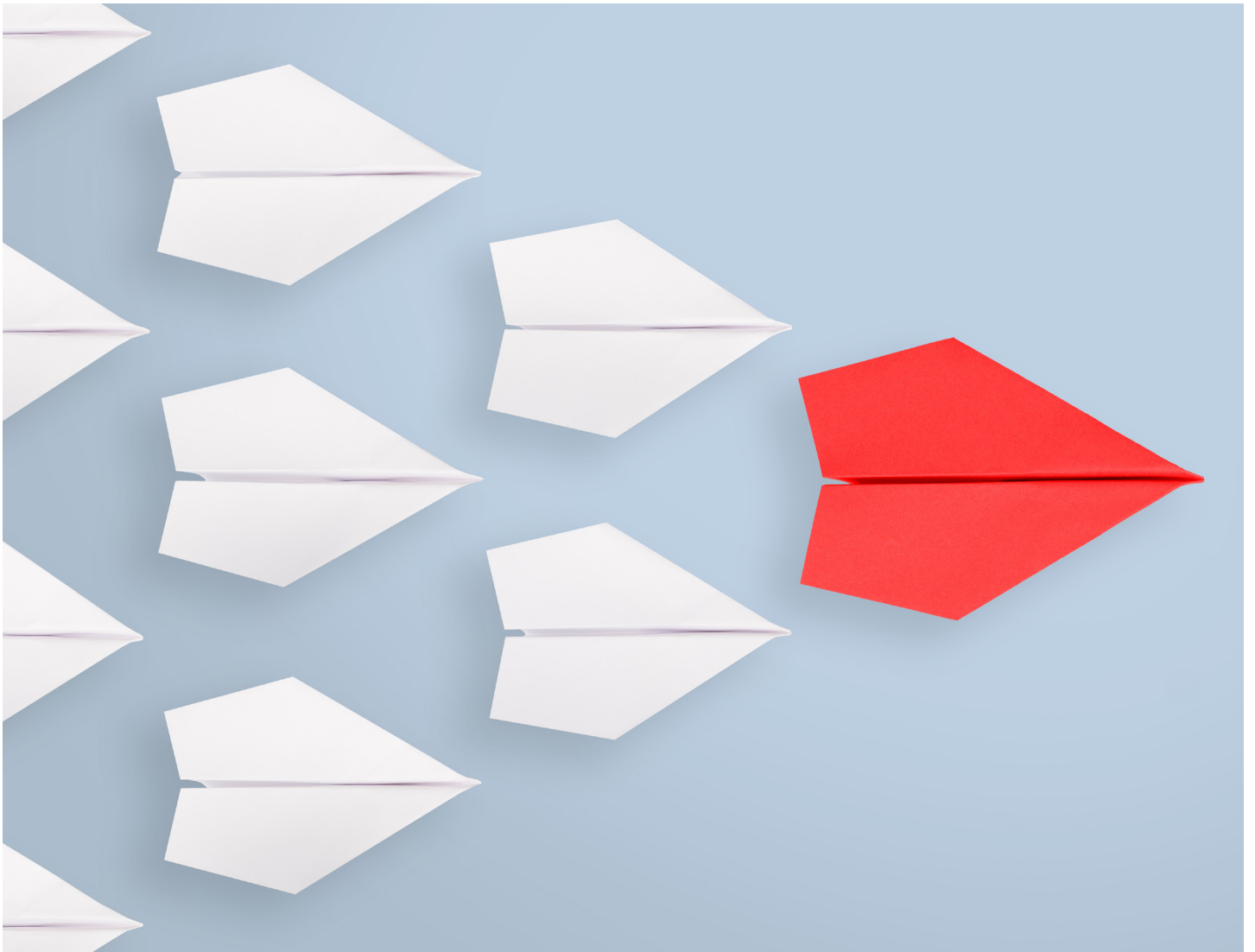


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# Leadership development – case studies of professional learning for school leadership

March 2020



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Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

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<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Main findings</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1 The range, suitability and effectiveness of local, regional and national professional learning for leadership</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2 Case studies</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Evidence base</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Information about the case study schools</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>37</b>

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## Introduction

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This report is written in response to a request for advice in the Minister's remit letter to Estyn for 2018-2019. The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools and may be of interest to local authorities, regional consortia, the National Academy for Educational Leadership and others.

The report includes detailed case studies of the professional learning opportunities provided for staff in nine schools across Wales. The case studies show:

- how leadership development can drive improvements in teaching and learning
- how schools can develop leaders to support local and national initiatives
- how schools can enable middle leaders to improve standards and provision in their schools
- the positive impact of coaching and mentoring
- the positive impact of school-to-school support in developing leadership capacity
- how schools can evaluate the impact of professional learning and leadership development

The report also provides a brief chronology of the various strategies and approaches to support leadership development over recent years and an overview of a range of such professional learning on offer. The report considers the professional learning available through formal external programmes and also where schools take on the responsibility for developing leaders more informally individually or in groups.

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## Background

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The educational landscape in Wales has undergone significant change over recent years. Estyn's annual reports and thematic reports, such as [Twelve secondary school improvement journeys](#) (2013), [Best practice in leadership development in schools](#) (2015) and [Leadership and primary school improvement](#) (2016) have emphasised that leadership and the development of leadership capacity in schools are fundamental to improving school performance.

A report by The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017) published in 2017 echoes Estyn's view that leadership development should be a prime driver of the Welsh education strategy. It recommends the continued pursuit of a coherent national leadership strategy, and the development of leadership standards. The report stresses that school leaders must focus on educational leadership and on developing their schools as learning organisations and to ensure the "readiness" of staff to deliver the new curriculum (OECD, 2017, p.8).

In response, 'Our national mission' included 'Inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards' as one of its four enabling objectives, and states that 'promoting and supporting effective, collaborative leadership will therefore be central to our reforms' (Welsh Government, 2017a, pp.3, 28). In May 2018, the Welsh Government established a National Academy for Educational Leadership. Revised professional standards for teachers and leaders became mandatory in September 2018. In June 2019, the Welsh Government launched an automated survey as part of a bespoke Schools as Learning Organisations package for schools in Wales.

