Estyn

Rhagoriaeth i bawb ~ Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Twelve secondary school improvement journeys

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The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

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

Estyn also:

- ⅄ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ⅄ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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HMCI foreword

Different kinds of schools need different styles of leadership

A school that is in special measures will need a different style of leadership from what is needed in a school that already has sound systems in place and where everyone is collaborating to maintain high standards.

When the problems being faced are considerable and a school's performance is weak, this is generally the time for direct leadership to offer centrally-driven and urgent action. The more successful a school is, the more it is possible to rely on a distributed leadership model because the culture of seeking continuous improvement already exists. At one extreme you need to develop direction and strategy, set up new organisational structures and create powerful teams to improve teaching and learning and streamline work processes. Even in extreme circumstances, though, success will not be sustainable if people are steamrollered to comply. Staff need to understand why change is happening and the best kind of way to manage change is to involve people in a process that means listening before decisions are taken and final plans agreed. Listening properly to the people who are involved in whatever needs to be improved and balancing their concerns and views while continuing to move forward are the marks of strong leadership.

Perhaps change is more challenging in a coasting school where staff believe that the school is doing well and does not need to improve. In this situation, the challenges need to be diagnosed clearly. To do this, leaders, including teachers, need to:

- establish an ethos of mutual respect and confidence between leaders, including the new headteacher and staff,
- create a learning organisation that is not complacent about existing practices but constantly involved in exploring ways of improving;
- drop in on classrooms and scrutinise pupils' work systematically (self-evaluation);
- identify what support is needed; and
- promote a new culture of innovation.

In a sector-leading school, there will still be a need to monitor progress and improve practice in order to respond to new initiatives and to make sure that high standards are being maintained. But the other responsibility that comes with excellence, of course, is how to go further than just being sector-leading.

Excellent leadership makes a significant contribution to individual school improvement and crucially is a key to system-wide improvement.

Some secondary schools are lead practitioner schools that receive funding to share their expertise and good practice with paired 'emergent' practitioner schools. But even if you work in a school that is not a lead practitioner, if you have innovative and effective

practice in your school it is your job to disseminate that, maybe within your family of schools or in your local cluster of schools. It is a condition of achieving 'sector-leading excellence' in Estyn inspections that you should be sharing that practice with others.

More and more emphasis is being put on networks of individuals or groups or clusters of schools. There are particular skills involved in making, using and retaining contacts in a network, and larger skills involved in leading across networks in order to achieve collective objectives. This includes understanding how partners and networks work and what the constraints on them are.

Working collaboratively requires skills to establish mutual understanding of the outcomes you want to achieve, and understanding how to find and use those lines of influence that lead from the strategic to the operational, in order to achieve those outcomes. We need to think in a more sophisticated way about how to frame our expectations of the kind of leadership that will lead to change. It is not enough to issue guidance and set policy or to inspect compliance. Our objectives are more subtle and have to do with widening horizons, aligning initiatives, building capacity, influencing others, developing potential and facilitating learning. We need to enable everyone in the education system to learn more, learn better and apply their learning. That includes children, young people, teachers, support staff, inspectors, system leaders, policy-makers and headteachers.

Ann Keane

Introduction

Over the years, Estyn inspectors have visited schools at various stages of development. Core inspections and follow-up visits, as well as visits undertaken as part of thematic work, have enabled inspectors to identify schools that are good or excellent or that are making good or excellent progress from a low starting point.

The case studies in Part One of this report describe schools that are on their own improvement journeys. The choice of case studies represents "journeys" from a range of starting points and a variety of stages of development. They are all schools that have either improved or maintained a high level of performance. In each case, the headteacher who played a key role in securing improvement is still in post.

The case studies have been produced by staff from the schools themselves and capture their own narrative and style. To tell the full story, a lot of detail has been included in order to describe and explain the processes involved. The case studies are written in the school's own voice, but they follow a similar pattern, starting with the context of the school, identifying three key factors that contributed to the work, and finally setting out those strategies and actions that have proved to be successful.

Part Two of this report pulls together some general features of successful school improvement, based on the case studies in Part One.

Part One: Twelve case studies of how schools improve

Case study 1 – Cefn Hengoed Community School, Swansea

Cefn Hengoed Community School is an 11 to 16 mixed comprehensive school in Swansea. Around 44% of pupils receive free school meals; this is considerably higher than the national average of 17.4% and the Swansea average of 18.3%.

Around 42% of pupils have special educational needs and of this 7% have statements of need; these are considerably higher than the national proportions, 18.6% and 2.6% respectively.

The leadership team is made up of the headteacher and two deputy headteachers. The head has been in post since 2007, while the deputies were both internal appointments in September 2011.

In September 2012 the school moved into a new school on the same site.

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

- Focus on improving attendance by improving curriculum provision at key stage 4 (14-19 Learning Measure), improving standards of teaching and learning to ensure appropriate learning for all pupils and giving pupils the skills to be actively involved in their own learning.
- Training all staff over time to use performance data to set targets and track pupil progress, to inform continuously refined intervention strategies.
- Distributed leadership to enable self-starting professional development (CPD), to maximise the momentum and reach of change so that raising standards are the responsibility, aim and drive for all staff e.g. through focus groups on teaching and learning, assessment, recording and reporting (ARR), literacy, numeracy. Revised and implemented by the staff to enable the staff to lead progress.

All these led to improved outcomes which in turn have raised the aspirations of the whole community.

How closely does the school match the stages of the improvement journey model? Why?

The common characteristics represent our simple, clear vision which underpins our journey (using the present tense as we are always on the journey):

- Strong leadership and vision, shaping a dynamic strategy.
- Strong learning culture and building aspirations for all pupils.
- Whole school literacy and numeracy strategy with strong skills development, strengthened by cluster literacy and numeracy; well established, transforming practice.

- All staff involved in planning and decision making and all staff accountable with sound quality assurance systems all based on personal communication through a real and effective line management structure.
- A sharp focus on teaching and learning with focus groups developing key areas and improving consistency. Monitoring the quality deeply embedded in the line management quality assurance structure with all teachers aiming to be moving from Good to Excellent. 360° quality assurance process involving leadership team lesson observations, departmental review, book monitoring, line manager lesson observations, self-evaluation and performance management setting targets for improvement.
- Governors at the heart of the decision making process, with school-based staff-led CPD and an open, honest critical friendship. Governors trained in the use and analysis of performance data and at the centre of quality assurance process.
- An appropriately staffed, dynamic curriculum for all pupils reflecting school, local and national priorities and offering best value.

Our Estyn report identifies all the above as strengths, judged from Good to Excellent with some quoted as 'outstanding' features.

Strategy for improvement

The key strategic focus for the improvements since 2007 has been to improve attendance because unless pupils attended there would be no chance to improve outcomes. The school's approach was not to just improve systems to improve attendance. Pupils needed a reason to come to school. There was a need to fundamentally change the ethos and purpose of the school. Pupils needed to be in school expecting to achieve and therefore the school focused on:

- improving teaching and learning;
- changing the curriculum to ensure literacy and numeracy were improved in key stage 3 and at age 14 pupils were able to choose courses that met their needs and aspirations; and
- changing the perceptions of pupils, parents, staff and the wider community.

Actions

2005 Estyn report

Inspection grades suggest there are important shortcomings in relation to attendance, standards, teaching and assessment, learning experiences, leadership and improving quality.

2005-2007 (Unsatisfactory to Adequate)

A development plan was put in place in response to Estyn inspection. Attendance remained a limited strategic priority. There was low staff confidence in the management

of behaviour. Literacy catch up groups were established, but there was little focus on literacy outside of English and the special educational needs provision. A top heavy management structure had outgrown the school and some of the leadership team left the school. By September 2007 the team was reduced to head, two deputies and a business manager. Significant amounts of data were produced but staff received limited training in its use and, as a result, there was inconsistent use made of it to bring improvement. There continued to be limited self-evaluation and staff received no training in how to implement what was required. There was a performance management process; this was not linked to self-evaluation or development planning. The school had a great reputation as a caring school at the heart of its community. However, its reputation as a learning institution was not good, expectations of standards was low. There continued to be unsatisfactory to adequate outcomes.

2007-2009 Adequate to Good

New headteacher appointed – challenging context and large budget deficit.

Behaviour and attendance
A strategic approach to attendance developed and put in place. An attendance focus group established and embedded. The curriculum at key stage 4 refreshed to include vocational and academic options in a range of settings. A senior pastoral team established and a consistent approach to standards of behaviour established and embedded.

Literacy skills
The humanities departments pilot a sample whole-school literacy strategy led by trained staff in the English department. This was then modelled for other staff. A literacy Professional Learning Community (PLC) established. Literacy and numeracy co-ordinators appointed.

Management structure / distributive leadership
The teaching and leadership responsibilities (TLR) restructuring takes place and whole school TLR posts created to drive improvement and develop local and national priorities. Faculty system restructures and refreshes previous structure and helps reduce budget deficit. School Effectiveness Framework drives the transformed school development planning.

Analysis and use of Performance Data
Dedicated new TLR post refines and simplifies key data, trains staff in data interpretation and enables use of data to inform self-evaluation and quality assurance.

Working groups / pupil targeting / progress tracking
Executive ARR Focus Group, comprising key members of associate staff, heads of faculty and departments, devises new ARR policy, procedures and an enabling document to link it into the school's information management system, which allows the use of electronic mark sheets.

Culture of self-evaluation
Improved understanding of data informs effective self-evaluation. A 'Self-Evaluating Champions Group' drives a new system linked to the new common inspection framework. Leadership team whole school lesson observations in place annually as part of a developing quality assurance process.

Performance management / peer observation
Improved self-evaluation informs target setting, focused on improvement in the performance management process thus enabling shared responsibilities and fast tracking change. The sharing of best practice is enabled through peer observations in gained time.

Community partnership
Parents involved in pupil progress through training devised to support them in supporting their child through examinations, and developing their child's literacy and numeracy. Raised profile of parents' evenings, parents targeted to improve attendance and participation. Improved dialogue leads to better quality information on their child's progress. School extended seeking of views of stakeholders. New build project announced.

2009-2011 Good to Excellent

Behaviour and attendance
Attendance is now in quartile 1 for four consecutive years. Key stage 4 attendance consistently improving. Dedicated associate staff team highly trained in managing and monitoring the range of issues which support attendance. Punctuality and truancy minimised due to consistently used electronic systems. Attendance prioritised in all meetings including governors. The senior pastoral team act as learning co-ordinators with responsibility for standards the key aspect of their role. Governing body disciplinary committee was central in monitoring the behaviour of most vulnerable pupils. Senior pastoral team managing a consistent response to behaviour issues using electronic behaviour management systems. Common approach to exclusions, return from exclusion meetings with parents, use of inclusion unit.

Literacy skills
Whole school literacy strategy transforms pupil access to the curriculum. Cluster literacy joint working deepening in its impact. Significant improvements in percentage of pupils entering Year 7 with reading ages six months or more below chronological age. RAISE and SEG funding targeted at a common cluster literacy strategy. Cluster PLC in place embedding a common understanding and language. School sharing best practice across the county and across other authorities. Literacy co-ordinators modelling school's best practice. School involved in delivering training across schools in South Wales and at regional and national conferences.

Management structure / distributive leadership
Further TLR restructure and restructure of leadership team to share leadership and enable best value. An evident and growing culture of high expectation. Extended

leadership team established and embedded to drive shared leadership and enabling enquiry and reflection. Succession management building on model of distributed leadership. School Effectiveness Framework transforming school planning and development.

Analysis and use of Performance Data
Faculties and departments highly competent and fluent in their use of data to inform decision making on pupil progress. All staff trained and retrained in the school's use of data to ensure a cohesive approach. All staff trained in interpreting All Wales Core Data Pack. Data clinics provided to support staff in updating self-evaluation. Peer support in analysing data. Pupils trained in understanding and monitoring their own progress with the 'Global Target Grade' understood as a progress measure. Intervention strategies targeted to individual need, whether to address underachievement or support performance above target.

Working groups / pupil targeting / progress tracking
Pupils are explicitly placed at the heart of understanding assessment. Assessment has become a holistic process with the 'Global Target Grade' system informing a termly academic review, the outcomes of which are shared with pupils through an individual meeting with the form tutor. This in turn supports the pupil's target setting to move forward to the next review. Parents are informed of pupils' underachievement or achievement above expectation by letter, with the opportunity to discuss it with a member of school staff. ARR process dynamic and revised in response to changing needs – e.g. updated to better reflect the school's increased focus on basic skills development. Interim and major reports revamped to give clear information to parents.

Culture of self-evaluation
Self-evaluation and professional reflection embedded in faculty and departmental culture. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) focused on literacy, numeracy and Special Educational Needs (SEN) drive and inform improvement. County PLCs broaden staff knowledge, skills and experience. CPD open to all staff, teaching and associate. School receives an increasing number of visitors to share best practice and provides inputs on conferences and school INSETs. School has contributed to a thematic report by Estyn on self-evaluation driving improvement.

Learner Voice
The pupil voice has developed to extend to involvement on the governing body, pupil curriculum voice in humanities and PE reflecting on and reviewing curriculum development and school development planning. This best practice has been shared with other schools including through iNet (International Networking for Educational Transformation organisation) regional conferences through their pupil conference and for INSETs. Development of the curriculum pupil voice has featured in an Estyn report on 'Raising Standards in areas of Poverty and Deprivation'.

Outcomes

2005
Attendance 83%
Level 2 threshold 34%
Level 1 threshold 74%
CSI 28%
Leaving with no qualification 7%

2005-2007 Unsatisfactory to adequate
By 2007 slight improvements.
Attendance 86%
Level 2 threshold 40%
Level 1 threshold 86%
CSI 23%
Leaving with no qualification 3.5%

2007-2009 Adequate to good

By 2009
Attendance 90%
Level 2 including English and mathematics 33%
Level 2 threshold 41%
Level 1 threshold 88%
CSI 32%
Leaving with no qualification 5.3%

2009-2011 Good to excellent
By 2011
Attendance 91%
Level 2 including English and mathematics 40%
Level 2 threshold 61%
Level 1 threshold 96%
CSI 38%
Leaving with no qualification 0%

Inspection outcomes 2011

Cefn Hengoed was judged to be a good school because:

- overall standards of attainment are good and improving;
- pupils' skills are good or better and continuing to improve;
- pupils' behaviour is exemplary;
- the ethos is outstandingly strong;
- care, support and guidance is excellent and contributes effectively to pupils' outcomes and wellbeing; and
- leadership and management is particularly effective.

Its prospects for improvement were judged to be excellent as a result of:

- outstanding leadership of the headteacher and leadership team;
- exemplary support from staff at all levels;
- particularly successful improvement in standards over the last two years;
- culture of high expectations prevalent throughout the school;
- well-established and rigorous systems to review progress and identify areas for improvement; and
- clear priorities for improvements that are supported by suitable plans and allocated resources.

And in 2012…

At key stage 4 all key indicators apart from attendance dropped a benchmark quartile. Issues with the English GCSE largely responsible. As the school did not use the WJEC English examinations there was no remark so the results were adversely affected by the movement of the grade boundaries.

However, performance remained above the line of modelled expectations and progress from key stage 2 remained in positive values apart from level 2 including English and mathematics. This saw a negative value but it was not a significant value.

Case study 2 – Connah's Quay High School, Flintshire

Context

Connah's Quay High School is an English-medium 11-18 mixed comprehensive school of 992 learners, including 120 in the sixth form. It is situated in Flintshire local authority. 14.8% of learners are eligible for free school meals compared with the Welsh average of about 17%.

No pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. Two point five per cent of learners currently learn English as an additional language. The school's intake represents the full range of ability. Just less than 2% of pupils have statements of special educational needs (SEN). This figure is slightly below the average for Wales as a whole.

The headteacher took up his post in 2002. The present senior leadership team (SLT) is comprised of one deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers and a business manager. Three additional professional development posts have been created to increase the capacity of the leadership team to support whole-school developments. The school is one of two schools in North Wales who make up the Innovation Hub in collaboration with iNET.

The school seeks to make its motto "We care" a reality in the lives of all learners. It cares about learners' academic development and their wellbeing in equal measure.

Strategy

- To increase the attainment of all learners
- To develop the skills of all learners in a holistic manner to prepare them for their future role in employment and in society
- To ensure that we, as staff within the school, work towards excellence in all that we do to secure excellent outcomes for learners and develop the role of the school in the community

The school's mission statement is to ensure that all:

- Achieve high standards
- Engage in outstanding learning
- Are responsible and well equipped citizens
- Receive high quality support and challenge

This vision is shared effectively with all in the school community.

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

1   Skills development of all learners – holistic, relevant learning for all

The focus of all school improvement activity has been based on the desire to continue to raise the achievement of all learners in the school. This has been developed in a very

holistic way where the development of skills has been a very high priority. This skills development has been a significant contributory factor in ensuring that the outcomes for learners have continued to rise.

Integrated curriculum in Year 7

Connah's Quay High School delivers humanities and personal and social education subjects in an integrated delivery.

Six topics are studied through the year:

- smart brain (learning to learn approaches, covered in Autumn term);
- slavery;
- time;
- fair trade;
- global affairs; and
- breaking news.

Impact

- Year 8 learners, who studied the thematic curriculum in Year 7, are much better at group work. As a result, teachers are more confident in organising group work activities.
- Learners are better at explaining reasons for their thinking/answers, both in a whole class setting or one-to-one.
- For half-termly assessments pupils have improved their revision skills by referring to mind maps and assessment for learning techniques to help them.
- Teachers noted positive improvements in pupil confidence and independence in learning.

Literacy and Numeracy Development

Connah's Quay High School has responded effectively to the need to improve literacy and numeracy in the school. The school has co-ordinators for Literacy and Numeracy who report directly to the deputy headteacher.

Following a series of INSET sessions a six point plan was created to ensure consistency and high standards in the development of learners' literacy skills. The impact of this has been significant with a reduction of almost 10% in the number of learners who have a reading age below nine years and six months.

Thinking Skills Development

In Year 8 every curriculum area develops a 'habit of mind'. A member of staff with responsibility for developing thinking skills introduced this approach to Year 8 pupils in a curriculum-focused day, where the timetable was suspended.

Pupils will take different activities in each subject area focused around thinking skills and 'habits of mind' learning skills. Each curriculum area focuses on a different 'habit of mind' to develop with pupils during the year. Tutorial and personal and social education lessons also reinforce this approach. Learners undertake a 10 week programme in thinking skills which is then reinforced across the curriculum. The emphasis is on developing independent learners.

Focus on skills in assessment

Connah's Quay High School were asked to participate within an 18 month programme relating to the development of PISA assessments. The first workshop involved the sharing of information regarding PISA and the style of questioning used within PISA assessments. Colleagues who attended the workshop were provided with examples of PISA style questions and were asked to carry out a baseline assessment on a group of Year 10 learners. Once back in school a Year 10 tutor group were selected to be a part of the PISA trial. They then completed the baseline assessment. The results from the baseline assessment were then analysed by the lead teacher and shared with other colleagues during the second workshop.

The second workshop aimed to share any findings from the baseline assessment; focus on effective pedagogy approaches; share tools and interventions that could be used to support the learners to deconstruct PISA style assessments as well as corresponding exam style questions.

The baseline assessment

As stated above, a mixed ability Year 10 tutor group was selected to pilot the PISA programme. The baseline assessment consisted of six questions; two from each domain (science, mathematics and reading).

The baseline assessment was marked and analysed. On the whole, the learners performed rather poorly on the baseline assessments. In some cases many of the questions were left un-answered.

