opportunities for more able young people from disadvantaged homes and communities
- the specific needs of more able young people from disadvantaged homes and communities in terms of support and wellbeing and how well these are met in schools

EAS is using the ten recommendations of the final report to develop and take forward its regional strategy for more able and talented pupils, for example to support schools to meet the needs of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Questions for providers

Schools:

- What is your strategy to improve outcomes for more able and talented pupils including those eligible for free school meals?
- How do you ensure that lessons provide enough challenge to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils?
- How do you ensure that talented pupils have opportunities to develop their sporting, creative, technological, leadership and entrepreneurial skills and that staff monitor their achievements and progress?
- What are your arrangements for providing support to help nurture and meet the learning needs of more able and talented pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds?
- How well do you engage with parents of more able and talented pupils as partners in their children's education?
- What are your arrangements to provide effective support and challenge for more able and talented pupils at transition points?
- How do you ensure that strategic planning and self-evaluation focus on outcomes and provision for more able and talented pupils?

Local authorities and regional consortia

- What professional learning opportunities do you provide for teachers and support staff to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils, and facilitate the sharing of effective practice?
- How do you support schools to evaluate their provision and improve outcomes for more able and talented pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds?
- How do you support better access to appropriate learning experiences for more able and talented pupils across regions?

1 Standards

- 30 At all key stages, most more able and talented pupils have a very positive attitude towards their learning. When motivated, they concentrate well, show resilience and persevere in their learning. Pupils enjoy exploring knowledge and concepts in depth and engaging with challenging themes and subject matter. Where outcomes for more able and talented pupils are of a very high standard, pupils grasp abstract ideas quickly and master skills at a level that is significantly ahead of their peers. These pupils transfer skills and knowledge highly effectively within and across subjects.
- 31 In nearly all schools where more able and talented pupils achieve well, pupils direct their own learning successfully. For example, they make well-considered, independent choices about how and what they learn. They evaluate their own and others' progress robustly and set their own targets for improvement. They know what to do to improve their work and develop a keen sense of responsibility for progressing their own learning.
- 32 Where provision is most effective, more able and talented pupils often have well-developed critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They apply these confidently in familiar contexts and to new situations. They share their ideas clearly using precise terminology and justify their opinions with reasoned arguments. They use and apply their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills highly efficiently and often creatively in their work. However, inspection findings identify that, in around a third of schools, more able and talented pupils do not achieve as well as they could. They do not always develop skills to the level they are capable of, or apply these at a high enough level. More able pupils in only a few secondary schools develop their thinking skills well as a result of effective teaching.

Key stages 2 and 3

- 33 By the end of key stage 2, in English, Welsh first language, mathematics, science and Welsh second language, teacher assessments of pupils' achievements at the higher than expected level 5, or above, show a year-on-year increase since 2012 (Welsh Government, 2017a). At key stage 3, the proportion of pupils gaining the higher levels has also improved quickly. Over half of pupils in each subject area achieve at least level 6 and there have been year-on-year increases in the percentage of pupils achieving two or three levels above the expected level 5. The attainment is highest in mathematics at the higher levels, with twice the proportion of pupils achieving level 8 as in the other subjects (Welsh Government, 2017b).
- 34 In key stage 2, girls perform better than boys in English, Welsh first language and Welsh second language at the higher than expected levels (Welsh Government, 2017a & 2017e). However, boys' and girls' achievements are similar in mathematics and science. At key stage 3, since 2012, girls have performed better than boys at the higher than expected levels in all core subjects. In English and Welsh, the gap remains notable (Welsh Government, 2017b).

- 35 Pupils who are eligible for free school meals achieve consistently less well than their peers in key stage 2 and key stage 3. Since 2012, the gap has increased slightly in all of the core subjects at key stage 2 and is wider for all subjects at key stage 3 than at key stage 2 (Welsh Government, 2017f & 2017g).
- 36 The increases in pupils' outcomes at the higher than expected levels at key stages 2 and 3 over time continue to raise questions about the reliability and validity of teacher assessments, particularly whether there is too much emphasis on teacher assessments for accountability purposes rather than accurate assessment to improve learning. An analysis and evaluation of outcomes for more able and talented pupils from key stage 2 and key stage 3 are in appendix 2.

Key stage 4

- 37 The proportion of pupils who achieve the highest grades has improved slightly over time in mathematics, but has declined in 2017 in English, Welsh and science (Welsh Government, 2017h). At key stage 4, the proportion of Year 11 pupils achieving five A* to A GCSE (or equivalent) grades increased slightly in 2017 after a period of decline.
- 38 Overall, there is a higher proportion of Year 11 girls achieving five A* to A GCSE (or equivalent) grades than boys. This gap did close slightly in 2017 compared to the previous year.
- 39 More able pupils eligible for free school meals do not perform as well as other pupils who are more able in external examinations. The gap in performance in the percentage of pupils gaining five A* to A grades has been around 14% in the last three years (Welsh Government, 2017c). There is a notable gap between the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals and other pupils when comparing those who achieved the higher than expected levels at the end of key stage 2 with their performance in key stage 4 examinations. Appendix 2 provides further information on the outcomes of more able and talented pupils at key stage 4.

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

- 40 In the 2012 and 2015 surveys, the proportion of pupils achieving the highest levels in all subjects was lower than in the other countries of the UK and was below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (Jerrim and Shure, 2016). The proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels is lower than expected given the mean scores in all three subjects. The most advantaged pupils in Wales do not achieve as well as similar pupils in the rest of the UK. There has been little improvement in the PISA scores of the highest achieving pupils in Wales since 2006. The proportion of pupils in Wales expecting to gain a Bachelor's degree is also below the OECD average.

2 Provision

Teaching and learning experiences

- 41 Most primary and secondary schools have an appropriate, shared understanding of how they define 'more able and talented' pupils within their individual schools. Many schools are aware of the definition in 'Meeting the Challenge: Quality Standards in Education for More Able and Talented Pupils' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008), but have their own interpretation of this. For example, many schools refer to 'more able' pupils as those with higher academic ability, who achieve above the expected level at the end of key stage 2 or 3 and attain at A* or A grade at GCSE. A minority of schools refer to a very small proportion of pupils who are exceptionally able, whom they define as working at least two levels above the end of key stage expectation. Many schools identify 'talented' pupils as those who have particular ability in sport, the expressive arts or technology. A very few schools include pupils' leadership skills within their definition of 'talented'.
- 42 Most schools take steps to celebrate pupils' successes outside school and give prominence to pupils who achieve representation at regional or national levels in their discipline. A minority of schools seek opportunities to involve pupils in projects where they can demonstrate and extend their talents, for example through the 'Shakespeare in schools' initiative, or special events such as regional sports competitions. In general, both primary and secondary schools focus their efforts more on provision for 'more able' than 'talented' pupils. Consequently, provision for 'talented' pupils remains underdeveloped in schools across Wales.
- 43 A majority of schools have moved away from using the Welsh Assembly Government guidance of 'approximately 20% of the total school population' as an indicator of the proportion of pupils that require 'enriched and extended opportunities across the curriculum' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008, p.6). These schools aim to create an inclusive culture of high aspiration and achievement for all. However, the needs of particular groups of pupils, including the more able and talented pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are not always considered carefully.
- 44 Estyn's previous reports (Estyn, 2011 & 2012) identified the benefits of individualised and personalised approaches to learning for more able and talented pupils, as they thrive when given the opportunity to make choices about how and what they learn. The most effective schools provide more able and talented pupils with a high degree of autonomy within carefully structured longer-term planning. This ensures that they receive a suitably broad and balanced curriculum that develops their knowledge and skills progressively, whilst also allowing them to make choices and pursue their own interests.
- 45 A minority of schools set up specific provision for more able pupils based upon their prior attainment. The most effective of these schools plan additional enrichment activities for these pupils to extend their learning. These enrichment approaches have a positive impact on pupils' attainment and self-esteem. However, in less

effective schools where leaders and teachers do not manage additional provision carefully or sensitively enough, these strategies can have a negative impact on those not included in these activities.