A variety of provision for developing school leadership has been available across Wales in recent times. The chronology below outlines the various approaches to developing leadership since 2005.

- National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) has been a mandatory requirement for headship since 2005. Since this time, the qualification has undergone a variety of changes.
- Prior to 2009, headteachers appointed before the mandatory requirement for NPQH had access to the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH).
- Prior to 2009, newly appointed headteachers had access to the Professional Headship Induction Programme (PHIP).
- Prior to 2012 and the establishment of the regional consortia to deliver school improvement services, local authorities offered training for middle and senior leaders.
- In 2012, regional consortia were commissioned to undertake school improvement responsibilities on behalf of local authorities, aiming to secure a more consistent approach.
- In 2015, the Welsh Government published a 'Leadership Milestone Matrix'.
- In July 2016, the Cabinet Secretary announced the creation of a National

Academy for Educational Leadership to support and develop leadership practice across the education system in Wales.

- In September 2017, the Welsh Government published 'Education in Wales: Our national mission' (2017a).
- In November 2017, Wales launched its version of the OECD's Schools as Learning Organisations model (Welsh Government, 2017c). There are seven dimensions in the Welsh Schools as Learning Organisation model, the seventh of which is 'modelling and growing learning leadership'.
- In 2017, the Welsh Government published its new professional standards for teaching and leadership (Welsh Government, 2017b). The standards are intended to be developmental, with a common framework covering the whole of a teacher's career from qualified teacher status, to highly effective practice including leadership. The professional teaching standards include a focus for all teachers on leadership, and the formal professional leadership standards encompass all five of the teaching standards.
- In November 2018, the Welsh Government launched its National Approach to Professional Learning.

As well as the above formal strategies, there have been many other initiatives that aimed at providing local support for school leadership in Wales, and including initiatives to facilitate school-to-school support. Since 2010, schools have been encouraged to improve outcomes for learners by sharing practice both within school and with other schools. Since 2014, there has been a greater impetus at school, local and national level to support collaborative working and the development of a self-improving system.

Inspection evidence suggests that, since 2010, there are shortcomings in leadership in just over a quarter of schools overall. In particular, the leadership in around half of secondary schools inspected since 2017 has important aspects that require improvement. The shortcomings arise usually because these school leaders do not evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and learning experiences well enough to ensure that pupils make good progress. Where leadership is excellent, across all sectors, leaders ensure a high standard of teaching and provision for learners, whatever their needs.

The main findings of [Best practice in leadership development](#), identified that '*where schools are not successful in developing a strong leadership culture, headteachers do not focus well enough on improving the quality of teaching and do not provide appropriate professional development activities to help staff build on their existing skills and knowledge. Many local authorities and regional consortia have often been too slow in identifying this as a weakness in schools and have not provided effective guidance to headteachers to help them improve in these important areas*' (Estyn, 2015, p.4).

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## Main findings

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- 1 The developing policy agenda relating to ‘Our National Mission’ (Welsh Government, 2017a) offers a coherent structure for planning leadership development and for encouraging collaboration between the different tiers of the Welsh education system. The infrastructure to support leadership development has improved, for example through the creation of National Academy for Educational Leadership, better joint working between regional consortia, refinements made to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and the creation of professional standards. Higher education institutions are contributing more to programmes that support and develop school leaders. Work to develop professional enquiry and research practices is strengthening though at the early stages of development.
- 2 The involvement of schools in the process of co-constructing national policy regarding leadership development is a strength of the current arrangements. This partnership enables school leaders to have a better understanding of national policy, and to work towards meeting national strategies in their schools. Schools with highly effective leaders often provide valuable support to other schools. A very few experienced headteachers engage in programmes to further improve their skills and those of others, but provision for this aspect of work is underdeveloped.
- 3 Nearly all schools have access to or can provide professional learning for their staff and leaders. However, the quality and equity of access to professional learning opportunities are inconsistent. Support and practical guidance for school leaders on how to plan and implement improvement priorities varies too much. This is one reason why the quality of leadership is variable in schools in Wales, particularly in secondary schools. In particular, the professional learning offer for school leaders has not focused well enough on supporting them to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. There is a strong suite of materials available for supporting school leaders to coach and mentor staff but these are not shared effectively enough and, as a result, a minority of leaders do not access these useful resources.
- 4 Most providers of professional learning have arrangements to evaluate professional learning programmes or events. In the last few years, these evaluations have focused more precisely on finding out which aspects of the learning have been most beneficial to participants. Despite these improvements, many providers fail to evaluate the longer-term impact of professional learning on leadership.

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## Recommendations

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**To improve the provision and quality of leadership development, regional consortia and other providers of professional learning should work together to consider:**

- R1 How to increase the focus on developing leaders' ability to bring about improvement in the quality of teaching and learning
- R2 How best to evaluate the impact of leadership development programmes over time



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## 1 The range, suitability and effectiveness of local, regional and national professional learning for leadership

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### The range of provision

- 5 Until the inception of National Academy for Educational Leadership in 2018, most leadership development opportunities on offer were not subject to national scrutiny or endorsement. The exception was the mandatory National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), which was authorised by the Welsh Government. One of the functions of the National Academy for Educational Leadership is to set clear criteria for endorsement, and it expects a provider's model for each programme to meet specific criteria<sup>1</sup>.
- 6 In addition to the NPQH, the Welsh Government has worked with regional consortia to develop a national 'Leadership learning pathway'. This is a structured continuum and programmes are available across Wales at each point on the pathway. Joint working across the regions has led to the development of other programmes, initially for senior and middle leaders. These programmes have now become part of the national pathway and have acquired official endorsement from the National Academy for Educational Leadership. The design of national pathway programmes has built on the previous offer from the four regions and has benefited from input from higher education institutions. The current national leadership pathway offer includes the following programmes:
- National middle leaders development programme
  - Aspiring headteacher development programme
  - Newly appointed and acting headteacher programme
  - Experienced headteacher programme
- 7 A variety of contributors, including regional consortia, local authorities and schools, offer a range of other professional learning opportunities for school leaders. In addition, bodies such as the diocesan authorities and professional associations such as the Association for School and College Leaders (ASCL) and National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) as well as various commercial organisations and higher education institutions also offer support and provision for leaders and aspiring leaders.
- 8 Regional consortia and higher education institutions are beginning to work together to develop accredited programmes to support further leadership development. These programmes include aspects of professional enquiry and research approaches, which enhance the provision available. For example, regional consortia now have a common offer for leadership development that provides for all stages of the national leadership pathway. This includes opportunities for teachers aspiring to headship or deputy headship. Across each region, the schools that contribute to