The learners also completed a questionnaire in order to gain an insight into their thoughts regarding the PISA style questions.

Interventions and frameworks used to support the learners

Diamond ranking and the placemat activity

These activities have been used in order to aid the learners to extract key and relevant information from a piece of text.

Think/pair/share

Providing them with the thinking time to come up with answers/solutions to a question or problem. The pairing stage allows the learners to build their confidence. Sharing their thoughts with a partner is less daunting than sharing with the whole class. If they are

both in agreement, then this instils confidence with regards to sharing their thoughts with the whole class.

Source square

Particularly useful with regards to extracting and interpreting information from a graph or chart. Exams are now moving towards this style of questioning which expect the learners to be able to fully interpret information or data from within the question.

Fishbone diagram

There is now a huge emphasis on the importance of literacy across the curriculum. This is particularly evidenced within exam style questions where marks are now being awarded for learner's correct use of language. This technique is particularly useful to aid them to write or answer detailed evaluation style questions. The template is structured in order to promote them to extract advantages and disadvantages from an extended piece of writing. It also encourages them to think of a concluding statement with regards to their evaluation.

The impact

The learners will all re-sit the baseline assessment at some point during Year 11 in order to assess the impact of the interventions that they have been trialling. The interventions aim to improve the learners' ability to think independently and to deconstruct their own learning.

In the short term, it has become apparent that the frequent uses of the tools and interventions have had a positive effect on the learners' abilities to extract information from text, data or graphical information. This improvement however does not happen overnight. The learners rely on the use of the tools/templates for their first attempts at deconstructing PISA or exam style questions. However, once the use of interventions has been embedded they then demonstrated their ability to tackle this form of questioning far more independently. Learners did require a little reminder with regards to how they would have tackled the questions with the use of the template. However, once given simple reminders were able to work through the problem independently. It goes without saying that in order for the use of these interventions to become successful, consistency is the key. The techniques that they use on a regular basis eventually become a learning habit. They can then transfer this skill cross-curricular within any style of extended questioning.

To conclude, the most conclusive form of evidence will be evident within the analysis of the re-submission of the baseline assessment questions and more predominantly their GCSE results during summer 2013.

2   Developing excellent learning and teaching – moving towards excellent standards

INSET

Following an audit looking into the training needs staff felt required addressing in order to ensure excellent standards were achieved, it was identified that INSET focussing on the development of skills in responding to the needs of the more vulnerable groups of learners; using data to inform learning and teaching and developing skills in the delivery of literacy and numeracy would be of benefit. Consequently a programme of workshops was created and delivered responding to these needs.

Assertive mentoring – high aspirations for all

The focus for learners and staff has been on a high level of challenge and support. These are terms which are explicitly referred to in the school and are terms which are clearly defined and understood. Staff are accountable for their work and learners are accountable for their studies. A system of very challenging targets based upon the principles of assertive mentoring has meant that this challenge is translated into an everyday reality for all in the school. This is however, done in an environment of support which is encapsulated in the school's pastoral support systems which include external multi-agency support. The school has achieved the Inclusion Quality Mark and keeps this development at the forefront of its work.

PDSAs

The school has used a consistent model of 'Plan, Do, Study and Act' as a change management tool in terms of classroom practice. This has ensured that small scale changes can be evaluated and then 'scaled up' where positive outcomes have been achieved.

IPR

The school has adopted an annual process of 'Individual Professional Reviews', which allow staff to reflect upon the outcomes of previous year and secure improvements for subsequent years.

PLCs

The school has made excellent use of PLCs to further develop learning and teaching in the school. PLCs are focussed on improving standards in learning and teaching and are designed to specifically address issues identified in the school's quality assurance system. The impact of the PLCs has been a contribution to the unrelenting focus on learning and teaching and the constant dialogue regarding how this could be further developed.

3   Quality assurance – distributed leadership

Connah's Quay High School has the notions of high challenge and high support at its core. These principles apply equally to learners and staff. It was from these principles that a holistic engagement in the rigorous quality assurance process began in the school.

Historically, the school had undertaken lesson observations, carried out by senior leaders in the school and this was contributing to improvement in standards and provision. The starting point for the development of a comprehensive system of quality assurance / school self-evaluation process was to create a system where the leadership was distributed and that the process itself was contributing to the professional development of the staff involved in it. This would increase the capacity for future successful engagement in the process and therefore school improvement.

These essential elements of quality assurance were divided into four key areas.

These were based upon extensive research in relation to school effectiveness and school improvement. The deputy headteacher was assigned to have a strategic overview of the whole system and pull together findings so they were accessible to the governing body and leadership team. This was essential if the model was to yield a whole school self-evaluation and aid the identification of whole-school issues to be addressed.

There were a number of initial reservations:

- at first the formal and comprehensive system of quality assurance was viewed with a level of suspicion and scepticism – in terms of the input of staff time and for what benefit;
- while there had been levels of accountability, this was a new level; and
- the making of judgements was a concern for a few middle leaders as was the sharing of these judgements – it was clear to all that the principles of high challenge and high support were being tested!

In the initial year of running the holistic system it was prescriptive in terms of a programme of activity that was completed by all middle leaders at the same time. Very quickly, while the concerns in terms of time remained, middle leaders embraced the 'new' information they were gaining. Many staff were happy with the development in terms of the opportunity to celebrate their work. Others changed their practice to meet, and very often exceed, the school's expectations. The system was delivering what it was intended to.

Training was a key element of the programme. Middle leaders needed to be confident in undertaking all of the activities they were expected to do in order to be effective middle leaders. These are the 'leadership behaviours' we expect to see in Connah's Quay High School. A great deal of support in the form of coaching and formal training was offered. Much of it was in-house, while some used expertise from outside the

school. Middle leaders regularly sharing their experiences was an obvious and powerful training tool.

After two years we have produced an in-house self-evaluation / quality assurance tool kit. This brought together the range of support documents we, as a senior and middle leadership team, had collated over the two years. The purpose of the document was to ensure consistency of commitment to the approach. It was also a very useful tool for the induction of new staff.

Middle leaders are now given an outline of the quality assurance activity the leadership team will be undertaking throughout the year in the form of a monthly calendar. Middle leaders now prepare their own schedule of activity to suit the needs of their department. This was the liberation of the system and, with the understanding and commitment to it achieved, this stage was the most exciting. Middle leaders were matching the system to the needs within their area. This was not a 'pick and mix' in the sense you could use some of the 'tools' and not others, they were all to be used throughout the year but there may be a much higher emphasis on some than others to address or monitor issues within the school or curriculum / pastoral action planning.

The focus in our school on self-evaluation and therefore reflection is constant. This quality assurance is focussed upon standards. The school has seen an increase in the percentage of learners achieving the level 2 threshold and level 2 threshold including English and mathematics to a point which represents excellent value added based upon Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data.

Learner Voice – Distributed leadership and improvement

At Connah's Quay High School, learners are provided with every opportunity to develop their skills and qualities as leaders. We have a school council where representatives from each year group meet every half term. Their discussions focus on all aspects of school life, from whole school policies to decisions about the kind of school they would like to be part of. Learners are given other opportunities to lead the school's thinking on developments of learning and teaching. Learners have also represented not only the school but also Flintshire and North Wales for consultations on areas linked to education and also to aspects of Welsh life affecting young people today.

Outcomes

At key stage 4 all indicators consistently among highest in family and above the averages for the family and Wales. Performance in level 2 threshold including English and mathematics above modelled expectations. Progress made by pupils from key stage 2 is significantly above expected levels in level 2 including English and mathematics, level 1, the core subject indicator and capped point score. Upward trend in performance 2008-2010, slight dip in 2012 but still above family and Wales averages and above expectations.

Case study 3 – John Summers High School, Flintshire

School context

John Summers High School, in the county of Flintshire, is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school some three miles from the English border and set on a large campus at Queensferry. The campus offers a range of services including a primary school, medical facilities, public library, adult education facilities, the educational psychologist(s) office and a resource centre.

There are currently 382 on roll, of whom 56 are in the sixth form. Post-16 education in the area is provided by the Deeside Consortium, which consists of John Summers High School and three other schools. This partnership arrangement enables the school to offer a broad and comprehensive academic and vocational curriculum.

The school is located in an area of significant social deprivation. The three-year average percentage of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is 33.4%; this is almost double that of the national average of 17.4%. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is 35.6% and the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs is 3.1%. The national average figures are 18.6% and 2.6% respectively.

The school currently has a headteacher, a deputy head and an assistant head.

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

- School culture, which reinforces standards
- Teaching and learning
- Accountability (quality assurance)

The school improvement process follows the common inspection framework (CIF) in that the school and departments conduct a detailed self-evaluation based on CIF key questions. The aims of the school improvement process are to bring about an improvement in standards, teaching and learning and ethos.

Our key actions for improvement have been:

- To improve standards and wellbeing
- To improve the learning experiences of pupils, the quality of teaching, the care, support and guidance and the learning environment
- To improve the quality of leadership, partnership working and resource management

From unsatisfactory to adequate, 2005-2006

The Estyn secondary school improvement journey model, in many ways reflects our personal journey. In the spring of 2005 the school was inspected and as a result Estyn

put the school into the category of serious weaknesses. In summary, the report concluded that:

- there were important shortcomings in the standards of achievement and quality of teaching in a number of significant areas;
- in a sizeable proportion of lessons pupils demonstrated disruptive behaviour which impacted upon learning and achievement;
- a significant minority of pupils were reluctant to attend school regularly;
- self-evaluation was underdeveloped and inconsistently applied;
- the school had a poor reputation in the immediate locality;
- there was a low expectation culture; and
- the quality of middle leadership was poor in a significant minority of staff.

This report required the senior leadership team (SLT) to take decisive and robust action in a number of key areas. Bearing in mind that Estyn were due to return within a year, all actions had to be forceful in addressing the shortcomings. The governing body supported the headteacher in the following actions:

- personnel changes in key areas including the appointment of three middle leaders;
- the re-structuring of the school day (50 minute lessons instead of 60 minutes, reduced break by five minutes and reduced lunch by ten minutes) since it had been noted that incidents of poor behaviour occurred very largely in the latter stages of lessons, break and lunch;
- a re-drafted behaviour policy based on a consequence model – the policy highlighted and rewarded good conduct, and rigorously punished misdemeanour, the key aspect here was the implementation of the policy which was consistently applied and monitored by SLT;
- to address attendance issues an electronic system (truancy call) was installed, where an automated, repeated call home was made if parents had not made contact with the school. Pupils were rewarded for good attendance with much fanfare and celebration; and
- a number of curricular changes were made including more curriculum time for mathematics and English, ICT lessons were made compulsory and drama was introduced at key stage 3 and key stage 4.

In the main, the above strategies were designed to have a short-term impact within a strategic context. Estyn revisited the school within a year and acknowledged the improvements the school had managed to make, particularly the improvement in standards, the quality of teaching and learning, the good progress in eliminating disruptive behaviour, the improved consistency and quality of school self-evaluation, the significant improvement in attendance percentages and the improvement of all subject areas which had previously been identified as being unsatisfactory.

From adequate to good

It was at this stage in the improvement journey that the SLT embarked upon the next and strategic phase, aiming towards a position where a consistent ethos of good

practice prevailed in all areas. In this respect, the SLT utilised the 'feel good' factor to continue to drive further improvement. A conscious decision was made that for this part of the journey a more collaborative and mutual approach was necessary to achieve the desired outcomes. All staff had to have ownership and responsibility for improving standards and by this conclusion an accountability aiming for consistent personal improvement in the quality of learning and teaching.

The strategies employed at this phase focussed on:

- the development of skills at key stage 3 (an in-house model where 12 skills are incorporated within the learning framework), and the introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in key stage 4 and the sixth form;
- a modified meetings structure which included an extended leadership team, a wellbeing leadership team and a core standards team, extending their membership to more members of staff;
- a more vocational curriculum in key stage 4 which included the introduction of a number of BTEC qualifications including applied science, construction and the built environment, engineering, public services and travel and tourism;
- the roles of governors were extended: associate governors were elected from the student body, link governors were established for all subject areas and governors for self-evaluation, global citizenship and equality were elected;
- governors were encouraged to act as 'critical friends' particularly during the monitoring of departments' self-evaluation procedures;
- regular management mentor meetings were calendared half-termly between learning managers and members of the SLT;
- PLCs were established to address the areas of teaching and learning, assessment for learning, addressing disadvantage and wellbeing. Progress in each of these was reported to the governing body by leaders of the PLCs and two 'sharing of good practice' staff training days took place;
- teachers and governors were trained in the use and understanding of data management and analysis;
- school and departmental self-evaluation reports and improvement plans were designed to follow a common structure which mirrored the school improvement plan. Their format follows the CIF[1];
- the quality assurance system was developed from a subject driven to a year group approach;
- there was an extension of learner voice through student, eco and sports councils and associate governors, and students became involved in the quality assurance process through peer observation and work scrutiny;

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[1] The School Improvement Plan (SIP) follows a two-year cycle and each improvement strand has a senior leader driving it. All departments mirror the SIP in terms of Key Actions and the timescale similarly corresponds to the SIP. Departmental Heads are responsible for the implementation, monitoring and reviewing.

- the target setting process, supported by the local authority, became more rigorous and the set targets presented an increased challenge to staff and pupils; and
- there was improved communication with parents and carers through regular progress checks, reports and parent-tutor evenings.

Outcomes

The judgement of the Estyn report in 2011 stated that this is a good school because:

- standards and wellbeing were good and improving;
- there was an outstandingly good ethos;
- the provision was very effective in meeting learners' needs; and
- the school had particularly effective leadership and management (distributed leadership).

Estyn also reported that the school had excellent prospects for future improvements because of:

- inspired and inspiring leadership from the headteacher;
- exemplary support by senior leaders;
- a very good team of staff all of whom are committed to improvement;
- a consistent improvement in examination results and behaviour over the last three years;
- an excellent system of quality assurance; and
- exemplary behaviour shown by learners both in class and around the school.

Also there is an outstandingly strong ethos because learners believe their opinions and viewpoints are valued and the school is very successful at meeting the diverse needs of a wide range of learners;

At key stage 3 the core subjects at level 5 and above and CSI all show positive trends over the last three years. The school is in the top quartile for value added at key stage 2 to key stage 3 in all core subjects. All non-core subjects show a positive trend at level 5 and above. The school is narrowing the gap between the higher and lower performing schools. Gender differences have been insignificant in most subject areas. FFT data confirms that over the past three years, boys and girls performed better than expected when modelled against prior attainment at key stage 2. In relation to free-school-meals benchmarking, most subjects follow a steadily improving trend in quartiles with several consistently in the first and second quartile throughout a three year period.

At key stage 4, standards have shown a consistent and positive upward trend and the school is closing the gap between high and low achieving schools. Almost all indicators and core subjects are closing in on, or are above, the family average at level 1 and level 2 thresholds, and for the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics, the school is nearly 10 percentage points above modelled expectations. Overall pupils entitled to free-school-meals perform significantly better than expected in GCSE and in the mean grade across all subjects.

Case study 4 – Mary Immaculate High School, Cardiff

Mary Immaculate High School is a mixed 11 to 16 school situated in the western suburbs of Cardiff. It has 581 students on role, 29% of whom are entitled to free school meals, compared with 17.4% nationally. Thirteen per cent of its pupils have English as an additional language and 11% of pupils have special educational needs (school action plus).

In its Estyn inspection during July 2009 the school was found to be "in need of significant improvement". The shortcomings most notably were:

- standards at both key stages and in particular subjects, most notably mathematics and Welsh;
- quality of teaching and leadership; and
- attendance.

A new headteacher took up post in June 2010 and the school was removed from this Estyn category in January 2011.

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

- The vision of the headteacher based on high expectations, accountability, challenge, modelling and support. This approach applies equally to pupils and to staff.
- The successful communication of this vision to pupils, parents and staff.
- The swift and decisive actions taken to establish the ethos, provide an environment for improvement and develop leadership.

How closely does the school match the stages of the improvement journey model? Why?

The stages of improvement that the school has undertaken closely match those described in the model, though not exclusively. The actions described in the first stage where a directive top down approach is taken were mostly carried out during the first term after the new head took up post. There was a need to act quickly partly because of the fact that the school was to be monitored by Estyn, but also because of a conviction that it was important to set out a direction and purpose for the benefit of pupils and staff. They needed to know that things were going to change for the better.

Once this groundwork was done it was then possible to develop a more collaborative approach and ensure consistency throughout the school. An important additional step that the school considers vital is to have a strategic approach to leadership development and the staffing structure.

Strategy for improvement

- To establish a strong ethos and culture at the heart of improvement
- To provide the environment for improvement

- To grow and develop leadership potential, including that of governors

Underpinned by ten principles

- Have a clear vision which can be shared, understood and lived on a daily basis. The school sets its own culture so others can't be blamed for it.
- Establish a strong leadership team who are credible and excellent teachers.
- Be clear about expectations from all and for all. Identify non-negotiable aspects of work/behaviour (this applies to pupils and staff).
- Establish the best environment for learning by focusing all attention on developing teaching. If an action doesn't impact on learning then evaluate whether it should be completed in the first place.
- Be visible by visiting lessons on a daily basis. It enables the school to be proactive to situations.
- Invest in the staff/students and remember to explain the benefit(s) of every key decision taken.
- Scaffold challenge to make change as simple as possible. Focus on being 'excellent at the basics' and avoid initiative overload.
- Be decisive in taking action both positively and negatively. If something negative is seen and nothing is done then it quickly becomes 'accepted behaviours'.
- Seek feedback regularly and act upon the potential quick wins.
- Model everything that is sought from those you lead. It does not go unnoticed and when done effectively increases morale exponentially.

Actions

Strong ethos and culture at the heart of improvement

The significant change to the ethos has led to a rapid change in culture at Mary Immaculate. Central to the school's ethos is the belief that all members of the community should treat each other with respect, care and compassion. However, underlying this is the belief that adults are not allowed to fail the students.

A key feature of this improved ethos is the clear and explicit vision for the school which was communicated to all stakeholders when the new headteacher arrived in June 2010. The vision focused specifically on a number of non-negotiable factors including:

- all students regardless of background and ability expected to achieve;
- teaching is expected to be good as a minimum entitlement, satisfactory would now be considered unsatisfactory;
- all students are expected to behave in an appropriate manner; and
- all staff expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner to be examples for the students to follow.

Given the situation the school was placed in the approach was more 'directive' from the headteacher. The style was very much describing and modelling the expected

behaviours, predominantly from the staff who worked at the school. This vision was outlined as a blue-print to improve the quality of education at the school which would impact on standards. Over the last two years the vision has been presented in the form of a new mission and core purpose statement which included significant input from students and staff. Underpinning the vision focuses on providing an education where all students:

- achieve the best results they are capable of;
- develop skills which will prepare them for the 21st century world of work; and
- develop a sense of morality grounded in the values of respect, care, compassion and love.

The school describes itself as a 'family' seeking to promote and develop traditional values where students and staff see the benefits of learning and working hard. The relationships between students and staff and the students themselves are strong because of the clear messages of 'respect' which are constantly reinforced by all. Visual displays and quotes promote the ethos and subconsciously promote the values of forgiveness, care and consideration for others.

The new approach included a review of establishing good behaviour amongst all students. The school introduced "learning walks" for each period of the school day which was timetabled for a member of the leadership team ensures a highly visible presence of school leaders. This proactively addressed undesirable behaviour by students and was welcomed by staff. Where a student failed to meet the school's expectations the member of the leadership team would intervene so that students quickly become aware of expected behaviours. In September 2011 following full consultation the school introduced an affordable but smart new school uniform which included a return to a shirt and tie. This change has been positively received as parents appreciated the cost effective uniform while students value the improved look and having played a key part of the design process.