- 46 Since 2010, the range of options offered to pupils at key stage 4 has generally narrowed. In many schools, pupils have more lessons in the core subjects of English or Welsh and mathematics and less time studying other subjects than at the beginning of the cycle of inspection. This has reduced the number of examination entries for such subjects as modern foreign languages, history, music and geography. This means that more able and talented pupils receive fewer opportunities to develop their skills to a high level in specific subjects or across as broad a range of disciplines as in the past.
- 47 In the schools that are most successful in challenging more able and talented pupils, teachers have very high expectations of all pupils. Many schools use national curriculum programme of study level descriptions, the LNF (Welsh Government, 2013) and learning criteria from mark schemes to plan and match work to pupils of different abilities within their classes. The most effective schools use these helpful guides well to ensure a good level of challenge for pupils when planning activities.
- 48 Increasingly, schools provide work with different levels of challenge and pupils select the level that they feel is appropriate to their needs, rather than the teacher providing differentiated work for pupils of different abilities. Where teachers have a good knowledge of pupils' prior achievement and use this approach skilfully, they motivate more able and talented pupils successfully. As a result, these pupils make good progress in their learning. However, teachers do not always ensure that there is sufficient challenge in these activities to stretch more able pupils. In addition, they do not always monitor pupils' choices carefully enough to ensure that they are working at the level that matches their ability.
- 49 Where there are shortcomings in teaching, teachers provide activities for more able pupils that require them to complete extra amounts of similar work, rather than activities that challenge pupils to think more deeply. Too often, more able pupils receive an extension task after completing the main activity quickly and easily. This does not ensure that pupils are challenged sufficiently well throughout the whole of the lesson.
- 50 Many schools use more able and talented pupils to help other pupils with their work. This strategy has beneficial outcomes in developing pupils' communication and leadership skills, as well as consolidating their own learning.
- 51 In highly-effective schools, assessment for learning strategies contribute exceptionally well to helping pupils to know how well they are doing, what they need to improve and how to do this. Teachers provide more able pupils with high-quality opportunities to assess their own work and that of their peers. As a result, these pupils talk about their strengths and areas for improvement precisely and maturely. In the best examples, teachers use the outcomes of formative assessment skilfully to plan next steps in pupils' learning. For example, they engage in regular learning conversations with individual pupils, probing and challenging their understanding through pertinent questioning and adjusting their short-term planning to take account of pupils' needs.

- 52 An independent review by Qualifications Wales (Sperring et al, 2017) raises important questions about the risks that widespread use of early and multiple entry at GCSE poses for pupils. For instance, it reduces the time available for teaching and learning and pupils are sometimes partially removed from other subject lessons. Teachers rush to cover the syllabus or do not teach parts of it. Pupils sit examinations with an incomplete understanding of the subject and of examination requirements, and do not reach their full potential. Re-sitting examinations may improve grades for some but not all pupils.
- 53 An unintended consequence of school performance measures is where the level 2 inclusive threshold (i.e. including a grade A*-C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics at GCSE) influences schools' decisions to enter pupils early for examinations. The current policy allows schools to count the best grade from multiple sittings of an examination. However, from summer 2019, only a pupil's first entry to a GCSE examination will count in their school's performance measures.
- 54 Early entry for GCSE examinations can help more able pupils who have mastered course content to achieve very high grades and then progress to additional qualifications or further study at an accelerated rate, for example in mathematics. However, schools do not always consider the individual needs of pupils carefully enough, including those who are more able and talented, when making these decisions.

Identification, tracking and support

- 55 Many schools have a consistent whole-school approach for identifying more able and talented pupils. This includes a range of information, such as:
- teacher assessments
 - national reading and numeracy test outcomes
 - assessments that test aspects of pupils' cognitive ability
 - data that shows pupils' progress over time from their starting points
 - teachers' observations of pupils
 - specialist teachers' observations of pupils' skills and abilities in extra-curricular activities

Many schools also invite parents and carers to offer information about pupils' talents, for example in drama or sport at parents' evenings or through questionnaires.

- 56 A minority of schools use the guidance offered by NACE to help them to establish criteria for identifying more able pupils. However, the criteria used varies from school-to-school, resulting in a lack of consistency amongst primary and secondary schools and between the different phases in pupils' education. This makes it difficult to ensure continuity and progression for more able and talented pupils as they move through school.
- 57 Nearly all schools have a whole-school tracking system that they use to record assessment information about more able and talented pupils. A minority of schools record these pupils on a separate register. A very few schools report that having a register had a negative impact on pupils' wellbeing as it increased parental pressure

on individual pupils. Having a register does not in itself ensure that more able and talented pupils make good progress in their learning. Schools often find it useful in providing an overview of more able and talented pupils as a group for internal monitoring purposes. For instance, they review this list regularly alongside their tracking information to see if they have overlooked any pupils, or to check if more able and talented pupils previously identified are making the necessary progress in their learning.

- 58 A very few schools monitor the achievements and progress of more able and talented pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is particularly evident at transition points from key stage 2 to 3 and from key stage 3 to 4. As a result, these pupils do not always make good enough progress in their learning over time.
- 59 Primary and secondary schools' use of data and assessment to identify, track and monitor the progress of more able pupils has improved since Estyn's previous reports (Estyn, 2011 & 2012). However, in almost a third of primary schools, even where there is accurate tracking, teachers do not use this information well enough to match learning activities to pupils' abilities. Only a minority of secondary schools make effective use of tracking information to monitor the performance of groups of pupils across all year groups.
- 60 Schools that provide exceptional challenge and support for more able and talented pupils have highly robust assessment approaches. These include clear and systematic procedures for the identification of pupils' strengths using a wide range of information, setting rigorous targets, and monitoring and tracking pupils' progress and achievements effectively over time. However, the effectiveness of assessment procedures and practices still varies too much between schools.
- 61 In schools that do not have robust enough procedures for assessing pupils' progress accurately, more able pupils are not always identified appropriately. Even in highly effective schools, there is little monitoring and tracking of identified 'talented' pupils' achievements and progress in art, music, drama or sport, for example.
- 62 The most successful schools develop an effective culture of nurturing potential and ambition from pupils' starting points, for example by identifying those more able pupils who are underachieving, or who have English as an additional language. They provide valuable additional support or intervention for these pupils, recognising that they need to address wellbeing issues before learning needs. However, only a very few schools support the wellbeing of pupils who are more able and talented specifically. This means that primary and secondary schools are not always aware of the barriers or challenges that more able and talented pupils might be facing, for example peer pressure not to appear 'clever' for fear of isolation, or a lack of confidence in talking to others.
- 63 Overall, mentoring systems for more able and talented pupils are better developed in secondary schools, than in primary schools. A few highly effective secondary schools provide mentoring for more able and talented pupils to help them make informed decisions about extra-curricular activities, options for subjects and career choices. For example, Ferndale Comprehensive School holds an annual more able and talented cross-phase conference. This year's conference focused on raising

pupils' aspirations by focusing on career possibilities. However, in many schools, ensuring that more able and talented pupils have good access to beneficial guidance regarding option choices, career paths and further and higher education opportunities remains an area for improvement.