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<sup>1</sup> For details of the criteria for endorsement follow this [link](#) (National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales, 2018).

these programmes are usually drawn from those that have experience of providing support to other schools. The names of these school groupings vary between regional consortia, but include ‘Hub schools’, ‘Learning Network schools’, and ‘Lead Support schools’. This approach, where school leaders support each other, enables school leaders to evaluate aspects of each other’s work and encourages other forms of peer-to-peer support.

- 9 While there is increasing commonality across Wales, the provision for leadership development remains quite complex and varies too much in availability and quality as a result of regional and local differences, including differences in demography and geography. Some staff and leaders have a limited choice of professional learning opportunities, particularly in rural areas. What is on offer does not always suit the needs of leaders in small schools and of ‘teaching’ headteachers, for example.

### Provision for senior leaders

- 10 Since 2018, and the introduction of the national ‘Experienced headteacher programme’, there have been increased professional learning opportunities for experienced headteachers. However, existing headteachers still report that support to strengthen the leadership of teaching has not been given a high enough priority.
- 11 Many experienced headteachers remember the strengths of past programmes, such as the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) and the Professional Headship Induction Programme (PHIP). They recall benefits of these programmes, including providing a safe space to grow their understanding of school leadership, and the balance between accountability and autonomy and between collaboration and improving one’s own school.
- 12 Informal networks often play a role in enabling headteachers to explore new ways to challenge and develop their leadership skills. Although courses such as LPSH focused on developing headteachers’ understanding of important aspects of leadership, such as different leadership styles, they did not provide leaders with in-depth guidance on improving the quality of teaching and learning in their schools.
- 13 For senior leaders and aspiring senior leaders, provision falls broadly into the following groups:
  - Formal national programmes – part of the national programme operating in a local context, for example the NPQH or the recently launched ‘Newly appointed and acting headteachers programme’, which provides accreditation through higher education institutions. The latter draws on programmes previously available through the regional consortia. Many headteachers report that NPQH is considered ‘a rite of passage’ but has not always led to participants applying for headship. Historically, there have been too few opportunities for senior leaders who wish to deepen and develop their leadership skills but do not wish to progress to headship. This gap in provision is being addressed through the ‘Professional learning pathway’, which identifies suitable programmes for middle and senior leaders who wish to develop their coaching, mentoring and leadership skills.

- Across each region, senior leaders have opportunities to participate in school-based ‘peer enquiry’ or ‘peer review’. These activities vary in nature, but generally involve participation in a small team visit to another school, and to consider a particular aspect of the host school’s work. These arrangements offer valuable opportunities for leaders to observe practice in a different context, but there is generally no follow-up dialogue to consider how these visits might support or influence practice in participants’ own schools. Overall, there is little evidence that participants involved with this collaborative work evaluate the difference that it makes to their schools.

### Provision for middle leaders

- 14 Provision to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding of middle leaders is the most established type of leadership development across all providers. This provision also attracts the highest number of participants. Most development opportunities mirror the offer for aspiring senior leaders, and include opportunities to carry out a school-based enquiry. For the most part, these are jointly delivered by lead schools with input from strategic lead officers or challenge advisers. In the most effective cases, there are concurrent opportunities to put this learning into practice with the support of the participant’s school.
- 15 Middle leadership is often a weakness, particularly in underperforming secondary schools. A third of the secondary schools currently causing concern have recommendations to improve the work of middle leaders. This suggests that, despite the popularity of these programmes, the professional learning arrangements to support middle leaders are not effective.

### Provision for other leaders

- 16 Regional consortia have responded to an identified gap in provision for teaching assistants and support staff. They have recently begun work on the newly devised Development Pathway for Teaching Assistants. This builds on existing programmes to develop the skills of Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA).

### Informal opportunities for leadership development

- 17 Formal or organised programmes are not the only opportunities available for teachers and leaders to develop their leadership skills. Local authorities and consortia also often offer opportunities for leaders to take on roles that promote school-to-school working. These include taking responsibility for working groups, such as school improvement group co-ordinator in the Central South Consortium, or Cluster lead in the GwE (North Wales) region.
- 18 In addition to long-term development opportunities, each region offers a number of short, face-to-face training days linked to education reform. These one-off events often feature objectives that are too broad and unspecific, such as ‘to develop leadership’ or ‘to extend leadership skills’.
- 19 Nearly all local authorities offer leadership support for new headteachers. A few continue to provide their own bespoke leadership development programmes. The headteachers that engage with these programmes say that they have benefited

from them. However, the impact of this work on improving leadership is too variable. Across Wales, many schools continue to engage with external providers for leadership support. The quality of this support is not consistently good, nor is it always based well enough on evidence of good practice

- 20 Many school leaders report that the most useful professional learning they have experienced has taken place within their own schools. This is especially true where the school has strong and established leadership cultures, systems for leadership development, and distributed leadership opportunities early in teachers' careers. The case studies in this report for Clase Primary School and Cardiff High School exemplify the typical characteristics of successful leadership development cultures.