The school refers to the three-way partnership (home, school and student) as a mechanism for school improvement. When the new headteacher arrived, an evening for parents was organised to allow them to identify the areas which caused them most concern. Parents were asked to complete a simple questionnaire where they identified three things the school did well, three things which needed addressing immediately, and to provide one piece of advice for the new headteacher. The feedback from parents was very good with a high level of return. Comments were used and the school could positively feedback changes made at the end of the summer term. Some of the main concerns focused on the quality of teaching while others were linked to communication. The school was then able to make a number of changes which provided "quick-wins" that demonstrated to parents that their views really matter. At every parents' evening, families are asked to evaluate the performance of the school and on the rare occasions where parents have provided negative feedback, the school arranges an appointment to try to resolve the matter so that the partnership is not damaged. Direct access to the headteacher is arranged with a monthly 'open door' event where parents can attend a

meeting without an appointment with the headteacher to discuss an issue. Over time, meetings are rare but parents value the opportunity to raise a concern however great or small with the headteacher. The school believes this is another way of ensuring that respect and care is central to the work between school, families and the students themselves.

Providing the environment for improvement

A significant challenge to the school was the quality of leadership prior to June 2010. To secure the ambitions of the school it was essential that the leadership of the school had the credibility and capability to bring about the necessary change. Most of the existing leadership team were well-established but with varying ability in terms of classroom ability as well as capability to lead the school. There were some excellent members of the team but others who did not sufficiently challenge or provide suitable direction for the school.

In July 2010 the headteacher and governing body took the decision to re-structure the leadership team on a temporary basis to bring about the significant improvements required. One member of the team was seconded to work in another school for one year and the structure of the team changed considerably with new members of staff internally appointed. The appointments and re-structure was undertaken on a temporary basis to ensure the process was completed quickly without the delays of formal consultation. The newly-formed team was established with only two members remaining on the team inherited by the new headteacher in June 2010.

In January 2011 the school embarked on a full consultation of the staffing structure with a view of implementation in September 2011. This took place immediately following the Estyn monitoring visit which brought the school out of in need of significant improvement category. The previous structure was not fit for purpose with nearly all teaching staff holding a TLR yet many not directly influencing the work of others. The structure led to unclear lines of accountability which had a significant impact on standards.

The purpose of the restructure was to strengthen the quality of leadership to secure rapid improvements. The school moved to a faculty based system which rationalised the leadership of the school at middle tier level and provided an opportunity for the school to appoint high quality staff to leadership positions. The process also provided an opportunity to provide an appropriate structure for support staff. As a result of the structural changes virtually all middle leaders have been appointed since June 2010. This ensured that the best possible leaders were in place and the core purpose of school improvement was not compromised by poor leadership.

While the process of restructure was difficult for a few staff to appreciate, the school, including governors, spent a great deal of time carefully explaining the rationale behind restructure. In order for the school to make significant improvements, it was necessary to make structure change as early as possible.

A clear focus of the school is the drive to improve the quality of teaching which impacts directly on the progress of students. In June 2010 the headteacher modelled expectations for teaching with the introduction of a common format for all lessons, known as 'The 10 Features of an Excellent Lesson'. This was designed to minimise the in-school variation in the quality of teaching which resulted in a number of subjects achieving poor standards at both key stages. The new format focused on the accelerated learning cycle but relied heavily on the positive behaviours required from adults. For example, insisting on staff referring to students by names; staff expected to use positive language etc. These explicit guidelines for what constituted good teaching and learning enabled the school to identify and eradicate unsatisfactory teaching through rigorous challenge. Staff identified as under-performing received intense support and in a number of cases improvements were made. However, where there was little improvement, staff have been held to account.

Raised expectations since June 2010 have led to a number of staff leaving the school. However, the school makes every effort to ensure the dignity of staff is preserved to maintain the positive ethos, the modelling of mutual respect while being fully committed to continued school improvement.

All staff training and meetings have a clear focus on learning and teaching. All staff meetings focus on sharing ideas and best practice to promote the importance of learning. This includes the use of video-recording of lessons and sharing activities to promote key areas as literacy and numeracy.

To improve the quality of teaching the school introduced 'sharing best practice' observations which take place each term. These were informal observations between teachers within and across different departments to share strategies to improve the quality of experience for students. The school continues to formally observe staff through departmental review procedures which include staff at all levels to ensure consistency and develop potential. The school is developing 'experts' in particular areas of teaching so that all staff can identify a named teacher who can provide support and guidance on aspects of teaching, such as assessment for learning, checking of student progress and/or effective feedback. As a result, staff are more confident in identifying effective strategies through modelling practice.

Ensuring the school curriculum met the needs of students was a priority while at the same time not compromising on the basics of a broad and balanced offer. Over the last three years there have been very few changes to the curriculum on offer at key stage 4 but there is greater accountability. A focus on ensuring subjects at key stage 4 are taught by specialist teachers has led to improvements in a number of areas, including vocational subjects. This has seen an improvement in the proportion of grades at pass or above and at distinction level. The greatest curriculum change has been at key stage 3 where there has been a greater emphasis on the development of skills with a clear focus on literacy development. Each department is expected to focus a particular skill for all key stage 3 lessons so that all students receive a broad range of skills throughout their diet rather than focus on the same skills in all lessons. The school also modified the curriculum to group students into mixed ability classes which ensures teachers have

to differentiate to meet the needs of all students while at the same time reinforces our ethos of an inclusive school where all are expected to achieve their full potential.

Parallel to the changes in approaches to teaching, staffing personnel and modifications to the school uniform, the physical environment of the school was improved to ensure that students and staff valued their place of work. This has been over a period of time with scheduled activities every half-term and all other breaks. The school has benefitted from a redecoration of all communal areas including corridors, the main hall and the majority of classrooms. The school has introduced a corporate image of colours to give the impression of a new school so that the perception of the old school was removed. All signs have been replaced with bilingual translations and all desks and chairs for students and staff have been replaced. There have been a number of other developments including the re-design of the music centre, the replacement of all school PCs, the introduction of a skills room with interactive technology including iPad technology and a new fitness suite.

Growing and developing leadership potential, including governors

The school believes that identifying, growing and nurturing leadership potential is key to ensuring continued improvement can be sustained. Developing the staff at the school has been a key priority over the last three years and a driver behind the recent successes at the school. One of the assistant heads is responsible for staff development and ensures that all training is closely linked to whole school priorities and provides value for money. The school regularly identifies best practice in schools locally and nationally and prefers to send staff on visits to share these ideas rather than pay for commercial courses. For one INSET day each member of the staff was sent to visit a school where best practice had been identified and were given the responsibility to share their findings with their teams and the school. This has led to a number of new ideas being brought into the school having been proven successful in other school contexts.

The leadership approach at the school is transparent and members of the leadership team are involved in joint working to ensure succession planning. The roles on the leadership team are updated and transferred to develop the capability of leaders so that the quality of the team continues to improve. During the last two years, three members of the leadership team have achieved promotion to deputy headship (one internally, two externally) and this provides increased opportunities for other staff to undertake additional responsibility having proven their quality. The school has a strategic plan for staff succession planning so that leaders are training other staff to undertake roles should they retire and/or gain promotion elsewhere.

In September 2012 the school appointed two heads of learning and teaching to mentor and coach staff throughout the school. Working with the deputy head these new teachers were proven excellent teachers from other schools who could help introduce new ideas and improve current practice. To support the new roles the school currently employs the support of an established educational consultant who is supporting the development of teaching with a small team of staff who will then disseminate the best

practice to all staff. This has focused on the checking of students' progress in lessons and effectively modifying teaching to ensure students make the desired progress. This significant investment is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching within the school which, in turn, will impact on standards across the school at all levels.

To quality assure the work of the school rigorous monitoring procedures were introduced in September 2010. These include evaluating the effectiveness of all areas of the school's work at all stages of leadership within the school. These also include the systematic observations of the quality of teaching and dissemination of best practice within and across departments; the evaluation of the effectiveness of individual departments/faculties; and regular scrutiny of students' work.

The processes are "tight" and enable leaders to have difficult conversations with staff to hold individuals/departments to account. To increase the capability of leadership at middle level a number of activities were undertaken to support sustained improvement across a number of areas. These include clear success criteria for activities through modelled examples by the leadership team to ensure consistency. For example, there are examples for middle leaders on how to write an effective departmental self-evaluation and improvement plan. Furthermore, the school co-ordinates internal training programmes in partnership with other schools in to ensure middle leadership development.

Performance management systems are now linked closely to whole school targets and provide a rigorous and systematic approach to holding staff to account. The system works on the principle of whole school targets being set which rely on departmental performance which filter to individual classroom teachers. The process is designed to provide a "joined up" approach with a sharp focus on student achievement.

Initially when the system was introduced there were a number of difficult discussions which took place and unpopular decisions made, e.g. staff departures. However, the impact of greater teacher accountability had the desired effect. While challenging conversations remain part of the culture of the school, it places a clear focus on what is in the best interests of the students and by the belief that "we are not allowed to fail!" Staff are aware of their responsibilities and know that poor performance will be challenged through the appropriate procedures.

Target setting is rigorously used to promote higher aspirations. The system is continually refined to take into account context on the backdrop of raising expectations year-on-year.

The quality of data and analysis has improved significantly while simplified so that all staff (a) engage with data and (b) understand their role once data has been shared and analysed. The school employs a data manager who along with the leadership team set challenging targets and monitors performance. Pastoral leaders support the work of curriculum leaders to challenge underperformance and establish strategies to intervene. Common formats are used so that there is consistency across the school and the approach is entirely transparent so that staff spend time appropriately to plan interventions.

The development of leadership has included the involvement of, and works with, governors. Prior to June 2010 the governing body did not sufficiently challenge the school on its performance. A new chair of governors in September 2009 was appointed but the school did not effectively monitor the performance of the school because they had been content to take the word of the previous leadership at face value and was not sufficiently trained to ask challenging questions. Over the last two years governors have been more exposed to the range of data available and are well informed about the quality and standards at the school.

The headteacher working with an experienced governor who took on the role of chair in February 2012 brought about significant change to the governing body with the majority of governors being replaced by experienced individuals from a range of backgrounds, able to bring a specific skill and attributes, to the governing body. These include a mixture of primary headteachers, some with Estyn experience; educationalists; business leaders etc. The new parent governors also brought additional experiences to the governing body. This has enabled the governing body to bring a fresh approach while ensuring that the school continues its improvement.

Outcomes

There has been a significant trend of improvement. In main indicators 2009 – performance was consistently below the family average, placing the school in the bottom quarter of similar schools. In 2011 and 2012 performance was well above the family average and placed the school in the top quarter of similar schools for many indicators.

Key stage 4 indicator	2009	2012
CSI	9%	38%
L1 threshold	82%	98%
L2 threshold	24%	81%
L2 including English and mathematics	10%	40%

The proportion leaving full time education with no qualifications has reduced dramatically from around 7% in 2008 to less than 1% in 2012.

Attendance has improved and is better than the family average and equal to the national average of 92%.

Performance in 2012 placed the school in the top quarter of schools in L2+, L2 and L1.

Performance in 2012 was above the line of modelled expectations for L2+, capped points score and attendance.

Progress by pupils is good with significant added value in all key indicators for the past two years.

Case study 5 – Newtown High School, Powys

Newtown High School, Powys

Newtown High School is an 11 to 18 comprehensive school of 859 pupils. The intake represents the full range of ability. Around 16% of the pupils are eligible to free schools meals, which is the highest proportion in the local authority. Just over 35% of pupils have special educational needs and 1.7 % have a statement of special educational needs. This compares with the national averages of 18.6% and 2.6%.

The headteacher was appointed in 2004. The deputy headteacher has been in post for 14 years. There are three assistant headteachers, all of whom are internal promotions since the CYFLE (Welsh for opportunity and an acronym for 'Caring Yields a Flourishing Learning Environment') ethos was introduced. Two were appointed in 2006 and the most recent one in April 2012

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

1 – Leadership and management

Leadership and management were identified as a weakness in the 2003 Estyn inspection report on the school. The school leadership team reacted to this with resilience and the created a clear new ethos for the school. CYFLE now permeates and guides all activity at all levels within the school.

The team developed a thorough, honest and well-evidenced self-evaluation culture at all levels of leadership and management, and reacting to the clear vision of the headteacher, set targets for the future of the school emphatically based upon improving learning and teaching and the standards achieved by learners. Clear lines of accountability have been established in all areas of school life and all leaders/managers produce clear and detailed strategic plans to ensure the realisation of both this vision, and their targets. Thus, distributed leadership is a core strategy in the improvement. A continual focus on plan implementation and review against impact, with additional action and intervention where necessary, takes place at all levels. Effective performance management has been enabled with a staff body that show a willingness to embrace change, seek innovation and hunt down good practice from many sources. This has led to the development of an engaging curriculum for learners. The governing body constantly challenges the school to do better. This constant focus on improvement at all levels is an example of the team approach.

Recently graded a Band 1 School, the school has recently attained the Investors in People Gold award for Leadership and Management which is additional evidence of the success of this distributed leadership culture.

2 – Behaviour management

Behaviour Management was again identified as a weakness by Estyn in 2003. Firstly, a focus on stimulating teaching and the creation of an engaging curriculum was

necessary. Good practice was shared, training disseminated and lesson methodology explored before schemes of work were rewritten to ensure pace and challenge were built in. A rewards system was developed with the pupils that they value. A disciplinary system that ensures rapid and effective responses to misdemeanours and rapid referral where appropriate was instigated. Each faculty has an internal withdrawal procedure, with a progression to senior leadership team (SLT) intervention leading to a definite and immediate outcome. A 'Wellbeing Centre' was established which is extremely effective in modifying the poor behaviour of a small minority of pupils. For pupils in need of additional intervention to effect change, fast-tracked, targeted SLT intervention is implemented. This level of perseverance involves hard work, but this system ensures all behaviour challenges are dealt with appropriately with minimum disruption to the learning of others. A team approach to behaviour by the whole staff ensures a consistent approach that all learners understand. Teamwork has been essential in the success of this system, as in any.

3 – Staff development and collaboration

Throughout the improvement journey, SLT and middle leaders have frequently visited other providers and lead practitioners to glean good practice from those who have demonstrated, or who advocate, outstanding standards or practice. This collaborative willingness on the part of the staff to both visit and host visiting schools; to both gather and disseminate good practice, has led to a collaborative ethos that is now almost second nature. This did not end with the 2008 re-inspection which found the school to be 'good with several outstanding features'. The staff body is a team who are constantly striving to achieve excellence and have now formalised this research process into its PLC structure. PLCs carry out extensive research, engaging in action enquiry projects and then reflect on the evidence gained before cascading training to other staff. This practice shows the hard work and perseverance of the whole staff towards continual improvement.

How closely does the school match the stages described in the improvement journey diagram? Why?

Whilst there are a number of overlaps, the move from 'serious weaknesses' to 'good with several outstanding features' and beyond has certainly involved a gradual shift from the directive approach to dealing with identified shortcomings, to a more collaborative/distributive approach that is firmly based upon high expectations and accountability. Distributive leadership features currently, ensuring a high degree of consistency in most aspects of the school's work. The direction of travel from the improvement journey diagram can be clearly exemplified in the journey of the school over the last 10 years.

In the first stage of the improvement journey, to adequate, a directive, top-down approach to dealing with identified short-comings was the most suitable form of intervention to effect immediate and considerable short-term change. Once the significant weaknesses were overcome, there was a need to build the middle to long-term capacity of the school to maintain the upward trend in standards of learning

and teaching and move towards good and better. This capacity was best established by shifting to a more collaborative/distributive approach to school improvement. The school is now clearly in the 'final column' of its journey. Once the school was recognised as a 'Good school with several outstanding features', there was a shift towards sharing this good practice with other school leaders; to extend system-wide capacity to deliver improved learning and teaching standards. The school is now travelling within this final column, from 'good' to <u>consistently</u> 'excellent' in all fields; the improvement journey diagram will assist this process.

Strategy for improvement

Our core aim had to be to raise standards and outcomes for all students. We created a 'Response to inspection issues' document to ensure whole school and departmental actions were made on the recommendations. We needed to define staff accountability and improve our self-evaluation at all levels including lesson observations and pupil product monitoring.

We focused on improving teaching and learning. We needed to improve our CPD programme for all staff. Our core ethos CYFLE was embraced and became the central vision and yardstick for school community. We had to improve behaviour and attendance. We needed to restore the school's image within the local community and indeed the country. Also, we needed to review the curriculum and improve the menu on offer to students, especially at level 2.

Actions

Immediately in year one, we launched CYFLE. This strategic vision was explained to all stakeholders and used as a reference point for all decision making. The efficacy of leadership and management at all levels was a focus and professional accountability was clearly defined. Data driven targets were set by the head and deputy – at school, department and individual pupil and teacher levels. Self-evaluation expectations were increased for all TLR holders. This allowed the development of a 'no excuses' culture. Our concentration on improving teaching and learning involved the leadership team and middle leaders through lesson observations and performance management. Staff development was targeted carefully. To improve literacy, a new basic skills / SEN co-ordinator and team were created. Behaviour and attendance also needed immediate improvement: clear parameters were set for acceptable behaviour. Staff CPD focused on behaviour management. Rewards and sanctions were reviewed and attendance was closely monitored. In addition to this, more focussed provision for pupil wellbeing was created and learner voice was introduced as a method of involving pupils in the improvement process.

After our initial actions, we were living CYFLE. We introduced a pupil mentoring structure with several levels of support in year 2. Pupil tracking and monitoring procedures, with a range of targeted intervention strategies, were introduced to ensure all pupils achieved their potential. We actively sought out and embraced best practice, adapting the ideas that we found to meet the needs of our school. We moved towards

shared and distributed leadership through the development of school groups such as School Improvement Group which involved all middle leaders, and the SLT.

Our focus on raising standards meant that we were by year 3 meeting national standards. We therefore used these as tools to measure our own success in terms of provision and improve further. We gained external accreditation of whole school initiatives such as: The Basic Skills Charter Mark, Investors in People, ESDGC Green Flags and Healthy Schools leaves. We also improved our collaborative work with feeder primaries and, our Learner Voice groups developed further with pupils creating a School Nutrition and Action Group (SNAG) and an Eco committee. Learner voice now contributes to the school improvement plan, takes part in appointments, and is involved in subject self-evaluation.

To improve teaching and learning we shared Estyn's lesson judgement criteria with all staff. A member of the SLT was given responsibility for teaching and learning and a PLC was established with a focus of moving lessons from Good to Excellent.

Best practice in teaching within school was identified and shared with other staff and staff development focused on teaching and learning. More emphasis was placed on the impact of learning experiences and the quality of the outcome.

A member of the SLT worked with the Powys learning team on assessment for learning and led CPD sessions in the school and cluster. Skills were developed as areas of focus and incorporated into new schemes of work with assessment for learning opportunities and methods of lesson delivery. This co-ordinated planning provided opportunities for monitoring pupil progress in literacy and other key skills in all subjects.

We needed to provide a curriculum that met the needs of the pupils. A member of the SLT was given responsibility for curriculum and worked towards meeting the Learning and Skills Measure for 14-19 learners. This led to a more varied curriculum suitable for learners, increased collaboration with other providers and Key Skills accreditation.