- 64 A very few secondary schools support more able and talented pupils effectively by using of cross-phase buddy systems. In these schools, older pupils who act as buddies improve their communication skills and develop effective thinking skills. The younger buddies develop effective literacy and numeracy skills and, in most cases, beyond those expected for their age.

Partnerships and transition

- 65 Overall, in many primary and secondary schools partnership working is a strength. In the best examples, primary and secondary schools use a wide range of partners to enhance the learning experiences of more able and talented pupils. For example, in many primary schools and good secondary arts departments, extra-curricular provision for more able and talented pupils linked to arts agencies and practitioners helps them to make the most of their abilities (Estyn, 2016a). In Ffynnon Taf Primary School, more able pupils in key stage 2 take part in a cluster schools' writing project, working with an author to improve their story writing and producing a termly magazine. These collaborative activities contribute strongly to improving outcomes for more able boys in literacy.
- 66 Where there are very effective partnerships, primary schools within a cluster pool their staff expertise so that pupils across the cluster benefit from specialist teaching. For example, in Victoria Primary School (Penarth), a teaching assistant who is a former British gymnast leads physical education workshops for talented pupils in Years 3 and 4, who come together in the host school for these sessions. Before and after each session, pupils complete an 'impact form', where they reflect upon their skill levels, their enjoyment and motivation in the session and how the activities they took part in have improved their abilities. The outcomes of these sessions are later reviewed by leaders at their 'more able and talented cluster group' meetings.
- 67 Many secondary schools begin to identify pupils as more able or talented in their feeder primary schools. For example, designated senior leaders take responsibility for transition between key stages 2 and 3. They hold purposeful conversations with feeder schools about all pupils who move to the school and pass on important information about those pupils that the primary school considers as more able and talented to the leaders with this responsibility.
- 68 In a very few schools, primary and secondary teachers begin to discuss pupils in Year 4 using agreed criteria to identify them as more able or talented, with the understanding that pupils will develop and 'bloom' at different times. These early discussions help these schools to plan strategically for transition work, as they consider the types of transition activities and approaches that might benefit these cohorts of pupils in the future. In a very few schools, a senior leader from the secondary school attends the primary schools' Year 6 parents' evenings and listens to valuable discussions between teachers and parents. While not specific to more able and talented pupils, this helps to provide the secondary school with a beneficial insight into individual pupils' abilities and needs.

- 69 Many clusters of schools provide worthwhile transition activities for more able Year 6 pupils where secondary subject leads, for example in mathematics, science, English and Welsh, deliver sessions to more able pupils as part of a 'bridging project' in the spring or summer term. Other worthwhile activities include organising a series of enrichment days or short-term projects where each primary feeder school identifies two or three pupils from Year 6 to visit the secondary school. This helps the secondary school to identify more able and talented pupils from primary feeder schools more accurately and to get to know these pupils.
- 70 In one cluster of schools, for example, more able pupils from Year 7 support the Year 6 pupils on a literacy-based challenge where pupils use their reading and thinking skills to solve cryptic clues and develop their writing skills by having to write a complete story in no more than 50 words. Pupils enjoy the challenge of these days as well as meeting and working with pupils from other schools who are more able and talented. These collaborative activities support them to develop friendships prior to starting their new school and help to ease anxieties about the transition that they might otherwise experience. The nature of the selection of a very small number of pupils from each school for these visits means that they tend to be more focused on the 'most able' (i.e. those pupils with exceptional academic ability).
- 71 A minority of secondary schools release their staff to work alongside teachers and pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 over a longer period. For example, in one secondary school the mathematics department have worked with their transition leader to provide resources and support teaching strategies for more able and talented pupils in key stage 2. This has developed primary teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills in delivering aspects of the key stage 3 mathematics curriculum. As a result, the schools have developed more consistent teaching methods in mathematics between key stages 2 and 3.
- 72 A minority of primary and secondary schools plan activities to support learners from disadvantaged backgrounds during transition well, for example providing additional pastoral support and a programme of visits to the secondary school for vulnerable pupils in a very small group. However, in general, primary and secondary schools do not plan and deliver transition activities to meet the needs of more able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds specifically.
- 73 In their transition plans, nearly all school clusters place an appropriate emphasis on promoting the continuity of education between key stages 2 and 3. For example, nearly all schools use the moderation of teacher assessment as an opportunity for primary and secondary teachers to discuss pupils' attainment across the ability range. However, there is wide variation across clusters of schools within regions and across Wales in how well schools plan for the progression of more able and talented pupils' knowledge and skills from key stage 2 to key stage 3. This is not helped by the variation between the primary and secondary phases in the way that they define more able and talented pupils and the criteria they use to identify them. Only a very few schools have considered developing a consistent approach to teaching and learning specifically to support the progress of more able and talented pupils as a group from key stage 2 to 3.

- 74 Many schools track pupils' progress at all teacher assessment levels in key stage 3, including pupils achieving level 7 or above. However, only in a very few secondary schools have leaders considered provision to support more able and talented pupils in their transition from key stage 3 to key stage 4. For example, one secondary school has a senior leadership group with responsibility for mentoring more able pupils at transition points. They focus on providing effective pastoral support for pupils and clear direction for learner pathways to further academic study and vocational routes as pupils enter Year 10.
- 75 Where transition systems are poor, more able pupils tend to suffer the most. This is because work is often too easy for them and teachers' expectations are not high enough. This leads to more able pupils becoming frustrated and demotivated and 'treading water' in key stage 3.
- 76 In its previous reports, Estyn identified a recommendation for schools to support parents' understanding of how they can better support the education of their child. Most primary and secondary schools use parent consultation meetings and annual written reports appropriately to share information with parents and carers of more able and talented pupils about their children's achievements and progress. However, very few schools are proactive enough in sharing information about the school's approach to challenging and nurturing its more able and talented pupils, for example through its school prospectus or website. Very few schools have established strategies for improving parents' understanding of how they can support their child's learning. In general, communication with parents to support more able and talented pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is weak.
- 77 Overall, across schools, provision for more able and talented pupils varies widely. Since the publication of Estyn's previous primary and secondary reports on more able and talented pupils (Estyn, 2011 & 2012), inspectors have continued to identify shortcomings in provision in a minority of primary and secondary schools. In general, improving provision for more able and talented pupils has not been a high enough priority in primary and secondary schools in Wales.

3 Leadership and management

Leadership, self-evaluation and planning for improvement

- 78 The quality of schools' provision for more able and talented pupils depends upon the quality of leadership and the importance senior leaders place upon improving standards and provision for these pupils. In primary and secondary schools where leadership is judged to be excellent, leaders act purposefully to ensure that the school meets the needs of all its pupils, including those who are more able and talented. They ensure that all staff and parents understand the policy for identifying more able and talented pupils and the learning experiences the school will provide.
- 79 In a few schools, leaders and staff have reviewed their policies and practices to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils, for example as part of a wider consideration of their school values and aims in the context of curriculum reform in Wales.
- 80 A few highly effective schools provide a clear rationale for the teaching and learning experiences that they deliver and the care, support and guidance that they provide for more able and talented pupils. Leaders explain precisely how they cater for these pupils' needs in line with their school's vision and aims. A very few schools use research effectively to inform their strategies. These schools have developed highly successful whole-school approaches where there is a sustained focus on achieving standards above expectations through consistently high-quality teaching and enriching learning experiences. As a result, these schools challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils very effectively.
- 81 Too often, leaders do not ensure that strategic planning processes pay good enough attention to supporting staff to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils. For example, school documents, such as teaching and learning policies, often do not contain sufficiently clear or precise guidance for staff on effective strategies to plan and teach the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with more advanced abilities and skills. As a result, practices for challenging and nurturing their progress vary too much between classes in primary schools and by class and department in secondary schools.
- 82 A majority of schools in Wales consider the needs of more able and talented pupils as part of their additional learning needs provision. Other schools consider their needs separately and have a specified co-ordinator or team of staff with responsibility for pupils with more advanced skills and abilities. In a few cases, it is unclear where the responsibility rests. In general, the prominence of the more able and talented co-ordinator role has decreased since the time of Estyn's previous reports and it is less clear who has overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of policy and practice for this group of pupils.
- 83 In around a third of primary schools and in a majority of secondary schools, processes for improving quality are weak. Too few schools monitor and evaluate how well their provision meets the needs of more able and talented pupils rigorously enough.