### Effectiveness of provision

- 21 Through more consistent joint working and planning between professional learning lead officers in regional consortia, opportunities have improved for school leaders to participate in both formal and informal learning programmes and experiences.
- 22 Professional learning for leadership development generally includes appropriate content and practical support. For example, themes explored in middle leadership programmes typically include planning for improvement, performance management, and the use of data and target setting. For aspiring senior leaders, there is a greater focus on setting strategic direction and on evaluation and accountability. Locally-developed programmes usually also include helpful contributions from leaders from other successful schools. However, generally these programmes do not focus well enough on developing middle leaders' ability to improve the quality of teaching and learning at phase, departmental and whole-school level.
- 23 The regions provide a generally appropriate range of leadership development opportunities. However, these are not always based on a thorough analysis of the strengths and areas for development identified for school leadership in a particular region, and as a result the opportunities do not always meet local needs or focus well enough on the most important aspects of leadership in need of development.
- 24 There is a strong suite of materials available to support school leaders to coach and mentor staff. For example, the Welsh Government 'Workforce development' training materials on mentoring and coaching have been used well in a few schools. The case study from Greenfield School in this report shows how the school used coaching and mentoring to develop a culture of professional learning and to strengthen the school's leadership capacity.
- 25 Most providers consider participant evaluations at the end of a professional learning programme or event. However, providers do not take a longer term view, beyond the end of the programme. This has two implications. First, the course provider cannot easily evaluate which aspects of their provision have been most helpful. Second, they cannot pinpoint the extent to which the content and delivery of the programme have enabled leaders to use their new skills.

## 2 Case studies from schools that have improved their leadership development provision

### **Case study 1: Llanfaes Community Primary School - an 'outward-looking' approach to building leadership capacity**

#### **Context and background**

Llanfaes Community Primary School has a well-established and effective senior leadership team. The headteacher provides a very good professional role model. She is an associate of the National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales and is a mentor for several new or acting headteachers across Powys. In addition, the headteacher is Chair of the Education through Regional Working (ERW) Headteacher Reference Board and she supports schools across the consortium region. The deputy headteacher leads the school's pioneer work on curriculum development.

There is a positive and professional working relationship between all members of staff at the school. Leaders prioritise professional learning for all staff as an 'entitlement', and they ensure a sharp focus on pupils' wellbeing and the standards they achieve. Well-planned opportunities for staff to develop their knowledge and skills through a wide range of activities relate closely to their personal and professional needs, as well as to national priorities. As a curriculum pioneer school, staff share successful approaches to teaching and learning regularly with each other and with colleagues in other schools.

#### **Strategy and activity**

The headteacher is proactive in seeking professional learning opportunities, that challenge staff as individuals and collectively as a team, to question and improve their practice. For example, several teachers have undertaken the ERW middle leadership course, which links directly to their performance management objectives, the professional standards for leadership (Welsh Government, 2017b) and the school's improvement priorities. This course has helped staff to lead whole-school initiatives effectively, for instance in Welsh and digital competence, and to develop their knowledge and skills of how to carry out a systematic enquiry into their practice. In addition, the school's involvement in regional and national working, providing support for other schools and presenting at ERW network events, means that nearly all staff have developed and shared their expertise with others. As a result, the school is building its leadership capacity at all levels.

Leaders have made good use of the school's involvement in curriculum reform and its inspection as an opportunity for all staff to review the school's pedagogical approaches and to develop their knowledge and understanding of curriculum planning. For instance, staff have considered the four core

purposes of the new curriculum carefully when addressing inspection recommendation ‘to implement the principles and practice of the foundation phase more consistently’. As a consequence, leaders and staff identified the need to develop better opportunities for pupils in key stage 2 to seek and enjoy challenge, to develop problem solving, creative and critical thinking, and to take responsibility for their own learning.

To support this development and other whole-school improvements, leaders have targeted resources, such as the Education Improvement Grant (EIG), to provide groups of staff with release time twice a term. In these ‘collaborative sessions’, staff share expertise and work together on improving aspects of teaching and learning identified in the school’s improvement plan. For instance, a group of staff, who requested to work together, visited other schools to observe how they extend foundation phase principles, such as using enhanced provision in key stage 2. Subsequently, they used these ‘collaborative sessions’ to undertake further research and to work with the local authority adviser for the foundation phase and the ERW leader of learning.

Recently, leaders have reviewed the school’s timetable for teachers’ planning, assessment and preparation time, to enable teams to carry on their ‘collaborative sessions’ on a weekly basis. This has led to greater professional dialogue between staff, increased innovation and regular reflection on the effectiveness of the new approaches being trialled. A notable benefit has been cross-phase discussions, where key stage 2 staff have drawn on the expertise of the foundation phase leader. As a result, key stage 2 staff have supported pupils successfully to plan their own topics. Pupils have transformed the learning environment to include ‘challenge zones’ in every classroom. Over a two-week period, pupils across the school enjoying working on independent challenges in these zones, which encourages them to apply their literacy, numeracy, ICT, problem-solving and creative skills independently.

### **Impact on leadership, provision and standards**

The school uses a wide range of professional learning opportunities to support staff development effectively, so that it impacts positively on the quality of teaching and pupils’ standards. Its outward-facing approach, for example through school-to-school collaboration, and involvement in regional and national networks, means that all teachers and learning support assistants have opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills.

Leaders have been successful in creating a culture of continuous improvement, where staff take responsibility for pupil outcomes and are comfortable with the element of ‘innovation’. Within a supportive environment, staff at all levels lead professional discussions to review and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Well-embedded systems for monitoring and evaluating provision and pupil standards mean that leaders can trust staff to innovate and to reflect thoroughly on the impact of their innovations, as individuals and in teams.

The headteacher's involvement in committees and groups at a regional and national level has helped to challenge leaders' own thoughts and perceptions. This has supported them to gain an understanding of system-wide reform in education in Wales. Visits to other countries, such as Canada, have helped leaders to become reflective and to make informed decisions, based on best practice internationally. This helps to ensure that:

- the school takes good account of national priorities in its work
- staff develop an informed perspective on important educational issues
- leaders have the confidence to do what is in the best interests of pupils

## **Case study 2: Ysgol Bryn Deva – investing in the professional development of all staff**

### **Context and background**

The school invests in staffing, and in ensuring that staff are well-qualified and trained to lead areas of improvement across the school. For the past four years, staff at various levels have undertaken professional learning for leadership that has resulted in improvements in standards and provision.

In June 2015, the headteacher undertook GwE leadership training for experienced headteachers. The training had a positive impact on distributed leadership within the school. In September 2015, the school re-wrote its core-aims following the publication of Successful Futures, (Donaldson, 2015). The school established a range of projects aimed at improving the curriculum. The headteacher placed a high priority on enabling all staff to contribute to leading initiatives and put in place effective arrangements to develop leaders and staff at all levels. The staff leading these projects had undertaken relevant professional learning and development.