Targeted staff development was required; again a member of the SLT was given responsibility for improvement in this area and focussed on standards. Staff development was linked to the school improvement plan and performance management objectives. Peer observations were encouraged and many staff became involved in enquiry and reflection; including networking with teachers in other schools. The school staffing structure was re-defined to place a greater emphasis on standards and accountability. The development of non-teaching staff to fill many key roles took place, particularly within the wellbeing provision.

More focussed provision for pupil wellbeing led to the creation of our Wellbeing Centre, Canolfan CYFLE. This focus on the needs of each individual learner and their personal support needs, was key in ensuring no pupil left school without a recognised qualification.

Our next steps; to further develop a high degree of consistency in all aspects of the school's work.

Outcomes

Improved standards

- We are in Quartile 1 or 2 for all performance indicators in KS3 and KS4
- We are above family average in most performance indicators
- We are above the Wales average in post-16 performance indicators
- We were rated Band 2 for 2010/11 and are Band 1 for 2011/12
- In addition to the above, we have an increasing number on roll, we have an excellent reputation in our community, we were a case study in the Institute for Welsh Affairs (IWA) book; Making a Difference at KS3.

Estyn listed our outstanding features in 2009 as:

- the improving trend in performance in examination results;
- the way in which teachers and learning assistants promote equality of opportunity in the classroom;
- the way in which the curriculum promotes key skills and sustainable development; and,
- the way in which the school cares for and guides pupils and students.

Other outcomes:

- Estyn judged the provision of vocational qualifications at KS4 to be an outstanding feature (Feb 2009)
- School KS4 curriculum exceeds 2012 Welsh Government targets for the number and range of courses on offer to our learners (as contained in the 14-19 Learning & Skills Measure)
- Estyn judged the provision for the development of basic and key skills to be an outstanding feature (Feb 2009)
- Estyn judged that 'Senior leaders and managers have effective links with departmental teams. They monitor their work, identify and support their professional development needs, and monitor the impact of their training on standards' (Feb 2009)
- Self-evaluation within the school was judged by Estyn to be outstanding (Feb 2009)

Case study 6 – Oakdale Comprehensive School, Caerphilly

Oakdale Comprehensive School is an 11 to 16 English-medium school with 600 students on roll. The school was founded to serve a mining community in the South Wales Valleys and the social and economic circumstances of the area are typical of the region. Most students are of White British heritage and the number of students whose first language is not English is well below the national average. The proportion eligible for free school meals is about 18%. The proportion who have special educational needs is similar to the national average, although the proportion with a statements of special educational need is below average.

The headteacher started at the school in April 2007 with an inspection due in November 2008. The appointment of a curriculum deputy head in September 2008 and a pastoral assistant head in January 2009 along with the bursar who was already in post, established the senior leadership team as it is at present.

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

The three factors that have had the biggest impact on improving standards are:-

1   Leadership – providing a vision and establishing a common purpose
2   Behaviour – providing a civilized and civilizing community
3   Curriculum – providing a learning environment that leads to the best qualifications
      for all

How closely does the school match the stages of the improvement journey model? Why?

Looking at the secondary school improvement journey model, there are clearly key markers which mirror our journey in Oakdale. What is striking is the need to develop in a phased way, building each stage of the journey on the foundations of the previous one. It is clear that trying to put into place those elements that are seen as indicators of excellence cannot be embedded in the culture of the school unless the foundations of leadership and behaviour are firmly established.

Strategy for improvement

Throughout the improvement process, the strategy has focused on four key elements:

- leadership and management;
- behaviour and attendance;
- curriculum and achievement; and
- teaching and learning.

Actions

The journey from unsatisfactory to adequate 2007-2009

Leadership and management

With an inspection due in November 2008, the headteacher quickly set out the school's core values through a series of meetings. These established what was good and what was not, and to take a clear top down approach to dealing with identified shortcomings with the backing of the staff and governing body. The new senior leadership team (SLT) was established to implement this approach.

Behaviour and attendance

Before the headteacher started, the staff were already working on a sanctions and rewards system. The headteacher recognised this as a developing strength and encouraged the staff to develop this system and was robust in supporting it. With the appointment of the pastoral assistant headteacher (AHT), the pastoral team of five progress managers (PM) and the special needs co-ordinator (SENCO) set about working with the curriculum team leaders (CTL) and staff to ensure a level of consistency across the school in the application of sanctions and rewards. This is the foundation for all the other developments in the school and still is today.

Teaching and learning

The headteacher encouraged the four- part lesson, critical skills and the use of Visual, Aural, Reading, and Kinaesthetic Learning styles (VARK) within the school by organising in service training with local teachers. This sharing of realistic practice gave confidence to teaching staff to take more risks with pedagogy in their lessons. Teaching and learning now began to develop because it was being built on the foundations of an increasingly more robust sanctions and rewards environment. With the appointment of the deputy headteacher (DHT), there was increased capacity within the school to take the teaching and learning, performance management, basic skills and key skills agenda forward by working with respected key specialists and enthusiasts on the staff.

Curriculum and achievement

The school was working with a subject-orientated curriculum model, based on staffing levels rather than learning requirements. With the appointment of the deputy headteacher, a staff skills audit was carried out to establish the capacity of staff to deliver other subjects and meet the learning skills measure within budget. The assessment recording and reporting (ARR) system was fairly standard with two interim alerting grades and a full report to parents each year. With the appointment of the assistant headteacher, the ARR working party started to improve the way we monitor pupil progress and began to re-establish the reputation of the school with the community by providing high quality reports to parents.

The inspection in November 2008 was adequate, but the commentary noted 'a sea change' in the prospects for the schools future.

The Level 2 threshold results in 2007 were 40%.
The Level 2 threshold results in 2008 were 44%.
The Level 2 threshold results in 2009 were 59%.

The journey from adequate to good 2009-2011

Leadership and management

With the end of two significant outstanding staffing issues carried over from the previous management and the expansion of the bursar's role to that of business manager, the headteacher and now increasingly the leadership team were able to concentrate on teaching and learning without distractions. Although, the 'state of play' interviews with middle leaders developed robust accountability, a key role was played by the style of leadership through an open-door policy, developed trust, a no-blame culture and an increased awareness of the importance of data.

Financial stability and a clarity of purpose allied with fewer distractions really focused the school on outcomes. Teachers were appointed to provide leadership on a task and finish basis on issues such as, digital literacy, teaching and learning, healthy eating, Welsh dimension and the environment. The importance of key skills and basic skills and the learning coach were recognised as key to improving performance at level 2 threshold.

Behaviour and attendance

The pastoral team improved consistency and clarity about sanctions and rewards, while at the same time developing the school ethos within their year groups. Behaviour and attendance at this time improved to a new level. Expectations of what could be achieved had risen as a result of the 59% level 2 threshold result and this increased confidence to expect more from students and themselves.

Teaching and learning

The teaching and learning group developed the teaching and learning toolbox and the middle leader leading the team provided training on assessment for learning and learning to learn. As a staff, we all went off site to a hotel for the day and had external training on teaching and learning to augment the teaching and learning toolbox. This group led the way to move forward with developments in student voice, peer observation of lessons, observation of lessons by students and a short film developed by the students on teaching and learning that was shown in assemblies to the whole school.

After discussions about the difficulty of making judgements on fellow colleagues about their teaching, the DHT carried out the performance management lesson observations

for all the staff which provided consistency and clarity of expectations which was in line with the methods in the teaching and learning toolbox.

Curriculum and achievement

The challenge in a small school to provide setting for all subjects with no double lessons or split groups, while not increasing spending was interesting! The solution was to have setting from Year 7 in either mathematics or English groups with subjects choosing to be set with these two subjects. The pupils can move up or down groups at half term depending upon assessment outcomes. Any CTL can play a 'joker' for a pupil who they feel needs to be in a particular group, for example by being gifted at music or art.

The ARR working party further developed the reports to parents by moving towards a colour-coded scheme that showed whether pupils were working above, below or at their potential. The feedback from parents and staff proved successful as parents visited subjects that were red for below potential more frequently than where students were reaching or exceeding their potential.

The skills co-ordinator continued to develop literacy levels through catch up, library, reading days and staff INSET. The vocational options introduced two years previously were coming to fruition. To make the 'sea change' that was recognised in the inspection into a genuine improvement in standards, the challenge and support for the core subjects through joint-core subject indicator meetings with the SLT to discuss individual student levels was vital.

The level 2 threshold results in 2009 were 59%.
The level 2 threshold results in 2010 were 71%.
The level 2 threshold results in 2011 were 83% with level 2 threshold including English and mathematics reaching 50% for the first time in the school's history.

The journey from good to excellent 2011-2013

Curriculum and achievement

The school has worked hard to develop an increasingly personalised curriculum which reflects the needs of students to leave school with level 2 threshold including English and mathematics. Students receive a broad entitlement of subjects across each key stage. More curriculum time is devoted to numeracy and literacy. The curriculum at key stage 4 is designed to ensure success in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics.

The systems used for monitoring progress are rigorous and robust, and have been improved through the work of the ARR working party and the use of high quality data. The headteacher provides high-quality data training for key staff. Data is presented so that vulnerable groups in every subject can readily be tracked. The students value inclusivity and vulnerable children are accepted and nurtured. The school day is

conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect. A sense of calm and purpose is palpable around the corridors.

Teaching and learning

Staff have focused relentlessly on maintaining high quality learning and teaching. Constant monitoring by CTLs means that under-performance in the classroom is detected quickly and support is provided. Senior staff have been trained in how to quality-assure learning and teaching; in recent years this training has extended to CTLs.

Staff meet regularly in curriculum teams to ensure consistency in the development of policy and procedures, and to provide opportunities to showcase best practice.

Leadership and management

There is absolute clarity regarding the requirements for leadership at the school – creativity, problem solving, high aspirations, an outward-looking approach, the ability to maintain high-quality relationships in a fast-paced environment and loyalty are pre-requisites to leadership at Oakdale. The interview process for seconded recruits to leadership positions is rigorous and based on competence in whole-school understanding. Most middle leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff have been seconded onto the SLT for a year to gain experience at that level. The induction of new staff is a refined process. Expectations are high and staff absence low.

The chair of governors describes the headteacher as: having a clear sense of purpose and vision, attuned to the governors' view of a community school; a willingness to listen to staff, governors and parents; a remarkable ability to synthesise complex issues and then take appropriate action; a credibility through delivering on promises; and a skill in communication both internally, with other schools and to a wide range of audiences.

The school has robust systems for self-evaluation. A bi-annual review focused on outcomes at key stage 3 in term 3 and key stage 4 in term 1 ensures that evaluation is based on evidence and action points follow this evaluation. There is an ethos of openness and collaboration. There are frequent staff and student surveys, providing confidential feedback to the SLT. Staff take a clear and active part in devising school policy and shaping the school's future. Parents are active in expressing their views and are welcomed to the form tutor days and parents' evenings, where they are advised on the ARR system as it applies to their child. The students' voice is strong. Students are involved in appointments, the self-evaluation process, a thriving school council and an associate governor programme. The school is relentless in its determination to secure excellence in all areas of its life and work.

Outcomes

The level 2 threshold results in 2011 were 83%, with level 2 threshold including English and mathematics at 54%.

The level 2 threshold results in 2012 were 80%, with level 2 threshold including English and mathematics reaching 60% for the first time in the school's history.

The school now has:

- an ethos based on 'pride in our school';
- a clearly understood sanctions and rewards system;
- clear expectations about teaching and learning;
- a personalised curriculum for students based on the best outcome for the student;
- strong professional development programme to grow the talent in staff;
- leading-edge ICT systems for data capture and analysis;
- students who value their own learning and inclusivity;
- a highly consultative relationship with governors, staff, parents, and students;
- staff who take an active part in devising school policy and shaping the school's future; and
- a leadership team who collectively are greater than the sum of their individual parts.

Being excellent is not the end of the story we realise that maintaining that excellence will be even more of a challenge than achieving it. So here in Oakdale we are working towards the following areas

Consistency of and creativity in teaching

We need to continue to develop systems and approaches which guarantee that the overwhelming majority of teaching in classrooms is at least good, and usually excellent. Senior leaders between us have a monitoring role that gives us a confident knowledge of the professional qualities of all the teachers in the school.

Now that consistency has been reliably attained, the emphasis needs to be on maximising the frequency with which lessons are truly memorable experiences of pleasurable, demanding, collaborative learning, for teacher and students alike. Formative assessments of students' work, need to continue to be based on principles common across the school, while maintaining a clear sense of students' progress. The products of students' learning need to continue to be celebrated through publication, performance or display.

A personalised curriculum

We need to continue to adapt our curriculum offer to students so that every student has an individual pathway through his or her school career. This needs to continue to be agreed with staff at key moments in that career, in consultation with parents. Progress along the pathway needs to continue to be regularly checked. We need to update and refine our monitoring and data-handling systems to give staff a constantly updated understanding of a student's progress, leading to prompt interventions in the work of students who under-achieve.

Engagement of students

We need to continue to develop pupil voice so students continue to see themselves as active partners in the school's life and work, not as passive consumers of a pre-planned product. This sense of partnership needs to be revitalised every year through students' participation in regular reviews of their work and progress, and through the sincere attention that staff pay to their opinions on all aspects of the school's activity and organisation. Students' voices need to continue to be heard through the school council, through the influence of their representatives in the appointment of staff, or through a system by which students appraise the effectiveness of their teachers.

Relations with the outside world

We need to maintain mutually productive relationships with parents and the wider local community. Our communication systems need to continue to be excellent and develop as new media comes along. Parents need to continue to have a genuine influence on the school's policies and procedures. Our governing body needs to continue to develop their strategic role in influencing or affirming the school's overall direction, while allowing senior leaders their executive space. We need to continue to develop our capacity to have a formal responsibility as guide and mentor to other schools which need to improve.

Inspirational leadership

As a leadership team we need to continue to have an overall, long-term vision of what our school could be, however distant that vision may be into the future. We need to continue to:

- translate that vision into practical and successful effort on the part of a critical mass of staff, especially our middle leaders;
- appoint excellent people to all positions in the school, and continue to trust them to do their jobs;
- encourage innovation and measured risk-taking on the part of staff;
- be uncompromising and, if necessary, ruthless in addressing poor performance;
- promote an atmosphere of confident pride in the school's culture;
- fulfil our role as the leadership team of the school in our relations with the community we serve; and
- maintain our credibility with staff by delivering on promises made.

Case study 7 – Olchfa School, Swansea

Olchfa School is an 11 to 18 comprehensive school of 1,861 pupils, including 492 in the sixth form. The intake represents the full range of ability. The academic profile of the school has altered significantly over the last five years, partly due to increasing numbers of preferred placements. Typically, 37% of pupils entering Year 7 over the last five years have a reading age below their chronological age. There has been a significant upward trend in the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals over the last five years from 5.7% in 2007 to 9.5% in 2012. Just over 12.4% of pupils (11-16) have special educational needs and 2.3 % (11-16) have a statement of special educational needs. This compares with the national averages of 18.6% and 2.6%.

The headteacher was appointed in 2001. The deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2010 having previously served as assistant headteacher. One assistant headteacher has been in post since 2002 and the other was appointed in 2009. The three learning directors took up post in September 2008.

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

- strategic leadership
- use of performance data
- self-evaluation and quality assurance

How closely does the school match the stages of the improvement journey model? Why?

No school can improve without change. The changes implemented in Olchfa mirror those in the improvement journey model. In this large school, consistency across all aspects of our work has been pivotal to our improvement. Successive staffing restructures have ensured that management structures are highly efficient and fit for purpose with a clearly defined focus on the primacy of classroom excellence and accountability. New policies and systems have been clearly communicated to all staff and applied universally. Our main priorities have been to focus on improving standards for all learners by improving the quality of teaching and learning and by up-skilling all staff in the use of performance data to track progress and set aspirational targets for all pupils.

Strategy for improvement

The school's results improved significantly between the inspections in 2005 and 2011 despite falling levels of prior attainment. This improvement in standards is supported by the standard of teaching at the school. This was a strength in 2005 and has continued to improve significantly with sector-leading QA policies and procedures underpinning robust and intelligent professional judgements by senior and middle managers. This gives the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) a highly accurate knowledge of the school, enabling them to focus on improvement. The SLT is committed to continuous

improvement and has shown professional bravery in implementing radical changes to secure significant improvement. Leadership and management at all levels now focus firmly on school improvement and outcomes. Our aim was, and continues to be, to create a school where pupils of all abilities achieve academic success and take advantage of everything a large school has to offer.

Actions

Strategic leadership

In September 2006, the school implemented a radical new staffing structure to create a coherent, fair, transparent structure that would be instrumental in raising standards of achievement at the school. The main changes involved the:

- reduction of the SLT;
- appointment of learning directors to the Extended Management Team (EMT) to link the strategic direction of the SLT with its dissemination and implementation throughout the school and to oversee the work of groups of subjects, year groups and whole- school themes;
- creation of TLR posts with a clear focus on teaching and learning;
- appointment of learning leaders to replace the traditional role of head of year with a clear focus on target setting, monitoring and tracking within the year group; and
- the appointment of pastoral guidance workers to provide support for pupils in pastoral matters and key stage managers to provide administrative support in the day-to-day running of the year groups.

In September 2012, there was a further restructure. This built upon the success of the previous restructure which had clearly been instrumental in increasing levels of accountability and improving standards of teaching and learning. The new structure emphasised the importance of classroom excellence and provided even clearer lines of responsibility and accountability. Our experience had shown that standards improve when there is excellence in the classroom and proactive management of staff performance. In the revised structure, the work of all teachers is directly managed by ten learning managers (LMs) and the pastoral team is headed by four phase learning leaders (LLs). Three learning directors (LDs) now form part of the SLT. Both LMs and LLs form part of the new EMT. LMs and LLs are supported by senior lead practitioners (SLPs) who will be supported in time by a team of lead practitioners (LPs). Both SLPs and LPs will drive developments in terms of classroom delivery, new technologies and will work under the direction of LMs, LLs and LDs to raise standards in all subject areas including, where necessary, assisting with direct interventions and support. The new structure underlines the commitment of the SLT to improving pupil outcomes. A new learning centre to support pupils at risk of under-achievement was opened in September 2012 and this has already begun to impact on pupil outcomes. The learning centre manager works closely with both academic and pastoral managers to design individual programmes to ensure that every pupil has the very best chance of success.

Other strategic leadership decisions have impacted very positively on outcomes in recent years. These include:

- The introduction of the sector-leading 'SMART' programme in September 2006. SMART is a cross-curricular, skills-focused, competency curriculum which engages our Year 7 pupils very effectively in the learning process. The SMART programme remains at the centre of skills-based learning at Olchfa. Pupils are encouraged to explore their own learning styles and have become skilled in applying rigorous self and peer assessment techniques. The use of alternative approaches to assessment has been particularly successful and is now used widely across the school to inform learners. The SMART programme also offers opportunities for pupils to gain ESW qualifications. The current SMART programme has a more explicit focus on literacy and numeracy in line with national priorities.
- The school places considerable emphasis on wider personal development as a crucial foundation for future lifelong learning and success. The SLT has prioritised these wider themes, making the case for the entitlement of all learners to a rich, skills based experience. The 'Olchfa Pathway' has achieved notable success in promoting wider development whilst at the same time securing clear improvement in standards. The introduction of the Olchfa Pathway, underpinned by the innovative enrichment programme, has played a major role in our improvement journey and has impacted positively on the wellbeing of learners. The aim of the programme is to supplement the formal academic pathway at Olchfa and comprises a range of activities which fall into four main areas: Community, Cultural, Sport and Healthy Living, and Practical.