- 84 A minority of school leaders make extensive use of materials provided by NACE to help them to evaluate their provision regularly and identify areas in which they can improve. For schools who have undertaken the 'NACE Challenge Award', many consider that the process of achieving the award was more important than the award itself, as the Quality Standards helped them to develop a successful whole-school strategy and action plan for improvement. A very few schools identify 'A curriculum for all learners' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010) as an important guidance document for supporting their planning and evaluation of their provision for more able and talented pupils.

Use of resources

- 85 Schools' use of grant funding, such as the pupil development grant, to support improvements in outcomes for more able and talented pupils is highly variable. In a very few schools, leaders target funds effectively to challenge eligible pupils who are more able. A few primary and secondary schools use the pupil development grant well to provide transport and supervision so that eligible more able and talented pupils can take up opportunities to participate in drama, art, music or sporting workshops, activities and events that they would otherwise not experience. However, overall, there is not enough focus in schools on helping more able and talented pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to overcome barriers to their learning.
- 86 A very few schools use the Lead Creative Schools Scheme to target the development of more able and talented pupils' knowledge and skills specifically. On occasions, schools' involvement in the scheme helps staff to identify pupils with very strong creative ability in music, art, and drama, and those with superior leadership or entrepreneurial skills. Where more able and talented pupils achieve exceptional outcomes, this is often an unexpected outcome of the project work with specialist practitioners, rather than a planned focus from the outset.

Professional learning

- 87 The extent to which staff participate effectively in professional learning experiences to support them to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding of how best to challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils varies considerably across schools. A minority of schools work beneficially with external organisations, such as NACE, to develop this aspect of their practice. For example, teachers at Victoria Primary School in Penarth implement a consistent approach to identifying pupils who are more able and talented. As a result, teachers are more confident about this process. The NACE training materials have helped staff to focus upon questioning as a key strategy for extending the learning of individual pupils within lessons. This focus has improved the consistency of teaching across the school for more able pupils.
- 88 Where improving outcomes and provision for more able and talented pupils is identified as a priority on the school's development plan, this tends to be linked with aiming for the achievement of the NACE Challenge Award. In these instances, leaders plan suitable training opportunities for staff. In general, since the time of Estyn's previous thematic reports, there has been a lack of high-quality professional

learning opportunities to improve practice for more able and talented pupils in their classrooms and schools. This is beginning to improve as consortia in some regions of Wales begin to place greater emphasis on supporting and challenging schools to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils more effectively.

- 89 Estyn's thematic survey on school-to-school support and collaboration (Estyn, 2017) identifies that high-performing schools always work closely with networks, clusters and family groups of other schools. This helps staff to understand the factors that contribute to effective practice, to reflect on their own practice and to build their confidence. The Central South Consortium has started a new programme of school-to-school working to improve provision and outcomes for more able and talented pupils and to increase the proportion of pupils achieving the A* to A grade at GCSE. However, across Wales, school-to-school collaboration that focuses upon how best to meet the needs of more able and talented pupils is at an early stage of development.

4 Support and challenge for schools

Local authorities and regional consortia

- 90 In 2016, Estyn inspected the four regional consortia that provide school improvement services on behalf of the 22 local authorities (Estyn 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e). Two of the regional consortia were judged as providing good support for school improvement and the other two provided adequate support.
- 91 Following visits in autumn 2017 to monitor the consortia's progress in addressing the shortcomings identified in their inspections, Estyn has seen sound progress in the use of data, target setting, tracking procedures and the analysis of the performance of different groups of pupils to evaluate trends over time, including the more able.
- 92 All consortia provide suitable training and support for their advisers to help them to monitor and track pupils' progress at regional, individual local authority level, school level and for groups of pupils. In addition, the Central South Consortium provides a 'vulnerable learners' pack to every school, which includes data about the performance of their pupils eligible for free school meals at the higher than expected outcome or level. This provides a valuable focus for discussion between school leaders and their challenge advisers during visits and has led recently to an increased proportion of schools identifying more able and talented pupils as a priority focus in their school improvement plans. Whilst there has been improvement in how challenge advisers support and challenge schools to monitor and track the impact of additional support or intervention programmes on pupils, this happens rarely for more able and talented learners.
- 93 All regional consortia now identify improving outcomes for more able pupils in their 2017-2018 business plans. Currently, they do not focus on the talented aspect. Three out of the four consortia have identified relevant lead officers with delegated responsibility for school support and challenge for more able pupils. Their focus includes developing regional strategies, including an agreed definition of the term 'more able and talented', and co-ordinating school-to-school working. However, it is too early to measure the impact of these strategies.
- 94 Three out of the four consortia provide appropriate support for schools to improve outcomes for more able pupils as part of their professional learning offer and support school-to-school collaboration. For instance, the GwE consortium provides a series of collaborative workshops to support teachers to work with their peers to use the programmes of study to plan challenge for more able pupils, to provide appropriate feedback for more able pupils, to target their next steps in learning and to support accuracy in teacher assessment. GwE compared the outcomes for schools that attended the workshops with those that did not. In all subjects, end of key stage results were higher for the schools that received the support.
- 95 There are a few examples of consortia beginning to work with higher education institutions, for example by adopting a research-informed approach to improving outcomes for more able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and in supporting schools to raise aspirations for their pupils.

The Welsh Government

- 96 In 2015, the Welsh Government established the Seren Network across Wales. This network of regional hubs aims to support Wales' most able students in Year 12 to achieve their academic potential and to gain access to leading universities. An independent review for the Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2018) identified that the Seren Network has made a positive contribution to raising the aspirations of the more able and talented students who have participated in the programme. For example, it has helped them to make informed choices about their further study options and it is supporting students beneficially to develop the skills necessary to make competitive applications to leading higher education institutions.
- 97 The independent review (Welsh Government, 2018) recommends promoting the Seren Network more widely in secondary schools, to raise the aspirations of pupils, and, in particular, those who are more able and talented at key stages 3 and 4. To date, the Welsh Government has taken worthwhile steps to consider how wider groups of pupils can benefit from the resources, information and advice targeted through the Seren Network.
- 98 In September 2017, the Welsh Government published the 'Education in Wales: Our national mission 2017-21' action plan (Welsh Government, 2017d). This plan builds on both the 2014 'Qualified for Life' plan (Welsh Government, 2014), the 2015 review of the curriculum (Donaldson, 2015) and sets out how the school system will move forward over the period 2017-2021. It focuses on raising standards for all pupils and identifies four 'enabling objectives' to meet its goal of ensuring every young person in Wales has an equal opportunity to reach the highest standards.
- 99 The plan places valuable emphasis on the need to improve the quality of teaching through professional learning 'to extend our most able learners in all settings/schools'. It also points to the need to improve transition for all pupils 'across all key points' (Welsh Government, 2017d, p.26) and to 'respond to the unique challenges that present themselves to individuals or groups of learners', such as supporting pupils to overcome barriers to their learning (Welsh Government, 2017d, p.31). The plan identifies 'strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being' as one of its key enabling objectives (Welsh Government, 2017d, p.31). However, schools are not always clear as to how they can be 'inclusive' and 'equitable' to all pupils while, at the same time, meeting the needs of their more able and talented pupils who may require additional opportunities.
- 100 The definition of the term, 'more able and talented' has not been reviewed in Wales since 2003 (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC), 2003). Currently, there are many interpretations of the term across schools and regions in Wales to describe pupils with advanced skills, capabilities or aptitudes. This lack of consistency in the use of the term makes it difficult for schools and regional consortia to know 'which' pupils to identify in their work.