The headteacher created an ethos that empowered staff to take proportionate risks in planning. For example, they did not always know exactly where newly-introduced learning activities might lead. The school was mindful that any changes to the curriculum should arise from needs identified through its self-evaluation activities and focus primarily on improving pupils' outcomes. Improvement projects followed the same format that consisted of planning, preparation, implementation and evaluation

Step 1: Identify the issue and specific targets for improvement – this arises from self-evaluation.

Step 2: Identify leaders and specific actions – the school uses phase leaders or individuals with specific skills to lead projects and to identify the actions required to deliver success.

Step 3: Implementation – staff implement the strategy in a supportive climate.

Step 4: Evaluate the impact – at the end of a specified period, leaders, including governors, reflect on the impact on securing improvements for pupils.

More information about this can be seen in the effective practice case study 'Innovation through teamwork' available here:

<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/innovation-through-teamwork>

### **Strategy and activity**

Four teachers have undertaken a GwE middle leadership development programme. An important component of this project is the requirement to undertake an element of enquiry while leading a whole-school project. This approach has supported and improved leadership of participants and enabled them to lead aspects of the school's work successfully. These include improving the digital curriculum, increasing creativity, and introducing the 'Touching the Sky' fitness and wellbeing project. The latter project in particular is highly effective in improving standards of fitness and wellbeing for pupils. All projects are evaluated and assessed for impact and included in the school improvement plan.

Teaching assistants have also led improvements at the school, such as developing the outdoor learning environment in response to an inspection recommendation in 2013 and coinciding with the building of a 'Flying Start' provision at the school. Two teaching assistants led these improvements in 2015-2016. They worked with the local authority foundation phase adviser and visited local schools to view best practice. When inspectors revisited in June 2016 it was noted "*Since the last inspection there have been significant improvements in the outdoor provision to enhance the experience of pupils of all ages*". This area continues to be evaluated and improved. The project resulted in the teaching assistants gaining level 5 qualifications initially, and then progressing to higher level teaching assistants (HLTA) leadership qualifications in 2018. Another teaching assistant successfully led the school's Families and Schools Together (FAST) Family Learning project in 2016-2017. This resulted in her becoming an HLTA assessor in 2017-2018 for the regional consortium.

In 2017, the headteacher undertook coaching professional learning, for the (National Professional Qualification for Headship) NPQH and New Headteacher programme. This had a positive impact upon leadership in school, by facilitating a solutions-based approach to improving provision and standards. For example, one teacher has led the 'Successful Kinaesthetic Instruction for Pre-schoolers' (SKIP) physical literacy initiative across the lower foundation phase to support the physical development and behaviour of boys in particular. A further positive impact of leadership training is improved engagement, enjoyment and self-confidence for individuals, for example that enabled the headteacher to apply for a secondment to the regional consortium. This in turn led to further



opportunities for other members of staff to lead at the school. In 2018, the deputy headteacher also undertook the leadership development programme. This has supported her in developing staff as middle leaders while the head has been seconded part-time.

### **Impact on leadership, provision and standards**

The school has led conference presentations and the Minister for Education has visited the school. This has led to improved publicity for the school and an improved perception of the school within the local community. The impact of professional learning for leadership has provided strong and effective succession planning for leaders of the future among the staff. This work has a positive impact on pupils at the school. The inspection report noted that:

- Most pupils make good progress and achieve well, and more able pupils achieve particularly well by the end of key stage 2
- Pupils with additional needs, and in particular those that access the nurture provision, make valuable gains against their personal targets
- Most pupils achieve good standards of literacy and numeracy and use these skills well in other subjects
- Most pupils behave very well and show high levels of respect, care and concern for others
- Pupils have a strong voice in the running of the school and regularly make valuable contributions to school life
- Teachers and support staff provide a wide and well-balanced variety of learning experiences that engage pupils successfully
- The school provides exceptionally high levels of care, support and guidance for pupils that have a measurable impact on pupils' achievement and wellbeing

### **Case study 3: Greenfield School – using a ‘coaching’ model to create a culture of innovation and learning**

#### **Context and background**

The school has a well-established senior leadership team, all of whom have been members since September 2014. Three members of the senior leadership team hold the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). The senior leadership team promotes a culture of high aspirations and expectations for all staff and pupils. On taking up his post, the headteacher restructured the leadership team and staff teams to ensure a consistent focus on pupils' standards, their wellbeing, curriculum development and provision for skills. All staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities that reflect these priorities.

The school's vision of 'opening doors for the future' extends to staff as well as learners, so leaders ensure that there are clear pathways for staff to progress in their careers. The school has a creative approach to

professional learning and engages in an extensive range of well-developed partnerships that support pupils and staff development. Staff, as well as pupil wellbeing, is a priority in the school.

### **Strategy and activity**

Since his appointment, the headteacher has committed to his own professional learning and development. Initially, he attended Central South Consortium's leadership programme for executive headteachers. This helped him to consider how to develop a vision for the school that would provide all pupils with high-quality learning experiences through developing staff. Throughout the leadership programme, the headteacher benefited from having a 'coach' to develop and challenge his own understanding of his goals, values, motivations and decisions. This experience helped him to consider carefully how leaders and governors could create the right conditions for all pupils and staff at Greenfield School to thrive and grow. Subsequently, the headteacher and governors invested in external coaches for the school's two deputy headteachers and the headteacher has been trained and accredited as a learning coach.

Leaders have used their own coaching experiences and the Welsh Government's 'Coaching and mentoring' resources successfully with all staff across the school. Leaders have extended the performance management process to build in valuable coaching and reflection time for each member of staff in each school term. The headteacher has modelled this process for senior leaders and they, in turn, have cascaded the model downwards, with each layer of management using the same approach.

During these half-day sessions, individuals reflect on their personal goals and coaches help them create practical step-by-step action plans to assist them to reach their objectives. For example, leaders support staff to manage their workloads, so they can study for higher-level qualifications.