Use of performance data

There has been significant improvement in this area since 2005 in terms of the accuracy, purpose and frequency of assessments. This has provided us with a raft of performance data and this, underpinned by predictive data from FFT, has put data and its management at the forefront of the improvement process. Our '1.2.3' assessment system, introduced in 2010, enables teachers to track progress against prior attainment data and predictive data on a half-termly basis. Much improved access to whole-school data on the school network and regular staff training has enabled teachers to make more effective use of predictive performance data to inform planning and target-setting. The information provided by 1.2.3 reviews gives instant feedback through SIMS to LMs and LLs and this helps to facilitate prompt, directed interventions. Progress is monitored within and across departments, and information is communicated to pupils and parents/carers through a secure link on the school website.

Training in data analysis has enabled managers to identify where strong performance exists and where improvement is needed. Staff are required to consider the reasons for particular levels of performance between subjects, teachers and teaching groups and trends over time. As a result, good practice is identified and shared and weaknesses are addressed. Self-evaluation reports and improvement plans produced by LMs and LLs are now supported by robust data analysis.

Self-evaluation and quality assurance

One of the recommendations in our inspection report in 2005 was to continue to develop and refine our existing quality assurance procedures. In 2011, the inspectors judged the school's processes for self-evaluation and improving quality to be outstanding. There is a now a very clear synergy between school self-evaluation, school improvement priorities, quality assurance and performance management. Our quality assurance procedures enable us to identify and celebrate good practice, identify areas in need of development and support, and provide the SLT with evidence needed to articulate and exemplify our vision for excellence.

The quality assurance policy and procedures have given greater prominence to the role of middle managers in the monitoring of teaching and learning and provide staff with a very clear overview of what they can do to improve. This acceptance of accountability by all staff has been the key to successful development and school improvement.

A well-documented system of teacher observations, (supported by the work of the peer teaching group 'LATOG'), departmental reviews and book monitoring ensure that the SLT has clear, reliable evidence about the quality of teaching and learning. Feedback is thorough and focused sharply on learning and outcomes. Underperformance is identified, challenged and supported. The quality assurance handbook details an annual cycle of quality assurance activities giving staff a clear picture of current performance and future challenges. Quality assurance at Olchfa is supported by effective line management, a clear time schedule for tasks, lesson observations, book monitoring and scheduled formal meetings between key personnel. Staff have moved from a subjective, impressionistic evaluation of performance to a more systematic and rigorous approach to assessing what we do as a school.

Outcomes

In May 2011, the school's current performance and the school's prospects for improvement were judged to be excellent. Olchfa was judged excellent in each of the key questions and in nine of the ten quality indicators. Inspectors noted:

"*The headteacher provides excellent strategic leadership. He communicates his vision for the school very successfully and receives outstanding support from his leadership team.*"

"*Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and leaders and managers at all levels are held accountable for their work.*"

"*The school analyses data rigorously to set challenging targets for pupils and to monitor their progress against them. Leaders of subjects and year teams use this data very successfully to inform teaching and learning and to motivate pupils to succeed.*"

"*The school's processes for self-evaluation and improving quality are outstanding. Monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is particularly rigorous.*"

Case study 8 – Sandfields Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot

Sandfields Comprehensive School is an 11 to 16 English-medium mixed comprehensive serving the Sandfields area of Port Talbot. There are currently 637 pupils on roll. Around 40% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. This is amongst the highest in Wales and is significantly above the national average of 17.4% for secondary schools. Pupils at the school represent the full range of ability. Around 11% of pupils have statements of special educational needs compared with 2.6% for Wales as a whole. A further 28% of pupils have a special educational need compared to 18.6% nationally. The school has a very large Neath Port Talbot enhanced resourced provision for pupils with moderate, severe, profound and specific learning difficulties and some with autistic spectrum disorders.

The leadership team consists of the headteacher, deputy head and two assistant heads. The head, deputy and one assistant head have been in post for the last two inspections. The headteacher has now also taken over as the head of Glan Afan School prior to the reorganisation of secondary education in Neath Port Talbot that will see three existing comprehensive schools amalgamate.

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

1   The implementation of standard operating procedures that focus on impact on learning. To achieve this a number of principles were followed, procedures should:

   - be simple and meaningful;
   - help teachers to deliver in the classroom;
   - be understood (through modelling, INSET and discussion); and
   - be easily accessible to teachers through smart use of technology.

2   The changing of expectations. The leadership speak constantly about 'high standards and high expectations'. All members of the school community understand this and share the aspirations it represents.

3   The empowerment of middle leaders so that they take responsibility and risks, and hold others to account.

How closely does the school match the stages described in the improvement journey diagram? Why?

The school closely matches the stages of the improvement journey diagram.

In 1996 the local authority made clear to the school that if there were no improvements then it might close. At that time attendance was 78%. The percentage achieving the level 2 threshold was 15% and only 50% achieved level 1 threshold.

A headteacher appointed at that point began the process of change. At that stage there was a top-down approach. The leadership was very directive. Performance and attendance began to improve. The school moved from unsatisfactory to adequate. The head retired after three years and the current head took up post.

The process of moving from adequate to good began. The process of changing expectations, implementing standard operating procedures (for analysis of data, evaluation and teaching) and distributing leadership began. Inspection in 2005 judged five of the key questions to be good and that care, support and guidance was good with outstanding features. At that time attendance had risen to around 90%. The percentage achieving level 2 threshold had improved to 33% and 84% achieved level 1 threshold.

Following the inspection, the process of moving to excellent began. The headteacher used the School Effectiveness Framework as a basis for planning for, and measuring progress towards, a collaborative, open and inclusive approach. Despite many challenges the school has establish a highly-inclusive ethos based on very high expectations of all its pupils. The inspection in 2011 judged current performance to be excellent. In view of the sustained trend of improvement and very consistent quality of teaching and leadership at all levels, prospects for improvement were also judged excellent. At that time attendance was sustained at 90%, the percentage gaining level 2 threshold has risen to 54% and 87% achieved the level 1 threshold

Strategy for improvement

Unsatisfactory to adequate

- top-down;
- high reliability schools approach to use of data and providing standard operating procedures; and
- narrow focus – attendance, achievement, appearance.

Adequate to good

- raise expectations and challenge perceptions;
- develop the school community and link s with wider community;
- revise standard operating procedures to have a clearer focus on learning; and
- empower staff at all levels.

Good to excellent

- emphasis on leaders of learning at all levels;
- share good practice through training and highly effective use of technology;
- empower staff by use of networks of professional learning internally, at cluster level and nationally; and
- strengthen the role of and status of the pupil voice.

Actions

Unsatisfactory to adequate 1996-2001

In 1996 Sandfields Comprehensive was visited by the then director of education and members of the local authority with concern expressed over the learning outcomes in relation to end of key stage 4 examination results.

The headline data gave cause for concern:

- Attendance: 78%
- 5 GCSE A* to C: 15%
- 5 GCSE A* to G: 50%
- Key stage 3 Level 5 English: 43%
- Key stage 3 Level 5 Mathematics: 41%
- Key stage 3 Level 5 Science: 40%

These statistics reflected the need for improvement. The local authority threatened the school with closure if these benchmark statistics did not improve. A new headteacher was appointed who had been a deputy at the school for a short period of time.

Around that time the school joined the Highly Reliable Schools Project. The purpose of this was for schools to consider strategies for school improvement. Later, all the schools in the local authority joined this project.

Amongst the key strategies, were the effective use of data, and the consistency of standard operating procedures. The then headteacher adopted ideas from this project which helped to improve the standards in the school. For example, the school introduced diagnostic testing, such as reading tests, cognitive assessment tests (CAT) tests, Midyis tests and Yellis tests. The priorities of the school were narrowed and focused on the "triple A challenge" of attendance, appearance and achievement. The school also improved monitoring procedures to ensure consistency of teaching and learning throughout the school.

At this time a new senior leadership team was established with a new headteacher, deputy headteachers and key middle managers adopting significant roles, particularly for pastoral care and pupil achievement.

Where attendance was concerned, standard operating procedures were put in place where a member of the senior leadership team was put in charge of attendance across the whole school. Various strategies were introduced in line with this becoming a whole school priority.

Where appearance was concerned, we had a two pronged focus. The first was concerned with the appearance of the school buildings themselves, where regular

painting days were established. The second one was on the appearance of the pupils where efforts were made to improve school uniform.

It was clear need that achievement had to be improved and this was the third priority, as this was a key indicator for the school. Targets for all subjects were introduced, with a focus on five A* to C grades at GCSE. To enable this to happen, the heads of year included pupil achievement in their remit. Within the first year our GCSE indicator had improved to 29%, and attendance to 86%.

Parental opinions began to improve, and school roll began to improve. Things steadily improved and by 2005 the school was achieving 35% at A* to C, 41% being the best in the previous three years, and attendance had risen to 90%.

During this period much of the direction of the school was driven by senior leadership team. To enable continued acceleration the senior leadership team were looking for new developments. However, at this time a new headteacher was appointed and the school began to renew its management practices under the direction of the new headteacher.

From adequate to good 2001-2005

The new focus of the school was linked to the development of the community, a re-clarification of standard operating procedures, and the empowerment of staff at all levels to ensure that there was a clear ethos and agreed direction for school improvement standing alongside a clear statement linked to the school's prime objective.

To enable leaders of learning to emerge and grow, within the organisation the operating procedures had to be structured to encourage both staff and pupil participation. The monitoring and evaluation process had to encompass this objective whilst maintaining a focus on outcomes and standards. The following are examples of expectations relating to staff monitoring and evaluation processes:

1   Post examination analysis, based upon data linked to potential prior attainment and Yellis was standard practice in every meeting with the headteacher and deputy following summer examinations. Curriculum leaders were expected to analyse all aspects of the exam paper, in particular, part marks and act upon any discrepancies. These meetings were scheduled and the SMT expected curriculum leaders to suggest areas for improvement. Welsh Government data including family of schools, FFT and FSM were used as a backdrop to contextualise outcomes and challenge and support improvements.
2   Tracking of pupil progress throughout key stages was systematic and whole school based, expectations meant that staff were encouraged to have a thorough understanding of individual pupils progress.(see section on use of ICT support to enhance process).
3   The focus was on the power of people to make effective change to impact on outcomes, and not to overburden staff with paper pushing. The self-evaluation

process was refined and consistent tools were established with staff agreement to monitor progress. These were simple and focused on teaching and learning outcomes with concise action plans resulting, not ten page essays that lacked focus and were difficult to measure success by.

In order to maintain consistency, specific monitoring tools were identified and agreed by governors, staff and pupils. This meant that when judging standards, the measures used and applied were identical across the school making comparative data and interpretations easier. The areas where these monitoring tools were devised and applied included:

- lesson observation proforma;
- registration checklist;
- key skill observation proforma;
- exercise book/files checklist;
- questionnaire for pupils on curriculum areas;
- questionnaire for pupils on behaviour/pastoral system;
- questionnaire for pupils on safeguarding; and
- questionnaire for pupils on canteen.

There was also standardisation of the format of other key operational features. The faculty monitoring process is set in a clear cycle and feedback is giving in an agreed format. This involves any recommendations being fed back to governors who themselves are involved in observing practice. There is a set structure to faculty self- evaluation and this encourages curriculum leaders and class teachers to impact on outcomes and future school developments. The school year planner clearly states when, and where school meetings will occur, for example year team meetings, curriculum leaders meetings, department meetings, SENCO meetings, school council meetings. The senior leadership team are allocated both pastoral and curriculum areas and are required to act as critical friends. This encourages a flow of information from all school areas, and is critical in determining the agendas for the weekly senior leadership team meetings.

One of the clear goals of the school is to ensure that all obstacles to success are minimised with regard to pupil progress. The school has adopted a school around the child approach to ensure that pupils meet their potential. This has resulted in several significant partnerships. There is a local authority enhanced resource provision on the site. This has eight classes and caters for a range of need; moderate learning difficulty, severe and or complex/profound, autistic spectrum disorders, pupils with learning difficulty as well as profound hearing loss etc. It is an expectation is that all pupils will integrate in the life of the school, that all pupils will achieve at least one formal qualification whilst with us, that all pupils will go onto either college or training. All staff from the resource complete whole school duties, teachers are attached to specific departments and attend mainstream department meetings in order to develop subject knowledge, use a consistent form of assessment, and provide ease of access to other classes should a pupils show a particular strength in one area.

Social Services have a base at the school, and there has been an attempt to reduce paper work and encourage a more pro-active approach to tackling children in need. In partnership with New Sandfields Aberavon, (Communities First), bids have been made to community funds and resulted in a youth worker being based at the school. The youth worker's remit is to engage pupils at risk and re-introduce them to the curriculum. Also it involved after-school work due to links with local youth clubs, the community worker can signpost pupils to activities that focus their out of school hours' time in a more constructive manner. Following a European bid that included input from the school, the local authority and non-statutory bodies an adult learning centre occupied the mobile classrooms on the school site. This encouraged lifelong learning delivered by experts during school hours, embracing the community focused ethos.

The use of ICT as a support mechanism to the community, staff and pupils was a priority and still is a key feature of the school around the child initiative. In 2007, following several meetings with the local authority, it was agreed that one electrical point per room was not sufficient to encourage the use of ICT across the curriculum. The decision to rewire the entire school was paramount and a prerequisite to the whole-school intranet system that developed. This accompanied by a bold bid for European funding to house community education in the mobile classrooms on site, and renovate a disused block for pupils use, meant that two new ICT suites were built along with new science, music and foreign languages rooms.

ICT is used as a key tracking tool for both academic and pastoral progress. The system was designed in house and encompasses information linked to each pupil's profile. The access to the system is simple and it contains details on:

- daily progress of pupils in lessons;
- attendance data;
- ALN data and guidance on best strategies for pupil progress;
- School Action and School Action Plus data;
- targets specific to each pupil;
- behaviour reports; and
- reward information.

The system also includes pupil and parent access to specific areas including homework and lesson details. Staff are able to access INSET information and resources. These resources include literacy and numeracy strategies with links to relevant websites. The site is used to convey daily information important deadline dates and pupil school council information including a section for pupil voice. The importance of this intranet in developing consistency of approach and communication has been a critical aspect in improving standards within the school.

From good to excellent 2005-2011

In later years, the emphasis on leaders of learning at all levels has resulted in a school that shares good practice, empowers staff by use of PLC both internally, at cluster level

and nationally. One key feature has been the strength of pupil voice and pupil inter school conferences, where best practice has been shared and impact seen at participating school level.

The suitability of curriculum provision has been important and particularly at key stage 4 the school has endeavoured to ensure that options are broad balanced and most importantly successful. The introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate to all at key stage 4 along with selected key skills has impacted on the pupils' skills. The effective use of grants has led to the construction of a motor vehicle provision on site and success at level 2 for pupils who opted for vehicle technology. Clear partnerships at 14-19 with the local college, and other schools have enabled pupils to widen their choices. At key stage 3, the skills framework has been mapped and the school is able to monitor the delivery of skills by using a matrix that highlights where specific subjects deliver specific skills within their programmes of study.

To support pupils in their curriculum learning coaches have been allocated at key stage 4, and each child has a mentor linked to Welsh Baccalaureate and general curriculum areas. Meetings are scheduled on a regular basis. To aide continuity from key stage 2 to key stage 3 in both academic and pastoral terms, the cluster has appointed a transition teacher who works on cross phase curriculum and on information sharing. This individual spends the first three weeks of September with the new cohort supporting them in pastoral terms, offering a known face to pupils who might be feeling anxiety. The remainder of the role is spent in the primary sector in Year 5 and Year 6. Pastoral support includes a nurture room for pupils, who might need social development, and language and maths workshops are used to accelerate pupils' skills, a retesting programme is used in both skills to ascertain progress and individualise the learning process. Whole-school strategies in both skills across the curriculum have been a focus of the school, and the intranet system has been used effectively to promote good practice in key skill delivery.

The administration side of the school has a clear management structure and performance management is arranged to mirror teachers' performance management structures. The same is true of the learning support assistant (LSA) structure, with a flow diagram in both instances clearly outlining roles and line management structures.

With the onset of Welsh Government's focus on literacy, numeracy and social deprivation, the challenge for the future lies in extending the community around the school and the school around the child ethos. The school faces challenges in extending the skill set of pupils in the two key areas identified by Welsh Government, while ensuring that social context does not impede pupil progress. The inclusive nature of Sandfields means that headline data does not often zone down enough to encompass the full nature of pupils needs within the school, and comparative national data does not compare like with like. Despite this the school has benchmarked well against FSM and family of schools data.

It is important whilst acknowledging the need for basic literacy and numeracy skills not to forget the development of the child with regard to the contribution they make to their

community as citizens of the future. It is therefore important that leaders interpret national goals and aims to ensure that they are meaningful to the unique context of a schools environment. If it is said that Sandfields has been a successful school over the past decade, it is because its staff, and stake holders have paid due consideration to the unique needs of its pupils and the community that it serves.

Outcomes

In its Estyn inspection during February 2011 the school was judged excellent for both overall judgements and for outcomes, provision and leadership.

Inspection found Sandfields to be an excellent school because:

- the progress made by pupils by the end of key stage 4 is outstanding;
- the interventions to improve essential skills are highly effective;
- the level of care, support and guidance provided to pupils is extensive and enables teachers to teach well and pupils to learn effectively; and
- there is an exceptionally high level of consistency in the quality of teaching and assessment.

The school's prospects for improvement were judged excellent because:

- the headteacher provides outstanding leadership to a very dedicated team;
- self-evaluation and planning for school improvement have a very good impact on standards and wellbeing, and involve all members of the school community, including pupils; and
- the school's ethos is highly inclusive in that all pupils are well supported and are able to make very good progress.

Since the inspection Sandfields has maintained very good standards. In 2012 there was a slight fall in the performance in level 2 including English and mathematics, the core subject indicator and the separate core subjects at level 2. However, all other indicators remained strong. There is almost no difference in performance of pupils who receive free school meals and those who do not. No pupils leave without qualifications, nearly all achieve the level 1 threshold and the majority achieve the level 2 threshold. Attendance remains in the top quarter of similar schools. The school performs above expectations in the level 2 including English and mathematics, capped points score and for attendance. Value-added data shows that in all indicators pupils in key stage 4 make better than expected progress. They make significantly better progress in level 2, level 1 and capped points score.

Case study 9 – Ysgol Bryn Elian, Conwy

Ysgol Bryn Elian is an 11 to 18 English-medium school of 880 pupils with 52 teaching staff. With 22% of pupils eligible for free school meals, the school has the highest level of deprivation in Conwy. Deprivation is an increasing problem in the area and inevitably impacts on the school's context. One feeder primary school has 67% free school meals. Around 40% of current Year 9 and Year 10 pupils have reading and spelling difficulties. The school has an active governing body and school council. A new leadership was appointed to the school in 2008.