Case studies of effective practice

Evenlode Primary School enhances the literacy skills of more able pupils through partnership working and specialist teaching

Information about the school

Evenlode Primary School is a community school in the western suburb of Penarth in the Vale of Glamorgan. It has around 450 pupils between the ages of four and eleven years. Very few pupils are eligible to receive free school meals. English is the predominant language of the pupils.

Context and background to the effective practice

The school caters for many able pupils across all year groups. Over the last few years, it has been a priority to improve the writing of more able pupils throughout the school. Working in partnership with an ex-parent of the school, who has experience as a specialist language teacher, has enabled many older pupils to succeed in developing their extended writing skills.

Description of activity/strategy

The school implemented a strategy to extend the writing skills of more able pupils in Year 6. This strategy required pupils to attend a weekly half-day session with an ex-parent, who is a specialist language teacher. Working with the local comprehensive school's Year 8 pupils, the school's more able Year 6 pupils were required to read a specific novel and use its structure as a narrative framework to help them write their own extended story over the course of a year. The process involved innovative homework, highly effective and unique classroom teaching strategies and parental support through weekly contact and termly meetings.

The specialist worked successfully with pupils on a wide variety of effective strategies and techniques to improve their creative writing. He based his creative writing and literacy programme on vocabulary acquisition and simple writing techniques used by professional authors.

Liaison with the local comprehensive school's English department enabled Year 6 and Year 8 pupils to participate in peer mentoring and editing which, in turn, led to the Year 6 pupils acting as peer mentors to Year 5 and Year 4 pupils. This increased their confidence and improved their wellbeing.

The pupils taking part in the programme have a confidence and flair for creative and non-fiction writing that is infectious, and all pupils produced their own novels of between 12 and 16 thousand words. Many of those pupils have a reading age of between 13 and 14 years.

Impact on provision and standards

Many pupils who took part in the programme produced work in oracy, writing and reading at level 6 in English. As a result of the success of the initiative, a second cohort of pupils are currently working on the programme.

The Year 5 pupils who were mentored during the first phase of the programme were very keen to participate demonstrating a passion for writing.

Langstone Primary School has reviewed its approach to meeting the needs of more able and talented pupils in response to curriculum reform in Wales but retained what works well

Information about the school

Langstone Primary School is in the village of Langstone to the east of Newport. The school serves the local and surrounding area. There are around 300 full-time pupils on roll from the ages of four to eleven.

Just over 2% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is considerably below both local and national averages. The school has identified about 11% of pupils as having additional learning needs.

Context and background to the effective practice

The school has a very strong track record of high performance of more able pupils. Langstone Primary is a professional learning pioneer school.

In response to curriculum reform in Wales, the school has reviewed its approach to how it meets the needs of more able and talented pupils. Instead of talking about 'how to teach more able pupils', staff have focused on developing a pedagogy that works for all children driven by the four 'core purposes'. For this reason, the school has moved away from identifying more able and talented pupils as a distinct group and keeping a formal register. The school now considers its provision for more able and talented pupils to be part of its inclusive philosophy of having high expectations of all pupils and providing the appropriate support and challenge to meet every pupil's needs.

Description of activity/strategy

The school uses a combination of class topics and a whole-school project approach to deliver its curriculum. It provides pupils with a careful balance of breadth of opportunity and time to study aspects of topics in depth to develop, consolidate and embed their knowledge and skills progressively across the school. For example, the 'Pages through the ages' project ensures that all pupils, including the more able and talented, receive many stimulating opportunities to apply their literacy and numeracy skills successfully in a wide range of contexts and to develop their

subject-specific knowledge and skills effectively across areas of learning and experience underpinned by the four core purposes.

The school places significant emphasis on developing pupils' skills for learning. It embeds strategies that have proven to be effective over time. For example, from the reception class to Year 6, pupils use a common set of 'tools' to help them plan their thinking and scaffold their learning independently. This means that, from a very young age, pupils make choices over how to present their work. This approach has been embedded over many years and this has had a strong and sustained impact on developing more able pupils' planning, recording and decision-making skills.

The school uses a film throughout the year, as the context for its whole-school focus on developing pupils' lifelong learning skills. Leaders had identified that pupils do not always have the resilience to cope when they find something difficult or get something wrong in their work. They chose the film 'Eddie the Eagle' as the vehicle for planning curriculum work to introduce more able and talented pupils to the concept of the 'power of yet'. They arranged for Eddie 'the Eagle' Edwards to visit the school to talk to pupils about his challenges in reaching and participating in the Olympic games, and the importance of self-belief. This inspiring real-life experience has had a powerful impact on helping more able pupils and those with sporting or creative talents to develop better resilience and to persevere in their learning.

Impact on provision and standards

In the school's last inspection in 2014, Estyn identified that:

- there is a consistent record over time of high performance of more able pupils
- teaching of very good quality ensures that nearly all pupils receive a high level of challenge in their work
- teachers develop pupils' skills for learning exceptionally well

More able and talented pupils talk confidently about there being a 'sticking point' when tackling more challenging concepts or skills, or applying their knowledge and skills in a new situation. They explain confidently the strategies they use to overcome this to strive towards their learning goals. They demonstrate resilience and a high degree of independence as learners.

Treorchy Comprehensive School provides an innovative Welsh programme to challenge its more able pupils and uses a pupil-voice forum to consult with its more able and talented pupils regularly

Information about the school

Treorchy Comprehensive School is an 11 to 18 mixed, community school in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It is an English medium school with significant Welsh provision. The school enables pupils from Welsh language primary schools to continue to study around half of their subjects through the medium of Welsh at key stage 3. There are around 1,680 pupils on roll.

Around 21% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and around 20% of pupils have additional learning needs. Ninety-six per cent of pupils are from a white British background. Around 10% of pupils are fluent in Welsh and around 40% can speak Welsh, but not fluently. Seven per cent of pupils speak Welsh at home.

Context and background to the effective practice

In 2007, Treorchy Comprehensive School became the first school in Wales to achieve the National Association for Able Pupils in Education (NACE) challenge award. Since his appointment in 2011, the headteacher has focused the school's work on recognising all pupils as individuals and on ensuring that high standards are at the core of the school's philosophy. All leaders maintain a robust focus on ensuring that they support and challenge those pupils who are more able and talented through a range of effective strategies and provision.