Across the school, staff draw on a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data to reflect on pupils' progress and to evaluate the school's progress against the success criteria set out in its improvement plan. Team leaders use the success criteria for each of the school's priorities to help individual staff to identify which aspects of the professional teaching and leadership standards (Welsh Government, 2017b) they meet, and where they need to focus next. Over time, this systematic and supportive approach has helped to build strong, respectful and trusting relationships between leaders and staff.

The school also uses its core priorities of wellbeing, standards, curriculum development and provision for skills to organise its approach to whole-school staff development. This has three strands:

- 1 Pedagogy
- 2 Curriculum and skills
- 3 Wellbeing

For each of these strands, the school runs two professional learning ‘tracks’: the ‘accelerated learning’ professional learning track and the ‘complex learning needs’ professional learning track. This means that leaders can tailor training and development activities to meet the needs of staff who teach and support pupils who are more able, and those who teach and support pupils with complex learning needs.

As well as weekly face-to-face training sessions, staff use technology effectively to support each other’s learning. For example, they use video to share and model effective practice and to discuss how to manage challenging situations. This helps them to reflect on their learning across the three professional learning strands. Recently, in response to the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act, a team has developed useful online materials. These include a series of short videos with explanations of ‘person-centred practice’, information about relevant research, and questions for practitioners to consider. This means that they can revisit topics according to their professional learning needs, after face-to-face training sessions.

Because of the diverse nature of pupils’ needs, leaders and staff often need to innovate to develop bespoke professional learning for the school. Therefore, the school uses its internal expertise and external partnerships to design tailor-made resources and professional learning activities for each of these ‘tracks’. For instance, a team of five of the school’s staff worked with an external consultant to develop 10 training modules to support its own staff to manage pupils’ behaviour, without the need for physical restraint. Subsequently, staff have delivered this ‘home-grown’ training programme across the local authority’s 28 schools. Leaders use external experts to evaluate and review their training programmes regularly, to ensure that their practice is critically informed and up-to-date.

### **Impact on leadership, provision and standards**

- Arrangements to coach and mentor staff are highly effective
- The school has an established culture of professional reflection and learning
- Leadership maintains a clear focus on improving pedagogy
- Professional learning develops practitioners’ thinking, specialist knowledge, skills and understanding to a very high standard
- The school has been very successful in building capacity as a forward-thinking and productive learning organisation
- The school provides a highly effective range of learning experiences that have a positive impact on pupils’ learning and wellbeing
- Nearly all pupils make strong progress in their learning and wellbeing
- Nearly all pupils have outstanding attitudes to learning and pupils’ behaviour across the school is exemplary

## **Case study 4: Llanishen Fach Primary School – evaluating the impact of professional learning**

### **Context and background**

In addition to its work as a pioneer school, Llanishen Fach Primary School is involved in many national developments in education. It has contributed to the development of the professional standards for teaching and leadership (Welsh Government, 2017b) and to the 'Developing Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales' survey (Welsh Government, 2017c). Most recently, leaders have been involved in the national evaluation and improvement resource. The school is in a formal partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University as a 'lead school' to provide accredited programmes for initial teacher education. All of its teachers are trained mentors for student teachers.

Llanishen Fach has a well-established senior leadership team. The headteacher has acted successfully as executive headteacher to two primary schools within the local authority to support their improvement from a category of a school causing concern. Nearly all staff have led presentations or workshops as part of the school's own staff training programme and as a 'hub' school for the Central South Consortium (CSC). The school has hosted visits for over 600 education practitioners from across Wales, for example to learn about the school's provision for outdoor learning, and its preparation for the new curriculum for Wales.

### **Strategy and activity**

As a result of the school's involvement in curriculum reform and other regional and national groups, leaders have reflected on how they could make better use of the school's in-service education and training (INSET) days to support curriculum developments. It concluded that the school's usual approach of external speakers and presentations would be unlikely to support staff well enough to prepare for changes to the curriculum and teaching. Instead, leaders planned a collaborative approach, in which they aimed to facilitate, but not direct, the learning and outcomes. Leaders asked staff to read materials before the day and, based on these materials, posed a problem to solve. They set up activities that encouraged everyone to contribute to 'answer' the problem. Staff then debated and worked together to agree an approach they could trial across the school.

Following the success of this approach, all of the school's internal training sessions now begin with a problem for staff to solve, which links to one of the school's improvement priorities. The sessions provide worthwhile opportunities for staff to share effective practice, to debate educational issues, to reflect on the school's strengths and areas for improvement, and to agree a way forward. This means that the decision-making process is transparent and staff take collective responsibility for progressing actions.

The senior leadership team have a good understanding of the specialist knowledge and skills of individual staff across the school, so they encourage staff with the relevant expertise, irrespective of their role, to support each other's professional learning, to innovate and to drive whole-school improvements. For example, the headteacher has used the skills of two teaching assistants, who had worked in the private industry, to review how effective the school's administrative arrangements were and to offer recommendations for improvement. The headteacher has since deployed these staff to manage significant organisational aspects of the school's work. This has improved the school's engagement and communication with parents and freed leaders from day-to-day management tasks, so they can focus on pupils' wellbeing and improving teaching and learning.

The school has established processes to support individual staff's career aspirations, which leaders balance carefully with the school's needs. For instance, every year, and sometimes within a year, as part of the school's ongoing review of professional learning, the headteacher revisits staff roles in discussion with individuals and the senior leadership team. This process often results in well-thought-out adjustments to responsibilities within the staffing structure, as staff rotate duties. In addition, this contributes to improving pupil outcomes, as staff have opportunities to develop deeper knowledge and expertise in significant aspects of provision, such as literacy, ICT and additional learning needs. This means that the school is not over-reliant on the skills and knowledge of one individual member of staff, and staff receive a wealth of leadership development opportunities.