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are articulated having been drawn up in consultation with all staff, governors and students. These are to improve examination results and value added outcomes, attendance and perceptions of the internal and external stakeholders as well as reducing exclusion rates. The articulation of these KPIs in every classroom ensures that staff and children are focussed on the business of whole school improvement, driven by data rich outcomes to ensure an evidential factual approach to school improvement. Critical success factors are also part of the Fulcrum diagram which summarises the school's direction of travel.
- Improving the quality of teaching with a strong emphasis on learner skills through a coherent CPD and performance management programme is central to driving up standards. The school's motto 'Achievement for All' applies to all staff and children in equal measure, where emphasis is placed on honing the skills of staff through high quality training events and sharing of good practice. The school invested in the expertise of Paul Ginnis and Alistair Smith in an attempt to move teaching from good to outstanding. These CPD opportunities have had a profound impact on classroom practice. Staff are working on developing thinking skills and complex pedagogical approaches in order to provide our learners with high quality experience.
- Emphasis on services to pupils has included the introduction of Learning Mentors for each year group and their duties include chasing attendance, academic achievement, issues of uniform and behaviour as well as being a first contact with parents. Each Learning Mentor supports the Learning Manager for that year group who is a member of the teaching staff. Services to pupils has also been enhanced by a full and detailed mentoring programme where discussions with children on their academic performance and effort take place on a suspended timetable basis at least five times a year. These discussions will take place with the form tutor or a member of the senior leadership team depending on the year group and the individual. Results and base line data are segmented and mentoring groups are refined according to the issues which arise (FSM, reading and spelling ages, additional learning needs etc.)

How closely does the school match the stages described in the improvement journey diagram? Why?

- The school closely matches the stages of the improvement journey and feels that it is moving from good to excellent and beyond the common characteristics across all categories expressed in the school improvement journey model. The school has clear unambiguous key performance indicators and critical success factors which are diagrammatically expressed in the Fulcrum model. We work hard to ensure that the child is at the centre of all we do in every decision taken at school level. The school has an active school council whose voice is heard and listened to. The All@YBE initiative focussing on literacy skills has helped improve standards for pupils along with high quality CPD to hone staff skills in the classroom. An emphasis on classroom practice is critical to the school's success and this is understood by children and staff alike. Staff are held accountable for their areas of responsibilities through link meetings, performance management and results reviews.

- Higher order pupils literacy, numeracy and Thinking Skills for all continue to be developed through the All@YBE programme as well giving key staff professional development opportunities to lead and drive these initiatives. The PLCs have been a very useful vehicle to forward the skills agenda. The school has appointed a senior leader (CPD) to take responsibility for the delivery and development of higher order Thinking Skills across the school. Detailed refinements to pupils' mentoring using the Thinking Skills agenda is resulting in high quality mentoring discussions between staff and pupils.

- Learning managers and mentors have key responsibilities for monitoring and mentoring pupil progress and they are fully involved in intervention strategies pertaining to individual pupil needs. They are expected to monitor pupil progress closely through the school's detailed assessment system and make regular contact with home where either praise or support is needed.

- Lesson observations are well established and will have a focus one of the key school improvement targets in order to impact positively on standards. SLT observations will focus on school improvement targets such as literacy or numeracy so that the observation has a direct relationship to the SIP. All staff have a performance management target which relates to whole school improvement which is shared e.g. literacy target, or numeracy reducing the gap between attainment and deprivation.

- AFL is well developed in the school across the vast majority of departments and is a well-established methodology in the classroom. The children understand what needs to be done to improve their work and are very much part of that active discussion with staff.

- The school has worked hard to ensure that discussion between staff and pupils centres upon constantly improving classroom practice in order to drive up standards. Staff are encouraged to research and to feedback outcomes to colleagues in order that good practice in disseminated. An iNet course is offered to emerging and developed learners which is a high quality INSET developing the school's capacity to continue improvement. Colleagues will meet with their

counterparts across Wales and learn from and share good practice in research-driven discussion about high quality teaching. Whole school INSET and PLCs have resulted in market place activities where staff, department by department, will share action based research on improved pedagogy during training sessions.

- The school council contribute fully to the SIP and have for the past three years had a target of their choosing to contribute towards improving standards. In the last three years these have included e-safety: what makes a good learner, and this year the children have asked that they look at equality and discrimination. Students have a well-established role in interviewing staff and are present in governors' meetings. The Council is consulted over key policy documents.

Strategy for improvement

The school's strategic aim is 'Achievement for All' and we have developed a model where this aim is at the centre, is the fulcrum, of a series of levers made up of critical success factors and indicators. These relate to:

- Curriculum
- Resources
- Community
- Society
- Support
- Leadership and management

Encompassing all is the core purpose and key critical success criteria, high quality teaching and assessment.

The school has adopted an excellence model where the rationale is based upon the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) criteria which is a recognised performance improvement tool. We have drawn up a visual representation of the model summarising the school's work, in our Fulcrum Diagram, which appears in every classroom in the school. This Excellence Model is a practical tool which we have utilized to measure improvement and map and check where we are on the path to excellence. We have clearly outlined our Key Performance Indicators against which we measure success, articulating processes and critical success factors. It is a rigorous model which has helped us fully evaluate provision and standards. The Estyn framework has been fully integrated with the EFQM in order that there is full coverage of all Key Performance Indicators. Both structures provide the scaffolding for rigorous self-evaluation and the setting of the strategic direction of the school.

Actions

KPIs and critical success factors were carefully identified following a detailed review of results outputs as well as school systems. These were agreed by staff, governors and school council members to be the strategic direction and practical outworking in order to secure the school's success. It was important that all staff bought-in to this process and

in an attempt to ensure there was synergy between the school's strategy and its stakeholders. The EFQM model was deployed in order for us to measure our KPIs and CSFs against. This resulted in the school submitting a detailed document outlining leadership, strategy, people management, resources, key processes, stakeholder indicators, society results and key performance results to the Wales Quality Award team. This process assisted the school in a thorough evaluation with relevant interventions into every aspect of the school's life. This rigorous evaluative process has reinforced the school's self-evaluation systems and school improvement plan. Data trends are carefully mapped and tracked across the KPIs and relevant interventions implemented to continue improvements. The timescale of improvement following our inspection in October 2008 was with immediate effect. However, the beauty of the Fulcrum diagram is that it embraces a short, medium and long term vision for the school's improvement journey.

1   Improving quality of teaching

The key actions in ensuring there was improvement of teaching in the classroom was a deliberate strategic attempt to improve capacity across all staff in improving pedagogy with action research disseminated to other staff. Performance management targets were aligned closely with the priorities in the school improvement plan four years ago. One priority was to improve literacy standards, given the increasing problems which new intakes were presenting. All staff had this target including the headteacher. There was a launch of literacy strategies through the All@YBE project and tighter transition activities were planned for and managed to try and support primary colleagues in this area. Detailed segmentation of year group profiles has given us full and specific information on the characteristics of groups of learners which has enabled us to refine our interventions. A high-quality speaker in the form of Paul Ginnis presented to the staff in 2010. Our priority was to inspire and motivate staff to reflect objectively on their own teaching styles and to consider how to make practical further improvements in order to connect with our learners more effectively. It was important that all teaching staff were involved in this training and that follow-up activities were calendared in, so that the impetus was not lost.

2   Emphasis on services to pupils

In 2008, the school appointed a Learning Mentor to each year group who is a non-teacher that supports the learning needs of the children and shore up the behaviour management programme. Their title comes from an emphasis on enabling student learners rather than a solely pastoral emphasis. Their appointment has made a significant difference to the school in that they map and track attendance, behaviour, academic progress and also act as a link with home. In conjunction with this, a Learning Manager was appointed for each year group rather than for a key stage so that there was more oversight of, and strategic responsibility for, a particular year group. While the model is expensive it is extremely valuable in ensuring that students are well supported by the school and that communication systems with parents are improved.

A very stepped and detailed behaviour modification system was launched in 2008 by the deputy head for services to pupils. This was written and developed in liaison with the school council, staff and governors. It has been recently reviewed and refined further in collaboration with all stakeholders and is working well. This means that low level disruption to lessons can be quickly dealt with through fair and rigorous systems. Exclusion rates in the school over the last four years have dropped significantly 37% from 2007-2008. The school's Pupil Support Centre is now a model that all schools in Conwy have adopted because of its effectiveness with children on the verge of exclusion. There has only been one permanent exclusion in the last four years.

An immediate mentoring plan was put into place in order to encourage the children to talk and think about their learning and their progress. This is now a calendared event and is very well established in the school. It was, and remains, very important that children and staff talk about pupil progress in the context of each individual's ability and aptitude. This has resulted in children around the school actively engaging with the inputting of data and questioning how they can improve their performance for the following mentoring session. It also ensures that staff input data thoughtfully and accurately knowing that it will be the subject of discussion with pupils. A member of staff asked to take the opportunity to improve and further develop the mentoring sessions by looking at reflective learning and the development of Thinking Skills. This member of staff successfully implemented detailed programmes across all year groups which have benefitted the children and improved the quality of the mentoring process. This member of staff is now leading the Thinking Skills agenda with the senior leadership team as part of her professional development. She has researched current thinking across schools in England in order to disseminate best practice in Bryn Elian. This is an on-going project and one that the school is very excited about.

Outcomes

Performance at GCSE has moved from 38.4% in the level 2 threshold in 2007 to 91.7% in 2012, with the level 1 threshold moving from 93.2% in 2007 to 100% in 2012. The school is in the upper quartile for the majority of KPIs in KS3 and KS4 and VA measures indicate that the majority of pupils meet or exceed their predicted grades. A level results 2+ A-C grades has moved from 60.5% in 2009 to 92% in 2012 and 2 or more A-E grades from 89% in 2009 to 98% in 2012. Number of A* awarded at A level has moved from 1.5% in 2011 to 15% in 2012.

Attendance is now in the upper quartile at 93% and this we will continue to work on. All children are on a traffic light system for attendance which is carefully scrutinised by our assistant head, attendance officer, Learning Managers and form tutors.

The school has achieved the IIP Gold as one of the few in Wales and has been described "truly world-class" by the assessor. The school has won the Wales Quality Award Prize for Learning in three successive years and has achieved an EFQM score in excess of 600 in the last two years resulting in Gold awards.

Kirkland Rowlands surveys are conducted every 18 months. Overall parent satisfaction rating for the school was described as excellent in the 2010 survey by Kirkland Rowell and exceptionally high in 2012, way above the norms for other schools. Parents were most impressed with the school facilities and the way the school developed their child's potential along with school discipline and their perception of the happiness of their child at school. An excellent performance score was rated for the way the school developed pupil confidence also. What was most notable about the parent survey is that the school had shown an upward progression in every success criteria over 4 surveys, covering 10 years.

The same picture can be seen with the pupil survey where they too in their overall ranking considered the school to be an excellent school. Pupil perceptions showed an upward trend in all academic subject areas over the past 10 years with the vast majority of subject rated excellent by the pupils.

Case study 10 – Ysgol Cwm Rhymni, Caerphilly

Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni is a designated Welsh-medium community comprehensive school for pupils and students aged between 11 and 18 years. It is maintained by Caerphilly Borough Council. At present, it has 1,400 pupils.

The school is a private funding initiative (PFI) school, in which the building and its maintenance are under the control of a commercial company.

The school is situated on the outskirts of the village of Fleur de Lys, near Blackwood, and the school's catchment area encompasses the whole county of Caerphilly. Thirteen per cent of pupils are registered as being entitled to free school meals, which is lower than the national average of 17.4%. Because of the increase in numbers, pupils at Ysgol Gynradd Caerffili, Ysgol Y Castell and Ysgol Ifor Bach will attend the Gwyndy site in September 2013. The site will be under the leadership of Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, and will have the same governing body.

The school's leadership has been stable, and it has had three headteachers since 1981 when the school opened with 158 children. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2008. The senior leadership team also includes a deputy headteacher, two senior assistant headteachers and five assistant headteachers.

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

- firm leadership, based on an agreed vision and a clear strategic direction;
- the school's unique ethos and pupils' progress being central to everything; and
- a continuous focus on literacy across the curriculum

How closely does the school match the stages described in the improvement journey diagram? Why?

The improvement journey diagram outlines a number of the steps that the leaders of Ysgol Cwm Rhymni have considered to be key as we journey towards excellence.

It could be used as a self-evaluation tool or as some kind of 'progress ladder.' It would be possible to celebrate and reinforce the elements that have already been embedded, by setting targets for strategies that have not been developed as well.

Milestones could be prioritised and set to show the steps that are taken to achieve the aims, who will be responsible for various aspects and how they will be developed, monitored and costed.

Including governors in the process would be key, perhaps requiring some of them to oversee a specific aspect, and reporting back to them on progress made in the area.

Strategy for improvement and actions

As a result of the 1998 inspection, the following decisions were made:

- make basic changes to the curriculum and the pupil banding system;
- change the timing of the school day (starting and finishing earlier) in consultation with parents, governors, staff and pupils;
- change the timetable (hour-long lessons, and only one lesson in the afternoon);
- prioritise core subjects to lead the curriculum;
- prioritise literacy;
- further strengthen the link between the primary cluster and headteachers of English-medium schools;
- strengthen systems to monitor progress;
- appoint co-ordinators to raise standards;
- restructure the senior leadership team and appoint a team of assistant headteachers;
- develop further our use of SIMS for electronic registration and assessment;
- begin to plan for the new school; and
- in 2002 move to a brand new building.

As a result of the 2004 inspection:

- decide to restructure staff in a creative and constructive way, with the aim of developing leadership;
- strengthen systems so that there are administrative staff who co-operate very closely with staff and parents;
- the 2006-2010 strategic development plan summarised the clear focus into three key elements, namely developing skills, tracking progress and self-evaluation, with departmental development plans to comply with this, and milestones to monitor;
- strengthen the role of the liaison manager when monitoring the above;
- respond to 'Learning Pathways 14-19' in a progressive, innovative way through partnership with Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw;
- develop middle leadership;
- establish and develop basic skills;
- strengthen the staff appointment system to be thorough and transparent with a prominent emphasis on teaching;
- strengthen the focus on methodology e.g. the learning wheel, assessment for learning, thinking skills, communication and number;
- ensure excellent provision for newly qualified teachers and students who are trained at the school; a number of them have now been appointed to the school's staff and a number of them are former pupils;
- respond to Curriculum 2008 / Skills Framework;
- establish the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification as a core subject from key stage 2 to the sixth form; and

- contact parents to give praise where it is appropriate in addition to drawing attention to concerns.

As a result of the 2010 inspection

- improve reporting to parents;
- improve attendance;
- develop an ALTERNATIVE curriculum (for NEET pupils) in co-operation with a local college;
- develop further the curriculum for transition through the medium of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification;
- create annual school and departmental development plans on the basis of the three key questions in Estyn's common inspection framework, namely standards, provision and leadership;
- develop further systems for observing peers with a general focus or specific focus on literacy and numeracy;
- establish an intensive learning centre with fellow headteachers in the support department;
- respond appropriately to the new performance management system and emphasise individuals' professional development, responsibility and accountability;
- play a prominent part in the south-east Wales CYDAG committee e.g. organising joint WJEC training;
- lead innovative professional learning communities with four other nearby schools from the same family with co-operation in the following areas – senior leadership teams, core and non-core subjects (Welsh as a second language – English-medium schools) and developing middle and senior managers;
- plan for the new literacy and numeracy framework;
- plan for the opening of Y Gwyndy in September 2013;
- appoint senior assistant headteachers, pedagogic leaders and a young people's mentor; and
- in September 2013, open Y Gwyndy with the aim of offering equal provision and maintain the same high standards.

Outcomes

- the 2010 Estyn inspection judged that the school is good with excellent elements in all areas (7 Grades 1);
- continuous progress in performance; the school performed consistently better than expected and was among the top 25% of pupils in terms of free school meals;
- a gradual increase in attendance;
- the school was placed in band 1 by the Welsh Government in 2011 and 2012;
- an astonishing growth in the school's population, testifying to the school's good reputation and the faith of parents.
- staff and governors' high morale and continuous ambition that is reflected in the school motto – 'Tua'r Goleuni' (Towards the Light);

- staff understand that initiative, enthusiasm and Welshness are appreciated and the fact that there is an opportunity for everyone (staff and pupils) to realise their potential;
- a committed, stable staff who share the same vision;
- a considerable number of staff benefit from the experience of sharing ideas and good practice on committees, in meetings and in conferences e.g. the Welsh Government, Estyn, CYDAG, the south-east consortium and the local authority; and
- a friendly, supportive, happy and ambitious ethos, based on the principle that '*Every pupil's progress is at the heart of everything*'. This means personal, social, cultural and spiritual progress in addition to academic progress. The outcome of this is the fact that pupils feel safe and confident, and are proud of the fact that they are Cwm Rhymni pupils.

Case study 11 – Ysgol Glan-y-Mor, Gwynedd

Ysgol Glan-y-Môr is a naturally bilingual school for pupils aged between 11 and 16 years. The school serves the town of Pwllheli and the surrounding rural area. There are 537 pupils on roll.

Pupils come from an area which, in general, is neither prosperous nor economically disadvantaged. Eleven point three per cent (11.3%) of the school's pupils are registered as being entitled to free school meals. This figure is lower than the national average of 17.4% in secondary schools. Pupils who are admitted represent the full ability range. At present, 2.9% of pupils have statements of special educational needs, which is higher than the national average of 2.6%.

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

- Emphasis on self-evaluation
- More effective use of data
- Development of internal learning communities

How closely does the school match the stages described in the improvement journey diagram? Why?

The stages indicated in the improvement journey diagram allow me to see fairly clearly where we stand in terms of the journey to excellence. We believe we can identify several aspects of the school's work in the centre box, namely 'Adequate/Good' and, very encouragingly, I also feel that we implement some of the steps that are highlighted in the purple box, namely 'Good to Excellent'.

The improvement journey diagram would be very useful to use as a basis for discussion with all the school's staff and governors. It is clear and manageable as an improvement journey diagram and as a result it is easy to understand. In the main, I believe that it would be useful in enabling a senior management team to develop and empower the role of middle managers in a school as this is an improvement journey diagram that allows everyone to plan better strategically in order to have a positive influence on standards.

Improvement strategy

Developing learners' literacy skills across the curriculum is at the root of what has taken place in Ysgol Glan Y Môr in recent years.

These were the aims of the work:

- Develop the awareness of all departments and all teachers of their role in developing literacy across the curriculum, ensuring that they receive appropriate guidance and training so that they can contribute confidently towards doing this.

- Respond to literacy needs in Estyn's strategy/guidance in terms of inspecting literacy.
- Respond to the recommendations of the 2009 inspection to ensure that pupils use their speaking skills fully across the curriculum.

Actions

Actions were divided into three areas: oral, reading and writing. The actions, in addition to the outcomes, can be seen below.

Oral

In 2010-2011, an internal working party was established to include heads of department along with members of the language departments.

- Expectations were agreed upon.
- Examples were modelled – good/excellent lesson plans.
- Teams of teachers were established to work together across the curriculum.
- Opportunities were arranged for the teams to meet and plan jointly.
- Teachers were released as necessary to observe lessons jointly. A report was compiled on the lessons that were observed and reports were shared among the partners only.
- A questionnaire was given to find out their opinion about opportunities to develop their speaking skills in different classes.
- It was known that this area would be the focus of a whole-school evaluation at the beginning of the school year and this process was implemented in Spring 2011. (A full report was submitted to all members of staff.)
- As a continuation of the process, the area received attention in October 2011 when all heads of department co-operated with subject advisors to observe lessons jointly. Once again, reports were received from the advisers.

The emphasis throughout all of the above was on ensuring that pupils have an opportunity to develop their speaking skills. It was a very developmental process for middle managers and a culture of observing lessons jointly across the curriculum was established, with a focus on improving standards of learning and teaching.

Outcomes

- It was noted in the school's self-evaluation report that the majority of lessons were good or excellent in terms of learning and teaching. In addition, the teachers themselves reported positively about the process.
- The process had a positive influence on opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking skills in their lessons. The majority of lessons were less teacher-centred and good opportunities were planned for pair and group work. It was seen that pupils had frequent opportunities to practise their speaking skills. In the lessons

that were observed, a number of engaging activities were planned to ensure that pupils have a variety of opportunities to practise their speaking skills.