Description of activity/strategy

Leaders have developed highly creative provision to ensure that more able pupils develop extensive Welsh language skills. This fits well with local and national priorities, and the community in which the school sits. For example, leaders' analysis shows that at least 80% of pupils who attend university remain in Wales, most of whom then continue to work and live in Wales. As a result, the school targets the development of Welsh language skills for more able pupils beneficially.

Staff from the secondary school teach Welsh in the primary feeder schools each week, beginning with pupils in Year 5. After two years of working with these pupils, they are able to identify effectively those who are more able. Liaising with primary leaders and parents, the school places these pupils in a fast-track Welsh programme, Cwrs Carlam. The same teachers work with these more able pupils through their first years in secondary school and pupils progress quickly through the Welsh curriculum. To support this work, teachers in other foundation subjects use an increasing amount of Welsh as the language of instruction in lessons and expect pupils to use their Welsh language skills when writing. As a result, these more able pupils develop their Welsh language skills very well and sit their GCSE examination at the

end of Year 9. Results show that nearly all pupils achieve a high grade consistently.

As part of its drive to improve provision and outcomes for more able pupils, leaders listen to and act upon the views of these pupils conscientiously. The school has a strong pupil-voice forum called the more able and talented school council. This council of two pupils from each year-group meets regularly and provides leaders with a beneficial perspective on the school's provision from a student's point of view. Pupils are able to bring issues that they consider significant to the attention of school leaders and the school asks their opinion on important issues that may affect more able and talented pupils. For example, leaders ask pupils for feedback on the level of challenge they receive in different lessons and how they think the school could improve. As a result, leaders have made changes in classes and enriched provision in line with the group's ideas when appropriate. For example, pupils now have more enhanced activities outside of school, such as a visit to a university where more able pupils learn about philosophy and a language day for more able pupils at another secondary school.

Impact on provision and standards

Outcomes in Welsh for more able pupils following the Cwrs Calam programme are consistently high. In 2016, almost two thirds of these pupils achieved an A* or A grade, while 95% secured A* to B grades. In 2017, 85% pupils achieved A* or A grades and 100% of pupils achieved A* to B grades (Welsh Government, 2017c).

Over the last four years, the proportion of pupils achieving five A*-A GCSE (or equivalent) grades is consistently above the average for the family of schools (Welsh Government, 2017c).

Estyn judged that the school provides outstanding learning experiences that meet the needs of all pupils. The school's Cwrs Carlam provision enables more able and talented pupils to make rapid progress in the development of their Welsh language skills.

More able and talented pupils have very positive attitudes to education and have high expectations of themselves, identifying prestigious universities that they would like to attend and challenging careers to which they aspire.

Ysgol y Preseli uses self-evaluation successfully to develop a consistent and personalised approach to challenging and nurturing its more able and talented pupils

Information about the school

Ysgol y Preseli is a designated bilingual community comprehensive school for pupils between 11 and 18 years old in the Pembrokeshire local authority. There are around 900 pupils on roll. Around 5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and around 20% have additional learning needs. Forty-one per cent of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes, and most pupils speak Welsh fluently.

Context and background to the effective practice

In 2013, leaders identified that, while the school had a clear definition of more able and talented pupils, practices for challenging and nurturing their progress varied too much by department and were not consistent.

The school refocused its interpretation of more able pupils and updated its practices to ensure that it considered pupils' individual needs. It identified that it needed to improve the proportion of pupils who achieve level 7 or above at the end of key stage 3 and the proportion who achieve 5A* to A grades at GCSE.

Description of activity/strategy

Since 2013, leaders have ensured a consistent focus on more able pupils within improvement plans. The school's initial action was to set up a specific leadership role and identify a leader who would have responsibility for more able and talented pupils.

The school's leader for more able and talented pupils began to work with all staff using guidance from the NACE to audit and evaluate the school's provision and practices. Leaders recognised that, while this work may lead to the successful attainment of the NACE award, the real strength of this process lay in helping to identify areas for improvement that would have a positive impact on provision and pupil outcomes.

Following this, the leader for more able and talented pupils led staff training sessions to help teachers consider and develop a clear, shared understanding of what more able and talented means in their school. As a result, staff are more confident in their ability to identify these pupils and place them on the school's register for more able and talented pupils. This supports other teachers to challenge these pupils effectively in lessons.

Using the NACE framework, leaders undertook an audit of provision for more able and talented pupils across all departments and identified improvement actions, for example mentoring individual pupils and improving the transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3 to ensure that teachers build progressively upon pupils' prior skills and knowledge. The school continues to use the NACE auditing tool to evaluate its practices and plan for

improvement. Subsequent actions have been to develop schemes of work with more challenging content and enrichment tasks for more able and talented pupils.

As part of the school's ethos of supporting and enabling all pupils to fulfil their potential, leaders and staff work diligently to allow more able pupils to undertake extra GCSEs where they wish. This means supporting these pupils' learning outside of the normal school timetable. For example, where a pupil asks to study one more GCSE than the timetable allows, teachers work with more able pupils to ensure that this can happen. Teachers provide pupils with course work and relevant study books and often work with pupils at lunchtime or after school. Pupils work conscientiously to complete coursework in their own time and teachers provide individual support when necessary. The school's work in this area allows more able pupils to study a wider range of subjects than is usual and, in nearly all cases, pupils completing these extra GCSEs achieve high grades.

As well as providing rigorous challenge in the classroom, leaders have developed a mentoring strategy for more able pupils in key stage 3. They recognise that, while these pupils are more able academically, they might need support with settling into secondary school or with issues of wellbeing. For example, leaders identify those pupils who feel pressure to perform consistently at a level above their peers or whose progress is slowing. Teachers also identify those more able pupils whom they consider may need mentoring support. The lead teacher meets with those identified regularly. This allows her to discuss their individual needs and identify how the school can support or accommodate them. She is then able to communicate with other teachers, to ensure that they meet pupils' needs. For example, a pupil identified as more able was performing highly across the curriculum but causing concern in one particular subject area. Teachers identified this quickly and provided mentoring. As a result, the pupil's engagement in lessons and progress in learning improved in this subject.

From the mentoring system, leaders identified that many more able pupils in Year 7 wanted extra challenge, both in and out of class. To facilitate this they developed a challenge booklet. Heads of departments of different subject areas helped to develop tasks to include in this. Pupils complete these challenges if they have time during the school day or work through them at home. The booklet contains a self-assessment tool linked to pupils' wellbeing that allows these pupils to identify and share their feelings. As a result, the booklets provide academic challenge while forming the basis for identifying issues linked to pupils' wellbeing, which are discussed during individual mentoring sessions.

Impact on provision and standards

As a result of effective self-evaluation, the school's work on improving provision and practices to support more able and talented pupils has had a strong impact on outcomes over the last four years.

The proportion of pupils achieving five A*-A at GCSE or equivalent has improved consistently during this period, rising from 23% in 2015 to 31% in 2017 (Welsh Government, 2017c).

Nearly all pupils who receive mentoring respond positively to the support and appreciate having an individual with whom they can discuss any concerns.

Llandrillo yn Rhos Primary School used the Lead Creative Schools Scheme to extend the mathematical and creative skills of its more able and talented pupils

Information about the school

Llandrillo yn Rhos Primary School is on the outskirts of Colwyn Bay. There are currently around 440 full-time and 30 part-time pupils on roll, aged from three to eleven. Approximately 15% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and around the same proportion have additional learning needs.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to professional learning.

Context and background to the effective practice

Improving provision and outcomes for more able and talented pupils has been a priority within the school's improvement plan for the past two years. The school has a specialist secondary-trained art teacher who leads the school's participation in the Lead Creative Schools Scheme. In 2016-2017, the school used funding from the scheme to improve pupils' skills in procedural maths, with a particular focus upon challenging more able and talented pupils within a creative learning context.