As part of self-evaluation, leaders undertake systematic reviews of professional learning activities using a range of evidence, to identify which contribute most effectively to:

- improving staff knowledge and skills linked to personal and whole-school targets
- supporting improvements to the school's provision and raising standards for pupils
- providing best value for money
- improving staff confidence and wellbeing
- strengthening leadership

As a result, leaders have identified professional learning is most effective in their school when staff:

- attend external courses run over a number of days, which involve participants in conducting action research and presenting outcomes to other course participants, for example consortium-led middle leadership programmes
- attend a series of network meetings or workshops for specialist practitioners, for example in additional learning needs, or to undertake a specific role, such as a mentor for student teachers
- visit other schools to observe effective practice and have opportunities to work alongside 'expert' practitioners

- take part in external working groups on national priorities, for example curriculum reform, and work with professional bodies and higher education institutions
- support and receive coaching that is non-judgemental but helps practitioners to be evaluative and self-aware
- collaborate with other schools on longer-term projects or improvements, which involve all staff
- lead or facilitate professional learning for each other within teams or across the school, using a variety of approaches

This rigorous approach to evaluating the impact of professional learning means that leaders have an excellent understanding of what works best in their school for developing staff and for improving provision for its pupils.

### **Impact on leadership, provision and standards**

The school's strategic and agile approach to professional learning means that all staff receive high quality opportunities to meet their personal and professional development needs.

The school is involved in a wide range of networks and working groups, which include representatives from regional consortia, the Welsh Government, Estyn, the OECD and higher education institutions. This has meant that staff now welcome and value the opportunity to engage in regular professional discussions about educational issues. This has helped to develop a more self-reflective learning culture. Leaders ensure that staff at all levels are involved fully in developments to take the school's practice forward. As a result, staff take on change readily and are well prepared for important changes to the curriculum and teaching.

Nearly all staff lead professional learning workshops and many facilitate whole-school training. They model teaching, take ownership of initiatives and offer valuable support to other schools. This helps teachers, teaching assistants and support staff to develop their leadership skills. Staff appreciate these opportunities and the value leaders place on their contributions to improving the school's provision and outcomes for pupils.

The long-term collaboration with local schools in an Estyn category of follow-up has provided leaders at all levels, for example the site manager, administration staff and learning support assistants, with the opportunity to apply their knowledge, skills and experience in another school setting. This has contributed strongly to their personal development, helping them to gain a greater insight into the challenges of implementing new initiatives and improving a school's provision.

The breadth of professional learning opportunities the school offers, such as working with excellent practitioners in other schools and attending leadership programmes, has raised teacher expectations, aspirations and professionalism across the school. It has motivated staff to take an active role in school improvement initiatives and to study for higher-level qualifications. As a result of these opportunities, staff who joined the school as newly qualified teachers four years ago are now members of the school's senior leadership team.

## **Case study 5: Cwmtawe Community School – using developmental roles and job shadowing to develop leaders**

### **Context and background**

Cwmtawe has a strong track record of developing leaders from within and for supporting other schools, post-16 colleges, consortia, local authorities and higher education institutions (HEIs). The headteacher sees facilitating well-matched professional learning for all staff as a key responsibility, and this includes professional learning for leadership. The school uses a range of methods to develop leadership skills. Where appropriate, staff have participated in external training, particularly for accredited programmes. In the view of the senior team, the greatest impact has come from the shadowing opportunities. Most leaders in the school have benefited from these development opportunities.

### **Strategy and activity**

Through self-evaluation and strategic planning, senior leaders identify fixed-term development opportunities in the form of 'shadow posts' to add capacity to the school's leadership team and to support the school's improvement priorities. In recent years, the school has ensured that there have been opportunities to shadow posts at all tiers in the leadership structure. Senior leaders consider carefully the range of leadership skills that staff need to deepen and develop while undertaking the shadow posts. These roles do not involve extra allowances, are advertised internally, and are open to all.

Examples of the opportunities offered recently include shadow roles for:

- Assessment, recording and reporting
- Key stage 2 to key stage 3 transition
- Developing coaching at key stage 3
- Curriculum planning
- Subject leadership roles

The roles are mapped broadly to the professional standards for teaching and leadership and discussion around the development of the identified elements is included in formal and informal dialogue with shadow post holders. 'Improving professional practice' is a focus for performance management along with the shadow leaders' other identified objectives.

Each shadow leader benefits from the support of a coach and mentor who is an experienced member of staff. For example, middle leader shadows, and those new to post, are paired with a curriculum leader from a different subject area. These partners have training in coaching techniques, and use meeting time purposefully to hold non-judgemental, reflective conversations. This ensures that the dialogue focuses on specific leadership skills, rather than having a subject focus.

### **Impact on leadership, provision and standards**

The internal and external opportunities available to staff have a positive impact on standards and provision in the school and beyond. Nearly all of the senior and middle leaders have experienced the shadow role, before being appointed to substantive posts. Staff turnover in Cwmtawe is low and all except one of the senior leadership team have come from within, having been successful in rigorous recruitment processes against strong external candidates.

Staff who have demonstrated particular skills and understanding in their shadow roles have been able to use these to work beyond the school. For example, one shadow leader now facilitates training for improving teaching for the ERW regional consortium, linked with a local higher education institution, and another leads on an advanced coaching training programme.

As a result of the shadow opportunities, more staff contribute strongly to the school's improvement priorities overall in addition to their own responsibility and have a collegiate sense of pride and ambition for the school and its pupils. Staff are confident in own practice, and are keen to learn more. Leaders at all levels have created a culture of high expectations for all aspects of the school's work. This extremely effective focus on developing leadership has led to a strong track record of securing improvements and sustaining strong performance.

### **Case study 6: Blackwood Primary School – using the school as learning organisation model to develop professional learning**

#### **Context and background**

In September 2018, a new headteacher took up post and two members of the leadership team secured deputy headteacher posts in other schools. In her previous role, the new headteacher had contributed to the development and implementation of the 'Developing Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales' survey (Welsh Government, 2017c) and the design and delivery of professional learning programmes for the Education Achievement Service (EAS). At Blackwood Primary School, many teachers are highly experienced and are longstanding members of staff.

In response to 'Our national mission' (Welsh Government, 2017a), the newly-formed leadership team identified that the SLO model (Welsh Government, 2017c) as having the potential to develop the school's capacity to prepare for the new curriculum.