- It was noted that there is an appropriate emphasis on ensuring that pupils report back orally in a polished/extended way in some lessons and in addition that pupils have opportunities to develop their bilingual speaking skills as a result of the fact that tasks are planned purposefully to develop their translanguaging skills in some subjects.
- The process gave rise to another cycle of observation and monitoring in 2011-2012 in which attention was paid to developing effective questioning skills in the classroom to promote learning. (This arose from the recommendations of the school's self-evaluation report in 2011).
- During the second cycle, different teams were established. At the beginning of the second cycle, namely September 2011, five heads of department received county training in the area. These heads of department were then responsible for leading the cross-curricular teams.
- A whole-school focus was given to the area on an INSET day in January 2012 and then time was released for the internal learning communities to work together.
- The main outcome of the second cycle was establishing a more consistent practice across the curriculum of setting a key question for units of work, and within that, key questions for lessons also, e.g. history / religious education.

Reading

The school strives continuously to implement effective strategies in order to develop this skill across the curriculum. Below are listed the strategies that are in place at the school:

- Sharing data to ensure whole-school awareness of the reading ages of Year 7 and Year 8 pupils
- Sharing data with primary schools in the catchment area
- Reading scheme – Year 7 in particular
- Morning reading club – mainly Year 8, to give support to those who continue to have weak reading skills
- Whole-school strategy – paired reading - in place across the curriculum

The challenge for the future will be to ensure that we have suitable materials for those that have reading skills higher than their chronological age. Ensuring this would respond to the recommendations of Estyn's able and talented strategy.

Outcomes

- Reading standards in Welsh compare very well with standards in Gwynedd and 77% of learners in Year 7 have a reading age as good as or better than their chronological age by May 2012.

- The school also tracks the progress of pupils who have been part of the reading scheme by looking in detail at attainment at the end of key stage 3 (level 5 or higher) and at the end of key stage 4 (level 2 threshold).
- Reading skills in English are not as good as those in Welsh, and nearly half of Year 7 learners (48%) need to improve their standards of reading considerably in English because their reading age is more than 18 months below their chronological age.
- The data led the school to establish a Brushing Up English – Year 7 strategy, that will be operational from September 2012, which is targeted at improving Year 7 learners' English literacy skills. We trust that this will be a way of continuing to raise standards.

Writing

This work was launched in 2011-2012. During the same period, the senior management team implemented a new system of monitoring the quality of pupils' work in their books. Once again, the aim was to develop learners' literacy skills across the curriculum by concentrating on writing. Close attention has also been paid to schemes of work as part of the process. The language co-ordinator was part of the team and she contributed extensively to the planning and evaluation process.

The objectives were:

- to ensure that learners have opportunities to develop their writing skills in lessons, except for Welsh and English and can link various types of writing with every subject;
- to offer further guidance to staff on planning / providing task where that is needed; and
- to ensure that there is consistency in messages concerning, punctuation, paragraphing, and grammar across the curriculum.

We undertook to organise the cycle for monitoring pupils' work. It was indicated that the books of pupils in key stage 3 – higher ability pupils – would receive attention in term 1; moderate ability in term 2 and lower ability in term 3. At the end of every monitoring cycle, a comprehensive report was produced, identifying strengths and areas that needed improvement. As a follow-up to each report, time was invested in conducting meetings with the heads of the history, religious education, geography, Welsh and English departments to give detail on the content of every report and strategies were planned to ensure improvement where this was needed. This was a key step in the process to ensure that departments took ownership of what was identified in the whole-school report.

At the end of the whole process, two days of school in-service training were planned during the summer term, 2012, to pay further attention to the area. A day was spent detailing the writing process and part of a further day paying attention to the quality of feedback on pupils' work. In addition, an audit was undertaken of the different forms of writing that each department uses/ plans for learners within schemes of work.

Outcomes

The process has promoted a better understanding of the key contribution of all teachers and all subjects to promote pupils' literacy skills. Following the school INSET period, all departments and all teachers are expected to:

- ensure opportunities for pupils to create various types of written tasks (the six non-literary texts);
- ensure opportunities for pupils to use various forms when completing the tasks above;
- pay attention to the criteria for the forms above – content and language;
- make use of the templates that will be put on the intranet;
- make use of the 'writing circle' guidance that is noted in the teachers' language booklet;
- pay attention to the assessment cycle with literacy tasks; and
- ensure that there are posters on the classroom walls, that display the key words. (18 words – the Welsh department to identify the key words).

New resources at the school as a result of the INSET:

- writing form templates available to everyone on the intranet;
- additional guidance in the contact book for pupils;
- a comprehensive "Developing Literacy Skills" booklet for all teachers;
- cross-subject table mats (spelling / punctuation) have been created;
- literacy walls in school have been created – creating characters from the question mark, apostrophe, etc; and
- use of the screen in the hall to promote literacy messages at the beginning of key stage 3.

There is a literacy learning community in place this year, under the leadership of the language co-ordinator.

The senior management team and the language co-ordinator have begun a similar process again this year in terms of monitoring pupils' quality of work and the focus of the process continues to be on the area of writing. The intention this year is to report more specifically on standards of writing skills in addition to marking and assessment and the quality of experiences for pupils. Attention is also paid to differentiation and as a result the work of pupils in the three ability tiers in Year 9 will be looked at in the Autumn Term, in Year 8 in the Spring Term and in Year 7 in the Spring/Summer Term.

Conclusion

Since September 2010 there has been a continuous focus in the school on developing learners' literacy skills across the school in a number of methods and ways. The process has ensured that staff have co-operated effectively through a variety of partnerships to ensure a better understanding of this key area. This has given rise to a

general understanding of requirements and responsibilities regarding literacy. The various strategies have had a positive effect on strengthening learning and teaching.

Since 2010, performance in key stage 4 in the core subject indicator and level 2 threshold, including Welsh or English and mathematics has placed the school among the top 50% in comparison with similar schools in terms of free school meals. In 2012, performance in the level 2 threshold, including Welsh or English and mathematics, was a little higher than the expected performance.

Case study 12 – Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr, Swansea

Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr is a bilingual school for pupils aged between 11and 18 and is situated in Gowerton, Swansea. The school was established as a school for 11 to 16-year-olds in September 1984, and the sixth form was established in 1996. There has been an open, friendly and hardworking ethos at the school since it was established, along with a team of enthusiastic staff who are committed to the success of the school and pupils in all areas.

At present, there are 737 pupils at the school, including a sixth form of 145. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals has been between 9% and 9.8% over the last decade and is lower than the national average (17.4%). The school has a Special Teaching Facility for pupils with profound needs. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs is 16.6%, which is lower than the national average (18.6%), and the percentage of those who have statements of special educational needs is 2.8%, which is a little higher than the national average (2.6%).

The school is now facing considerable growth in pupil numbers. Local authority forecasts show that there will be 1,000 pupils at the school by September 2017, including a sixth form of 200, and further growth is foreseen up until 2019 and beyond.

What three factors have had the biggest impact on improving standards?

1   The use of data
    The introduction of the national Core Data Set was a catalyst. We put it at the heart of the whole-school self-evaluation process and whole-school strategic plan with the main focus on raising standards.

2   Enhanced distributive leadership
    With the introduction of the School Effectiveness Framework and the new Estyn Inspection Framework we began to place a greater emphasis on outcomes rather than processes. A clearer understanding of distributive leadership has led to an enhanced sense of shared accountability for raising standards in all areas.

3   Teaching and learning
    Teaching and learning of a high quality has always been at the heart of the school's vision. In order to ensure consistency across the curriculum a five step lesson structure was developed promoting the thinking cycle and higher literacy skills. Quality assurance procedures were strengthened.

How closely does the school match the stages described in the improvement journey diagram? Why?

The school matches the Good to Excellent section of the improvement journey diagram closely. We have built on each one of the other stages of development in moving forward over the last decade, and we continue to work on our whole-school targets in

order to make further progress in a number of key strategic areas such as currently literacy and numeracy in response to the new National Framework.

Strategy for improvement

The headteacher was appointed at precisely the time when the school was about to face a turbulent period of change. In 2002 there were 1,000 pupils at the school and one year later, in response to increasing demand for Welsh-medium education, the local authority decided to open a second Welsh-medium secondary school in the county. In order to establish the second school, the plan was to take feeder primary schools from Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr's catchment area and place them in the catchment area of the new school. This would inevitably have an adverse effect on the funding and staffing at Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr. As a result, over this period of seven years, a generation of experienced teachers at the school was lost, including two deputy headteachers. In order to compensate for this loss, an additional assistant headteacher was appointed in September 2004, so that there was an SMT comprising of the headteacher and three assistant headteachers. This small but effective team has been in charge through a period of significant restructuring.

During this challenging period of instability which threatened the future of the school, our focus was wholly on maintaining:

- high academic standards:
- a positive ethos;
- a positive staff morale; and
- the confidence of pupils and parents.

This was done by detailed self-evaluation and forward planning, close co-operation with local authority officers and our sister Welsh-medium secondary school (Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bryn Tawe). During this period, the school was very active in establishing a 14-19 partnership with Bryn Tawe, in response to the Learning Pathways 14-19 agenda. Out of the positive co-operation between the two schools, advantages were gained for both schools by expanding the choice of 14-19 vocational subjects and securing the funding of the sixth form within a new Sixth Form Partnership which became sector leading, and enhancing the curriculum with the introduction of the Welsh BAC at key stage 5 and then key stage 4 to all pupils.

There was an inspection in 2005, two years into the restructuring period, and the school was awarded three grade ones and four grade twos. The main post-inspection recommendation was to raise standards in key stage 3. This led to a whole school focus on assessment for learning in key stage 3, producing intensive assessment tasks that received a great deal of attention in lessons, and setting higher targets for key stage 3 pupils. By 2008, the impact of this strategy could be seen in the outcomes at the end of key stage 3. It was then decided to move the focus to key stage 4 so that end of key stage 4 outcomes corresponded to those at the end of key stage 3.

The SMT was aware that outcomes at the end of key stage 4 were uneven and depended on the cohort. A discussion was begun on whether the pastoral system was supporting pupils' progress in learning sufficiently. It was decided in 2009 to re-structure the role of heads of year to be heads of learning and progress that specialised in one key stage. Learning coaches were also trained to work with pupils individually, especially in key stage 4. Specific responsibility was given to every assistant headteacher for raising standards in one individual key stage and improving the systems for targeting and supporting pupils so that there is now more consistency from year to year.

Our story of improvement in key stage 4 began when the future of the school was assured. It is based on a strong desire to improve, raise and maintain standards for a large number of our pupils. Our key stage 4 pupils study between 10 and 12 GCSEs with some pupils following BTEC courses. An open choice is given to pupils in terms of their GCSE pathways.

One catalyst for improving the attainment of key stage 4 pupils was receiving the All Wales Core Data. The Core Data gave us the opportunity to see the school's performance more clearly against family, county and national data. With the core data, the whole-school self-evaluation and strategic planning process was strengthened with the main focus being on raising standards. Our ability as senior and middle managers to use data in a more sophisticated way was developed and this assisted the process of raising standards. To raise standards further more challenging school targets needed to be set if we were to reach the higher quartiles as a school in the FSM <10% group. The FSM benchmarking data was the most challenging data for the school and stimulated countless discussions on SMT level and with the local authority development officer. On the benchmarking graph in the core data set, the school was performing considerably higher than expected, but this was not always reflected in the quartiles. It was decided to compare our results with excellent schools in our local authority who were in the same FSM group and to challenge ourselves to attain similar standards in order to be able to aim for the higher quartiles.

From the school's core data and FFT data we could assess the school's strengths and weaknesses. It was decided to try to raise standards in key stage 4, focussing on the core subjects and the core subject indicator. It was felt strongly that most pupils at our school should attain at least a grade C and higher in the core subjects – almost as an educational entitlement – in order to lay a firm foundation for their next step, either in the world of work or in further or higher education. At this point our Welsh results were strong, science was improving and there was scope for raising the results in mathematics and English.

In an in-service training session in September 2009, the challenge was set before the school's teaching staff that we were raising our expectations and aiming for a L2 threshold of 85%+. The relevant assistant headteacher actively went about taking charge of the process of raising standards in key stage 4 and new strategies were introduced- these are set out in the Actions section below.

At the same time, a whole-school focus was placed on refining learning and teaching standards and ensuring consistency of high-quality teaching and learning across departments. A 5-step lesson structure was developed to promote the thinking cycle and higher literacy skills. In-service training was conducted on promoting thinking skills and the 'thinking cycle' with good practice being shared enthusiastically by various departments. A whole school monitoring process was already in place and this process was refined by the introduction of the grading of lesson observations and peer observation. His work built on a long-established tradition of developing methodology in the school through the work of the teaching and learning PLC, and on the commitment of staff to professional development. The performance management focus was adapted to be a whole-school focus, covering learning and teaching and raising standards.

The school also used the School Effectiveness Framework as a basis for school self-evaluation, training and discussion with a focus on middle management and the concept of distributive leadership. This provided a platform for further development of our whole school monitoring scheme and self-evaluation processes within departments.

Actions

2009- 2012

- A whole-school focus on raising standards in key stage 4, based on national core data.
- A member of the SMT takes charge of the key stage 4 raising standards process and establishes intervention processes in terms of consistent key stage 4 underachievers from year to year.
- Setting higher expectations for pupils and departments – using challenging targets.
- Promoting pupils' self-belief by discussing and encouraging – changing psychology – challenging negative thinking about potential and changing this into a positive attitude about learning and achievement.
- Underlining the value of aiming high for A*-C grades in all areas for pupils.
- Constant contact with parents, giving feedback and receiving support to target underachievement.
- Early targeting of underachievement in key stage 4 and earlier through tracking processes.
- A system of work sessions on Monday nights for underachievers with attendance of a learning coach.
- Intervention in departmental systems in order to ensure quality and opportunities for pupils to improve standards.
- Accountability of middle managers /heads of departments when discussing core data and benchmarking data.
- An emphasis on outputs, rather than on processes.
- Good quality lessons aiming for excellence – five structured steps, setting clear aims, emphasising the development of skills through the thinking cycle, with a firm plenary to confirm pupils' learning and progress.

- Performance management focusing on whole-school targets in terms of raising standards and learning and teaching.
- Whole-school monitoring system reviewed and strengthened focused on raising standards and improving quality.
- Changing the job description of heads of year – a new role encompassing learning and progress.
- Training learning coaches – defining a clear role that is focused on pupils' progress towards targets and assists them to overcome problems.
- Adopting a whole-school and department self-evaluation, based on the new common inspection framework.
- Detailed self-evaluation that is based on data and whole-school strategic planning, the main focus being on raising the standards of the whole school – the need for all Heads of Department to be accountable for the attainments of the department, analysing data in self-evaluations, and targeting improvement – detailed discussions on data, departmental self-evaluation and planning for the future between the head of department and the link manager from the SMT.

Outcomes

In 2010, the impact of the whole-school focus on the outcomes for level 2 threshold and level 2 threshold including Welsh/English and mathematics was seen and showed improvement. Of course, the challenge is maintaining continuous improvement. The same strategies and hard work were continued in 2011 and 2012, raising our whole-school targets by 2012 to 90%+ level 2 threshold.

Performance indicators for YG Gwyr KS4

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
L 2 including Welsh/English and mathematics	66	63	74	79	79	79
L2 threshold	72	77	75	86	83	88
Core subject indicator	51	65	62	74	79	79

In 2011 the school was judged to be an excellent school due to the:

- vision and commitment of the headteacher, the management team and all staff at the school to ensure the highest standards in all aspects of school life;
- high standards learners achieve, and the progress they make across the key stages;
- family ethos that protects the interests of all learners, whatever their background or ability;
- quality of the 14-19 partnerships which the school has developed;
- experiences of high quality, within the classroom, and the wide programme of extra-curricular activities; and
- high quality of the teaching, care, support and guidance.

The prospects for improvement for the school were deemed excellent due to:

- the leadership and vision of the headteacher, and the strong support she receives from the senior management team and all staff at the school;
- strong systems that exist for self-evaluation, monitoring learners' performance and planning for improvement; and
- the school's ability to choose and select the appropriate initiatives for developing the quality of teaching, training and management.

What are our prospects for the future? We are keeping to our target of 90% for the level 2 threshold and 80-85% for the level 2 threshold including Welsh/English and mathematics. We will continue to work systematically towards maintaining high quality learning experiences for our pupils in a stimulating teaching and learning environment.

Part Two: School improvement

Common tasks for schools at all stages of development

There is usually scope for most schools to improve to some extent and some need to improve more than others. When schools try to improve from unsatisfactory to adequate and then good, or when good schools want to become excellent, they may need to adopt different sets of strategies that match their different stages of development.

However, although there are different strategies for different stages, there are also some common tasks that all schools need to carry out at all stages of development. All schools need to:

- define the vision and strategic direction of the school clearly;
- establish and maintain an ethos and culture where improving standards for all learners is the main priority;
- ensure that improving teaching and assessment is seen as the key process contributing to improving and maintaining high standards;
- analyse performance data to identify specific areas that need improvement;
- implement a consistent and sustained focus on improving literacy and numeracy;
- have high expectations and make all staff, especially those in management roles, accountable for their areas of work;
- give governors a clear, understandable and honest analysis of how well the school is performing and encourage them to fulfil their role of challenging the school to do better; and
- deliver a curriculum that fully meets the needs of all learners.

Schools generally set out a **vision** statement that encapsulates their values and strategic objectives. Sometimes, vision statements state the obvious, are too vague, are cliché-ridden or do not give a clear enough steer for the work of the school. To be of value, vision statements must be meaningful and clearly understood by all involved – staff, pupils, parents, partners and the wider community. Successful schools have a vision that is communicated well and provides a strategic direction. In these schools, the vision permeates all aspects of the school's work and it is made manifest in what the school does.

In setting their vision and strategic direction, the best schools do not lose sight of their core business of ensuring that all **learners achieve** the standards they are capable of achieving. The school's ethos and culture should reflect this core purpose. Successful schools do not lose their focus on the need to improve standards. These schools do not just say this in their documentation and strap lines, but it is evident in all that the school does.

Improving **teaching** is key to improving and maintaining high standards. All schools, regardless of where they are on their journey, should place emphasis on discussing effective pedagogy and on improving teaching. In good or better schools, there is a high level of consistency in the quality of teaching, with nearly all lessons judged to be at least good. In schools moving from unsatisfactory to adequate, a minority of teachers do not plan well enough to meet the needs of all pupils and there is often a lack of challenge for the most able pupils. In good or better schools, a consistent and effective approach to **assessment** is a key feature. This usually involves the use of a consistent terminology about assessment which helps to reduce variation within the school. There is also a significant involvement of pupils in assessing their own work and that of their peers. Most staff provide high-quality oral and written feedback to pupils about what needs to be done to improve their work.

A consistent and sustained focus on **literacy** and **numeracy** is a priority for all schools. Successful schools understand the vital role that these two areas, especially literacy, play in providing access to the wider curriculum and in promoting better standards across the curriculum. They are clear about how literacy and numeracy can be developed in English or Welsh and in mathematics, and extended through planned and progressive opportunities in the rest of the curriculum. A well-developed strategy and close co-ordination are the key ingredients for making this a success.

Successful schools analyse **performance data** closely and in detail. These schools see data analysis as a means not only to assess the level of their performance, but to identify specific areas that need to be improved. The importance of analyses that compare the school's performance with that of similar schools or pupils' prior attainment need to be fully acknowledged by all staff.