Description of activity/strategy

Over an eight-week period, 60 Year 5 pupils took part in a creative project for five hours per week led by four Creative Practitioners, the school's art teacher and Year 5 class teachers. The project's aims were:

- to develop pupils' creative skills by providing opportunities for them to explore independently the five creative habits of mind: imagination, inquisitiveness, persistence, collaboration and discipline
- to progress pupils' number, measuring and data skills
- to support non-specialist staff to improve their understanding of effective pedagogies in creative subjects

Leaders were also keen to ensure that the project gave pupils the opportunity to work independently, to self-direct their learning and to challenge those more able and talented pupils with more advanced artistic and mathematical skills.

At the start of the project, a group of more able and talented pupils wrote questions and interviewed two visual artists and two musicians to ensure that they would help them to achieve the project's goals. Together, the Creative Practitioners and teachers planned four taster workshops based on the practitioners' art and music specialisms around the theme of 'pattern detectives'. In the sessions, pupils developed their knowledge of radius, diameter and circumference as they investigated patterns in the natural world, for example through water and sound. They made their own observational drawings of a cross-section of a cabbage, using charcoal and oil pastels to explore line, pattern and texture. The Creative Practitioners used Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical drawings of the 'Vitruvian Man' (1490) to introduce pupils to the mathematical concept of ratio and proportion, which they investigated using their bodies to create large-scale drawings. This was particularly successful in engaging and challenging more able pupils, who went on to explore da Vinci's belief that the proportions of the human body were an analogy for the workings of the universe. This stimulated their thinking very effectively, prompting them to ask high-level questions and carry out independent research at home.

Following a review of the taster sessions, the Creative Practitioners and staff agreed that pupils should be given the opportunity to follow their individual creative interests and have free choice over the subject, techniques and tools they would explore within the 'pattern detectives' theme for the rest of the project. Together, they planned a careful balance of creative exploration and numeracy skill development, pitched at an appropriate level to meet individual pupils' needs, including the more able and talented. The specialists worked successfully with pupils individually and in small groups to develop their skills, for example using tablet applications to create musical compositions and industrial materials such as metal piping to create a marble run following their investigations of 'flow'.

Every week, pupils, teachers and the Creative Practitioners reflected upon the project together, giving feedback to each other and reviewing progress. Over the eight weeks, staff noticed significant improvements in pupils' ability to work in diverse teams, negotiate roles and make decisions such as how to organise each session and whom to work with. Teachers observed that more able and talented pupils often chose to work with pupils with additional learning needs, as they recognised that they had qualities, such as resilience and persistence, which were of great benefit when taking risks and solving problems. Similarly, less able pupils welcomed the support from their peers, for example to work out the angles required to create an effective marble run over a long distance in the playground.

At the end of the project, the school held a sharing event for all classes, parents and governors. The pupils chose to showcase their learning through a carousel market stall approach, where they shared their work and provided short creative activities for each group of guests.

Impact on provision and standards

Teachers asked all pupils to complete a 'creative habits of mind' wheel at

the beginning and end of the project. Together, staff and pupils used the spider graph to talk about pupils' progress in developing imagination, persistence, collaboration, discipline and inquisitiveness during the project. For example, more able boys spoke animatedly about how the session on ratio and proportion led them to investigate the relationship between ratios in the human body and those in the universe, which fascinated them. More able and talented pupils benefited greatly from engaging in learning conversations with specialists who challenged their creative and mathematical thinking.

The opportunity to present and explain their work to other pupils, for example in the nursery class, and to parents developed the Year 5 pupils' ability to adapt their talk for different audiences exceptionally well. For instance, they worked together successfully to choose different examples to illustrate their explanations and descriptions of their creative work, depending on the age of the listener.

Teachers assessed pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts, which had been a focus in the project, as part of the school's normal practice of half-termly assessments, before the start of the project and at the end of the eight weeks. Teachers identified a strong improvement in most Year 5 pupils' attainment in problem-solving, measuring, calculating area and perimeter, angles and interpreting bar charts and graphs. More able pupils developed their understanding of ratio and proportion to a high level. Overall, the project had a positive impact on improving pupils' engagement in mathematics lessons as they could see a direct link to their creative project work and the relevance of applying their numeracy skills in a practical context.

More able pupils appreciated the autonomy, opportunity for creative risk-taking and breadth of stimulating experiences the project provided. Non-specialist staff benefited from working alongside the Creative Practitioners and the school's art teacher. For example, they have adopted more creative approaches in their teaching and feel more confident in allowing pupils to lead their own learning in subjects across the curriculum.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

The findings in this report draw on:

- a range of primary and secondary school inspection evidence
- telephone interviews to a range of primary and secondary schools
- visits to a range of primary and secondary schools
- visits to the four regional consortia
- data from teacher assessments at the end of key stages 2 and 3 and examination outcomes at the end of key stage 4
- PISA results by subject and groups (including proportions achieving at the higher levels 5 and 6)
- an extensive literature review

Schools have been selected following an analysis of data, consideration of inspection findings and feedback from HMI. Nearly all of the schools visited have received 'Excellent' judgements in relevant Quality Indicators in an Estyn inspection within the past three years. The sample also includes a small number of curriculum and professional learning pioneer schools.

When visiting schools, inspectors:

- interviewed senior leaders, those with co-ordinator responsibilities and pupils
- conducted learning walks to evaluate standards and quality of teaching
- interviewed pupils to gather their views on the provision available at the school
- scrutinised school documents during the visit, including school improvement plans, evaluations of projects and self-evaluation reports, professional learning plans, teachers' planning and schemes of work, and pupil assessments and tracking.

List of schools interviewed or visited:

Cyfarthfa Park Primary School, Merthyr Tydfil
 Fitzalan High School, Cardiff
 Langstone Primary School, Newport
 Llandrillo Yn Rhos Primary School, Conwy
 Penllergaer Primary School, Swansea
 St Joseph's RC High School, Newport
 Treorchy Comprehensive School, Rhondda Cynon Taff
 Victoria Primary School, Vale of Glamorgan
 Ysgol Corn Hir, Gwynedd
 Ysgol Teilo Sant, Carmarthenshire
 Ysgol Y Preseli, Pembrokeshire

Appendix 2: Key stage 2 to 4 performance data

Key stage 2

- 101 By the end of key stage 2, in English, Welsh first language, mathematics, science and Welsh second language, teacher assessments of pupils' achievements at the higher than expected level 5 or above show a year-on-year increase since 2012 (Welsh Government, 2017a & 2017e).
- 102 At the higher than expected levels, boys perform less well than girls in English, Welsh first language and Welsh second language. However, their achievement is similar to that of girls in mathematics and science. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals achieve considerably less well than their peers. Over time, the gap has increased slightly in all of the core¹ subjects (Welsh Government, 2017g).

Key stage 3

- 103 At key stage 3, the proportion of pupils gaining the higher levels has also improved quickly. Over half of pupils in each core subject area achieve at least level 6 and there have been year-on-year increases in the percentage of pupils achieving two or three levels above the expected level 5. The attainment is highest in mathematics at the higher levels with twice the proportion of pupils achieving level 8 as in the other subjects (Welsh Government, 2017b).
- 104 Since 2013, girls have performed better than boys at the higher than expected levels in all core subjects. In English and Welsh, the gap remains notable.
- 105 More able pupils eligible for free school meals do not perform as well as their peers. The gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and those who are not eligible is wider at key stage 3 than at key stage 2 for all subjects in 2017 (Welsh Government, 2017f & 2017g).

Key stage 4 examination results

- 106 In mathematics, the proportion of pupils who achieve the highest grades has improved since 2013, with a slight decrease in 2017. In English language and literature, Welsh language and literature and science GCSEs, the proportion of pupils who achieve the highest grades has not improved consistently over time (Welsh Government, 2017h).
- 107 At key stage 4, the proportion of Year 11 pupils achieving five A* to A GCSE or equivalent grades increased slightly in 2017 after a period of decline. Performance in this measure has increased by just under one percentage point since 2015 and is just over one percentage point lower than in 2012 (Welsh Government, 2017c). This indicates that the rate of improvement of pupils achieving the highest grades has levelled off.

¹ English and/or Welsh, mathematics and science

- 108 In 2017, boys' performance remained consistent at around 13% but the proportion of girls achieving the five A* to A grades increased slightly to around 21%. Pupils from Chinese or Chinese British homes² perform much better than pupils from other ethnic backgrounds. Pupils identified as mixed race perform least well. Pupils in Welsh-medium schools achieve better than pupils in English-medium schools. This is due in part to Welsh medium schools having lower levels of pupils eligible for free school meals (Welsh Government, 2017c).
- 109 The proportion of pupils gaining the A* to A grade is highest in other modern foreign languages³. The percentage of pupils achieving the highest grade has remained at a similar level (around 69%) for the last three years. The performance of pupils in biological sciences, chemistry and physics is also generally higher than in other subjects. The subjects where the proportion of pupils gaining the A* to A grade is lowest are often vocational qualifications, such as additional applied science, applied engineering, hospitality and catering. Achievement at the highest grade is also low in humanities, home economics and the single science award at around 8% to 13% (Welsh Government, 2017c).
- 110 The proportion of pupils achieving the highest grade in mathematics has decreased slightly to around 17% in 2017. The percentage of pupils achieving A* to A in English or Welsh language has remained lower than in mathematics and at a similar level for the last three years. Pupils' performance is slightly higher in English literature than in language (around five percentage points) and much higher in Welsh literature than in language. The proportion of pupils who achieve the highest grades in additional science has not improved over time, whilst the proportion achieving level 2 has improved. These results suggest that expectations are not high enough and that schools have been concentrating on pupils achieving a grade C or level 2 qualification (Welsh Government, 2017c).
- 111 Overall, there is a higher proportion of Year 11 girls achieving five A* to A GCSE (or equivalent) grades than boys. This gap did close slightly in 2017 compared with the previous year. In general, the gap is greatest in other Welsh second language, art and design and religious education⁴. The proportion of both boys and girls attaining the A* to A grade is highest in other modern foreign languages, chemistry and biological sciences, and for boys the highest attainment is also in physics (Welsh Government, 2017c).
- 112 More able pupils eligible for free school meals do not perform as well as other pupils who are more able. The gap in performance in the percentage of pupils gaining five A* to A grades has been around 15% for the past three years (Welsh Government, 2017c).

² The relatively small proportion of pupils from Chinese or Chinese British homes should be considered when comparing pupils from different ethnic backgrounds.

³ 'Other modern foreign languages' does not include French, German or Spanish. It includes: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, Italian, Japanese, Modern Greek, Modern Hebrew, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Turkish and Urdu.

⁴ Note that in each of these subjects the number of boys sitting the GCSEs is less than the number of girls.

Progression between key stages

- 113 From 2011-2012 to 2015-2016, there has been an increase in the proportion of pupils who achieved the higher than expected levels in English or Welsh and mathematics in teacher assessments at the end of key stage 2, who went on to achieve the higher than expected levels at the end of key stage 3 in these subjects. This proportion is higher in mathematics than in English or Welsh.
- 114 The proportion of pupils achieving the higher than expected levels at the end of key stage 2 in teacher assessments⁵, to achieving a level 2 qualification⁶ in key stage 4, increased over five years from 91.9% to 96.1%, but declined slightly in 2017. However, the average capped points score⁷ has generally been consistent at around 400 points. Of those pupils who achieved the higher than expected levels at the end of key stage 2, around half achieved five A* to A GCSE (or equivalent) grades.
- 115 The percentage of pupils achieving the higher than expected level 6 or above at the end of key stage 3 to achieving a level 2 qualification has remained similar over time at around 95%. However, the average capped points score decreased substantially by 10 percentage points during this five-year period. A minority of pupils who achieved the higher than expected levels at the end of key stage 3 in teacher assessments in English or Welsh and mathematics gained five A* to A grades in 2015 and 2016.

Around half of pupils achieving the higher than expected levels at the end of key stage 2 in **both** English or Welsh and mathematics achieve an A* to A GCSE (or equivalent) grade in English, or in Welsh, or in mathematics or in science in key stage 4. Many of the pupils achieving the higher than expected levels at the end of key stage 2 achieve an A* to B grade.

⁵ in English and/or Welsh and mathematics

⁶ A GCSE grade A*-C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics

⁷ A measure of the average of the best eight GCSE or equivalent results

Glossary

Central South Consortium (CSC)	The joint education service for Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan local authorities
Early entry	The practice of entering pupils for GCSE examinations before the end of Year 11
Education Achievement Service for South East Wales (EAS)	The Education Achievement Service for the five local authorities of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen
ERW	The joint education service of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Swansea local authorities
GwE	The school effectiveness and improvement service for the local authorities of Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd and Wrexham
Lead Creative Schools Scheme	This scheme aims to provide opportunities for schools in Wales to develop an innovative and bespoke programme of learning designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning through high quality arts and creative experiences. It is one of the key building blocks of 'Creative learning through the arts - an action plan for Wales' (2015). The plan is jointly funded by Arts Council of Wales and Welsh Government.
Level 2 qualification	Grades A*-C at GCSE or equivalent
Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF)	This is a skills framework developed by the Welsh Government. It became statutory in schools from September 2013. It is designed to help teachers embed literacy and numeracy into all subject areas.
more able and talented	In Wales, the term 'more able and talented' refers to about 20% of pupils who require enriched and extended opportunities to develop their abilities or talents in one or more areas (i.e. academic, practical, creative and artistic).
most able (or exceptionally able)	In Wales, 'most able' or 'exceptionally able' refers to approximately the top 2% of pupils with the capacity to achieve or perform at the very highest levels.

NACE	National Association for Able Children in Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Pioneer schools	Schools that are currently working with the Welsh Government and other schools to develop and pilot a new curriculum for Wales
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment: an international survey that aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students
Pupil development grant	A grant provided to early years settings and schools by the Welsh Government to improve outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals and looked after children. It is intended to overcome the additional barriers that prevent pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving their full potential.
Qualifications Wales	An independent statutory body, funded by the Welsh Government, which regulates qualifications (other than degrees) in Wales
Quality Standards in Education for More Able and Talented Pupils (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008)	The Welsh Assembly Government devised a set of Standards to support schools by providing a clear framework for whole school quality provision for more able and talented pupils. The Standards are intended to help schools to develop an action plan for their provision and to ensure that their approach is inclusive.
Seren Network	A network of regional hubs, which aims to support Wales' most able students in Year 12 to achieve their academic potential and to gain access to leading universities
Shakespeare in Schools	A widening participation project for schools led by the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art
The NACE Cymru Challenge Award	A quality mark that the National Association for Able Children In Education award to schools through formal assessment against the 'Quality Standards in Education for More able and Talented Pupils'

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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