Having **high expectations** of staff and pupils is a key part of the culture of a successful school. These expectations need to be made clear and understood. Staff undertaking management roles need to be sure that they know what their responsibilities are and what tasks they will be expected to undertake and to what standard. They need to be held **accountable** for what they do, through performance management processes and line management arrangements. The work of middle managers is often a weakness in schools, particularly in terms of variation in quality. These variations in the quality of middle management often result from weak management at senior level.

Governors have an important role to play in bringing about school improvement. In successful schools, governors understand what is meant by being a critical friend and do not just pay lip service to the role. Headteachers provide them with clear, understandable and honest analyses of how well the school is performing. This information is then used by governors to identify strengths and areas for improvement and to challenge the school to do better.

Successful schools have staff who think carefully about how to devise a **curriculum** that meets the needs of all learners. This is especially the case in key stage 4 and the sixth form where options are offered to meet the varying needs of pupils. To meet pupils' needs and interests fully, partnership working is required to ensure there is suitable

range of courses at the appropriate level. Successful schools also look carefully at their provision at key stage 3 and try to provide progression in pupils' learning from primary schools, develop the skills of literacy and numeracy, and ensure that pupils are prepared to choose wisely for key stage 4.

Moving from unsatisfactory to adequate

When a school is judged as being unsatisfactory in aspects of its work, it will need to adopt strategies that are in addition to those listed above. The key characteristic of the approach taken by a school in this stage of development is that it is largely directive and top-down, to deal quickly with the significant weaknesses identified. The aspects that need this urgent attention are likely to be:

- pupil behaviour and attendance;
- basic literacy skills;
- management structures;
- analysis and use of performance data;
- self-evaluation;
- performance management; and
- the ethos and reputation of the school.

Schools that are generally unsatisfactory usually have poor pupil **behaviour** or **attendance**. There is usually low-level disruption and there are often incidences of more serious misbehaviour. Attendance is much lower than it should be and usually actions to improve it have been ineffective. Improving both behaviour and attendance becomes a vital starting point to effect wider-scale improvements that cover all aspects of the school's work. Clear parameters for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour have to be introduced. This may lead to a short-term increase in exclusions, but this may be necessary to establish new boundaries of acceptability. The new expectations for behaviour need to be supported by a stepped and well-understood sanctions system, but this also needs to be complemented by a structured rewards system. The new expectations about behaviour are not going to work unless staff are made aware of what is and what is not acceptable behaviour and that they accept that they have to follow procedures consistently. For attendance, systems are needed to identify and monitor poor attenders, including identifying specific individuals and groups. Together with this, there need to be well-organised systems, for example for undertaking first-day response and for working closely with educational welfare officers and other agencies.

It is also likely that there will be significant deficiencies in pupils' **literacy skills.** A first step is to assess pupils' literacy skills so that there is a clear view about which individual pupils need immediate support. This support will probably involve intervention programmes. Equally important at this stage is to persuade staff that they can all contribute to improving pupils' literacy skills and that they start to plan for developing pupils' skills, for example by introducing a consistent whole-school approach. The process needs to be monitored and systems should be set up to evaluate how well pupils are progressing, especially those on intervention programmes.

In these schools, there is likely to be an ineffective **management structure** and there is probably a need to re-establish a senior leadership team and to define clear roles for those involved. Sometimes, the senior management team will not have the capacity to move the school forward and it will be necessary to co-opt other staff to form a larger and more talented team. The new senior management team needs to be complemented by a clear middle management structure for departments/faculties and pastoral teams, and a line manager system to improve communication and accountability.   All this needs to be underpinned by a meeting structure that is hierarchical and calendared. Meetings need to focus on standards and teaching and not be dominated by administrative matters. They should have clear agendas and a focus on actions to be taken.

The **analysis and use of performance data** are probably underdeveloped, inconsistent or superficial, and there are no systems to collect information to track pupils' progress or identify underachievement. At this stage, the system will probably only be focusing on broad indicators and staff will not yet be sufficiently familiar or confident with using data. It will be necessary to stress to all staff that it is comparisons with similar schools and prior attainment that are the most useful and that there should be no tolerance of weak performance. The process will need to involve analysing data at the level of the individual pupil and to aggregate these for individual departments and teachers. At this stage, the headteacher will more than likely need to undertake the initial analysis for the departments and to ensure that it is robust and critical. This will demonstrate to departments the type of analysis that is expected.

Analysing and using performance data is a start to establishing a **culture of self-evaluation**. Self-evaluation will also need to include the use of first-hand evidence of teaching and learning, based on a programme of lesson observations and book scrutiny. In the first instance, these are likely to be carried out by the senior leadership team and focus on meeting agreed requirements, for example in the use of lesson plans, the quality of pupil engagement, and the standard of behaviour. It is crucial for a new leadership team to arrive quickly at an overview of the quality of teaching across the school. This will need to be complemented by establishing effective **performance management arrangements** to focus on identifying and addressing under-performance.

The support of parents and of the community are essential requirements in the improvement process. If a school is generally unsatisfactory, its reputation with **parents** and the **local community** has probably already fallen and parents have started to move their children to other schools. A key priority is to start to regain the trust of parents and this may take some time and it will only be fully restored when standards are high. A useful starting point is to provide parents with high-quality information on the school's work and on the progress of their children. Their views on the school should be sought regularly. Senior managers need to be accessible and interested in parents' views as a necessary precursor to gaining their engagement.

Moving from adequate to good

In moving from adequate to good, once the features outlined above have been established, schools introduce a more collaborative approach to improvement. The strategies at this stage are likely to include:

- refining the use of performance data;
- distributing leadership responsibilities;
- further development of lesson observations;
- establishing working groups to look at aspects of school development;
- a peer observation system;
- learner voice; and
- improving the partnership with parents.

The systems set up to analyse data and to identify under-achievement will need to be refined so that they are used to set individual **pupil targets** and to **track progress**. The basis of this will be a tracking system to collect information on pupils' progress. The system needs to be common across the school although better departments may have developed their own systems in the absence of a common whole-school system. Staff will have to be trained and will need to know what type of information is needed, who enters the data and when. The information needs to be IT-based, should be accessible to all staff and presented in a straightforward form. It should focus on whether pupils are above, on or below target, and be complemented by well-defined procedures for dealing with pupil under-achievement. To work, the system depends on the school setting targets for pupils' achievement at the end of the year or key stage. The process of target setting should be based on a number of sources of comparative performance information. However, it should not just rely on a quantitative analysis and should be consider other qualitative information and result in setting targets that are achievable but challenging.

As the management structure settles and staff become used to their roles and responsibilities, the next stage is to develop **distributed leadership**. This could involve giving members of the senior leadership team more responsibility for key whole-school matters, including some that would have been the responsibility of the headteacher. The approach should also extend to providing opportunities for other managers to take on aspects of whole-school tasks, or to join the senior leadership team on a temporary basis and for a specific task. To make this work, managers taking on these roles need time, and they need to feel confident that the headteacher trusts them to do a good job. However, there also needs to be a method of ensuring accountability through frequent monitoring and evaluation, but this does not need to be intrusive or heavy-handed.

By this stage, **lesson observations** will have become a regular and accepted feature of school life. The next stage is to extend this approach so that it involves middle managers working alongside the senior leadership team in observation programmes. The time is now right to shift the focus from compliance with school systems to concentrate on the impact of teaching on learning and standards. This is likely to

require moving away from a checklist approach to one that is more reflective. A further shift would be to start a **peer observation** system and invite staff to take part. It may be possible to allow those staff who volunteer to set up and run the system themselves with minimal input from senior leaders.

To develop distributed leadership and staff engagement in the improvement process, it is useful to establish **working groups** on aspects of school development. The topics need to be chosen carefully so that they are genuine matters that need to be addressed and could include, for example, the development of a common system for assessment and reporting. Other possible topics that are likely to have a beneficial effect on school improvement at this stage are: developing thinking skills, teaching personal and social education, and provision for healthy eating and physical fitness, and education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

Now is the time to start to listen more carefully to the **learner voice**. There should be a proper response to school council suggestions so that pupils understand that their views are taken seriously and lead to action. Other groups could be established, especially those concerned with healthy eating and the environment. It is not enough to rely on the school council to provide views on school life and other methods are needed to gain a rounded picture of what pupils think about their school. Regular surveys are one way to do this and another useful strategy is to set up focus groups of pupils to consider issues that affect them.

Once parents become more confident in the school, the next stage is to develop the partnership with **parents** further. Any information sent to parents should be of high quality and provide detail and substance on the school's work and on the progress of their children. As with pupils, systems should be established to obtain the views of parents about the school.

Moving from good to excellent

Schools that become excellent have developed a collaborative, open and inclusive approach based on high expectations, and a high degree of consistency in the way all aspects of their work are carried out. The strategies that are likely to feature include:

- the development of higher-order literacy, numeracy and thinking skills;
- pastoral managers having a responsibility for standards;
- a well-established culture of lesson observations;
- staff engagement in enquiry and reflection; and
- a significant role for learner voice.

At this stage, the focus on improving skills becomes much sharper with a focus on developing **pupils' high-order literacy, numeracy and thinking skills**. This needs to be something that all staff are involved in and it needs to be based on a common understanding of what they are expected to do. Those who co-ordinate the work have to be clear about their responsibilities and all staff should know what is required of them

in their teaching and assessment. The planning for developing the skills is sophisticated and specific. It involves a well-understood distinction between teaching and applying the skills on the one hand and merely providing opportunities to 'cover' the skills on the other. Staff should know when they are giving pupils opportunities to expand their skills or to practise them in new contexts. Opportunities for skills development will feature in schemes of work and lesson plans, but will say more than merely indicating that a skill has featured in the lesson. Instead it will say how specific aspects of skills can be developed and improved. The approach is strategic and a well-known priority for all staff, with proper procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work.

Pastoral managers broaden the range of their responsibilities beyond the welfare of pupils and have responsibility for standards as well. This becomes the key aspect of their role and their main priority. They are well placed to monitor pupil progress across the curriculum and to identify patterns of under-achievement. Their work is integrated with that of subject leaders and they work together towards achieving the same goal. Together with class teachers and subject leaders, they are closely involved in providing learners with a coherent package of intervention strategies.

By now the culture of **lesson observations** is well established. The focus is firmly on standards and on judging teaching and learning by the extent to which they are effective. This means that the focus is on the progress pupils make in lessons. It is also likely that observations will be thematic, for example in evaluating new procedures or aspects of work, such as the quality of tutorial periods. Well-organised and routine book scrutinies are in place and focus on the quality of the work pupils are producing as well as compliance with whole-school practices.

The standard of **assessment** across the school is now of a consistently high quality and all staff follow agreed procedures. In particular, assessment ensures that pupils have a secure understanding of the criteria being used to assess their work and receive high-quality oral and written feedback. Staff know what is expected of them when providing feedback and approaches show little variation across the school. It is well understood that the main purpose of assessment is to help pupils know what they need to do to improve. A key part of this process is asking pupils to assess their own work and that of their peers, in accordance with well-understood criteria.

Many staff are engaged in **enquiry and reflection** focused on collaborative activities to improve teaching and learning. All staff can take part and outcomes are disseminated widely through professional learning communities and networking with teachers in other schools

At this stage, the use of the **learner voice** is well established. In addition to systematically gathering their views and responding to them, excellent schools give pupils a significant role in school improvement. This can mean that they make a purposeful and planned contribution to the development of the school improvement plan, for example by having opportunities to be consulted on its main priorities. In many excellent schools, pupils take part in the appointments process by interviewing candidates both informally and formally. Increasingly, excellent schools provide pupils

with opportunities to take part in the lesson observations. This is usually after a specification of their role and training in how to carry out observations and how to provide suitable feedback.

Leadership in the case study schools

The case studies, although detailed, do not always make explicit the characteristics or personal qualities of the headteachers of the schools. But while collecting the case studies, it became clear to inspectors that the headteachers of these schools played a key role in turning strategies into realities. The common qualities of these successful headteachers can be categorised broadly as follows:

Resilience This is the ability to deal with setbacks, disappointments and problems by 'bouncing back' and keeping the improvement journey on track.

Determination Progress is not always smooth and there are likely to be difficult times where doubts will emerge and problems may appear insurmountable. But it is here that successful headteachers show their determination in seeing through potential crises and keeping a clear view of where they need to go.

Optimism Leaders need to maintain the strong belief that improvement is possible and that all the resources at their disposal can be used to achieve this. They believe and expect that things will improve, even through difficult times.

Humility The 'ego' of the leader should not distract from the common core purpose of the school. This requires leaders to be relatively humble, modest and respectful of the opinions of others. The "hero-head" approach is less effective in the long term than the collaborative leadership model.

Openness Successful leaders do not stop learning and they have an attitude of being open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. If they see something that can improve their work, they are willing to try it.

Risk taking It is difficult to make some improvements without taking some risks. Successful leaders recognise this and are adept at identifying and managing risks and, on occasion, taking a chance on a potentially productive activity if they can do so without putting learners at risk.

Admitting to being wrong At times, successful leaders need to recognise that they can be wrong and need to be confident enough to admit this and cut their losses as soon as possible.

Engendering confidence   The main resource in any school is its staff. Successful leaders get the best out of their staff by listening to their views and developing staff confidence.

Core business   Successful leaders are clear that their core business is ensuring pupils achieve the best they can. They keep a consistent focus on this and test new developments or initiatives against what it can do for the core business.

Modelling behaviours   Successful leaders often establish a culture where staff go the extra mile because they are treated with care and compassion. When these leaders ask their staff to do things, they always explain why it is important and often model how it should be done.

Secondary school improvement journey diagram

Common characteristics across all categories:

- Define in clear, unambiguous and meaningful terms the **vision and strategic direction** of the school
- Establish and maintain an ethos and culture where **improving standards** for all pupils is the main priority and function of the school
- Implement a consistent and sustained focus on improving learners' **literacy** skills
- Make all staff, especially those in management roles, **accountable** for their areas of work
- Make **improving teaching** the key process that can contribute to improving standards and maintaining high standards
- Define the role and contribution of **governors** by providing them with clear, understandable and honest analyses of how well the school is performing and encouraging them in their role of challenging the school to do better
- Deliver a curriculum that fully meets the needs of all pupils, including a wide range of options at key stage 4 and post-16 together with partner institutions

Unsatisfactory to Adequate	Adequate to Good	Good to excellent
Take a **directive, top-down** approach to dealing with identified shortcomings	Start to develop a more **collaborative approach** to school improvement	Collaborative, open and inclusive approach firmly established based on **high expectation** and featuring a high degree of **consistency** in all aspects of the school's work
Focus on improving **behaviour and attendance**: • establish clear parameters for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour • set up a rewards and sanctions system • make staff aware of what is and what is not acceptable behaviour • identify poor attenders and establish systems to monitor attendance, for first-day response, work with EWOs	Further develop performance data systems to set individual **pupil targets** and to **track progress**: • staff trained to understand and use the system • common system used across the school • information presented in a straightforward way • information available to all staff • IT systems used • well-defined procedures for dealing with pupil under-achievement	All staff are actively involved in developing **high order pupils' literacy, numeracy and thinking skills**, based on: • a common understanding of requirements and responsibilities • planning co-ordinated opportunities and monitoring progress
Start on improving pupils' **literacy skills**: • assess pupils' literacy skills • provide catch-up for those with low-level skills • ensure all teachers plan for developing pupils' skills • set up systems to monitor pupils' progress	Develop a **distributive leadership** approach: • give members of SLT more responsibility for key whole-school matters • provide opportunities for other managers to take on aspects of whole-school task or to join SLT on a temporary basis and for a specific task	**Pastoral managers** have a responsibility for standards by: • making this the key aspect of their role • monitoring pupil progress across the curriculum • being involved in any intervention strategies

Set up clear **management structures**: • establish senior leadership team. • define clear roles for senior managers • establish middle management structure for departments/faculties and pastoral teams • set up link manager system • establish meeting structure	Further develop **lesson observations** by: • including middle managers alongside SLT in any observation programmes • shifting focus from compliance to school systems to a focus on the impact of teaching on learning and standards	Culture of **lesson observations** firmly established with a firm focus on standards and on improving teaching and learning
Set up systems to **analyse and use performance data**: • stress importance of comparative analysis (to similar schools and prior attainment) • analyse data at pupil level and aggregate to department. • provide departments with robust and critical analysis of performance	Establish **working groups** to look at aspects of school development, for example: • assessment and reporting procedures; • teaching PSE • healthy eating and physical fitness • ESDGC	**Assessment** consistently involves: • pupils having a secure understanding of assessment criteria • high-quality oral and written feedback • well-understood advice on what needs to be done to improve the standard of work • pupils assessing their own work and that of their peers
Start to introduce a **culture of self-evaluation** based on data analysis and lesson observations by SLT, including a focus on: • meeting agreed requirements, for example in observations lesson plans, pupil engagement and behaviour	Invite staff to become part of a **peer observation** system. Allow volunteers to set up and run the system with minimal input from SLT.	Many staff are engaged in **enquiry and reflection** focused on collaborative activities to improve teaching and learning. All staff can take part and outcomes are disseminated. This includes professional learning communities and networking with teachers in other schools.
Establish effective **performance management arrangements** that focus mainly on identifying and addressing under-performance	Develop **learner voice** by: • ensuring there is a response to school council suggestions • establishing other groups such as SNAG or Eco-committee • developing focus groups to consider issues • conducting regular surveys of pupils' views	**Learner voice** has a significant role in school improvement, for example by: • contributing to the development of the school improvement plan • taking part in appointments process • taking part in the lesson observation system
Focus on establishing or restoring reputation of the school with **parents** and the local **community** by: • providing high quality information on the school's work and on the progress of their children • regularly seeking their views on the school	Develop the partnership with **parents** by: • providing high quality information on the school's work and on the progress of their children • regularly seeking their views on the school	

How schools can use the report

Evaluation

Schools could use all the available evidence that they have to locate themselves on the continuum described in the improvement journey diagram. The detail in the diagram can be used to highlight which specific aspects of the common characteristics or the particular stage are done well and those need further attention. This could involve identifying the areas that need action and those that need further investigation or a significant change of approach.

Planning

This report can be used to identify possible courses of action and inform improvement planning. It identifies key factors that have worked in schools across Wales which should be addressed to ensure sustainable improvement. If the improvement journey diagram has been used as an evaluation tool, the areas highlighted for attention can form the priorities for strategic planning. The improvement journey diagram outlines a stepped approach for moving towards excellence, while identifying basic needs in terms of 'common characteristics across all stages'. The improvement journey diagram can be used as a prompt for the school to engage in collaborative work and to bring about systemic change.

Communication

The improvement journey diagram can help leaders and staff to work together more effectively and can provide a shared language and understanding. The improvement journey diagram provides a concise guide and source of reference. This can be used to help staff to see the overall strategic thrust or 'big picture' of what is happening in the school and give coherence and purpose to self-evaluation and improvement planning activities.

Role of governors

The improvement journey diagram can provide a clear overview of the school improvement processes that governors could use to fulfil their role. In particular, it will give them some strategic oversight and could be used to help them develop and improve their role in challenging the school as well as indicating where their support might be needed. The improvement journey diagram has enough detail to provide a clear focus on the strategies that can work in securing improvement.

Professional development

The improvement journey diagram could be used as a handy source for planning the professional development of staff. Needs could be identified in relation to the improvement journey diagram and the improvement journey diagram could be used as a reference point for any setting any personal, group or whole-school professional development targets. It may also be useful in supporting the process on making internal or new appointments.