#### **Strategy and activity**

The newly-formed leadership team used the school's effective self-evaluation processes to review the school's strengths and areas for improvement, and considered its priorities for the next three years in the



context of national developments. Following this process, staff and governors came together to discuss the school's strategic direction. Together, they focused on how best to realise their aspiration to develop the school as a learning organisation, which would 'empower, nurture and challenge' all pupils to become: ambitious capable and lifelong learners, enterprising and creative contributors, ethical informed citizens, and healthy and confident individuals (Donaldson, 2015, p.29). The leadership team introduced the SLO model to staff and governors, and collectively they decided to use this to drive the school's future work. Pupils and parents then contributed to shaping the school's vision, strategic aims and objectives using the principles of the SLO. These include:

- placing the curriculum's four purposes at the centre of the school's work
- ensuring continuous professional development for all staff that is focused on the learner's learning and the school's goals
- working collaboratively and learning together in a supportive and trusting environment, leading to personal and professional growth
- supporting all staff to engage with research to learn from what is known about effective pedagogy locally, nationally and internationally; and to innovate, enquire into and improve their practice
- using self-reflection and robust self-evaluation to inform school improvement and personal development planning
- learning through networks, external collaborations and partnerships, and making effective use of the regional professional learning offer to drive school improvement
- modelling professional behaviours for lifelong learning and building leadership capacity at all levels in the school, including with learners

Planned improvement actions for the school began with developing a professional learning policy to provide a framework for delivering its first strategic objective of improving leadership and management of the school, based on the seven dimensions of the SLO model. Leaders identified this professional learning objective as key to achieving its subsequent improvement objectives of developing a new curriculum, improving pupil outcomes in literacy, numeracy and digital competence, and developing pupils' independent learning skills.

Early in the autumn term, leaders held a series of whole-staff professional development sessions, which focused on 'what it means to be a learning organisation' ([Dimension one in the SLO model](#)). These involved staff fully in shaping the school's vision centred on realising the curriculum's four purposes. Alongside these sessions, the headteacher met with individual staff to explore their professional aspirations and interests in depth. This helped leaders to have a better understanding of individual staff needs and to consider how best to create and support a continuous learning culture among all staff (Dimension two in the SLO model).

As well as considering the professional learning needs of teaching and support staff, the senior leadership team recognised the benefits of taking part in a 'peer review' with more experienced school leaders. The EAS regional consortium provided structured support, including a timetable for

review activities, such as learning walks, interviews with pupils, scrutiny of pupils' work and leadership interviews. A challenge adviser attended the review activities that took place over several weeks, and quality assured the process. This learning experience helped the newly-formed leadership team to refine the priorities and actions in its improvement plans and to engage in reflective discussions about leadership, teaching and learning practices (Dimension six in the SLO model).

Drawing on the headteacher's expertise from her work in a pioneer school for professional learning, leaders introduced staff to the new professional standards in teaching and leadership (Welsh Government, 2017b). They used techniques in the EAS's Excellence in Teaching and Learning Framework, to support staff's knowledge and understanding of these new standards. Leaders then worked with individual staff to map their professional learning needs against the professional standards, linked to the school's strategic priorities (Dimension two in the SLO model).

Following this process, staff have been involved in a wide range of leadership development activities, including middle leadership programmes and school-to-school collaboration offered by the EAS, work with universities, developing networks with other schools and using its own internal leadership expertise. These aim to build staff knowledge and leadership skills at a level appropriate for their role and personal stage of development, over an extended period of time, rather than through 'one-off' training events. For example, the deputy headteacher uses coaching techniques with a highly experienced group of middle leaders (Dimension two in the SLO model).

As part of the school's developing ethos of collaborative working, all teachers and support staff have been encouraged to work in small teams on critical enquiry projects to investigate a 'problem' in their practice, or to take forward innovations. Leaders recognised that, while this work may lead to the successful sharing of knowledge and enhance teamwork, the real strength of the process lay in helping to identify particular aspects of the school's provision that were not having a positive impact on pupil outcomes. As a result, staff were open to thinking about how to do things differently, for instance to improve pupils' early reading skills, and how to use their learning from other successful projects, such as the Lead Creative Schools, to inform curriculum design and planning (Dimension four of the SLO model).

All staff now keep professional learning diaries. These are beginning to help practitioners in the school to consider how professional learning affects their own practice in the classroom and how they support other staff in their roles. These written reflections are at an early stage and leaders recognise that further work needs to take place to support staff to reflect more deeply on their leadership skills and development. For instance, leaders have developed a dedicated room for staff professional learning with easily-accessible reading materials, ICT resources and poster displays of staff's action enquiries into teaching and learning (Dimension five of the SLO model).

### **Impact on leadership, provision and standards**

The school's use of the SLO model is at an early stage of development. However, there is encouraging evidence that this is helping the school to build on previously-identified strengths in supporting staff professional development effectively, so that it impacts positively on the quality of teaching and pupils' standards.

Leaders draw judiciously on the wide range of professional learning opportunities the EAS offers and uses these, and other activities, to meet whole-school priorities and individuals' professional learning needs successfully. As a result, across the school, staff are highly motivated in their roles.

The SLO model has provided leaders with a useful structure to build a shared vision, which takes very good account of national priorities. At Blackwood Primary School, the model's dimensions have helped to develop a supportive ethos of collaboration, enquiry and reflection among all staff, based on high expectations for pupil outcomes. Through modelling positive leadership behaviours (Dimension seven in the model), the senior leadership team has been highly successful in creating a positive culture of change, where staff at all levels feel empowered to take risks to innovate together and are beginning to lead their own and others' learning.

### **Case study 7: Somerton Primary School – working collaboratively to secure improvement**

#### **Context and background**

Somerton Primary School started working collaboratively with a nearby school in 2016. The two schools are very different in size and demography and are at different stages in their improvement journey. The schools decided to embark on a joint journey of improvement, to develop the new curriculum, share best practice and support each other in improving outcomes for all pupils in both schools.

#### **Strategy and activity**

Initially the schools worked on building relationships between staff. They arranged joint training events that led to efficiencies in supporting the learning of both schools. Staff worked in their year groups and started to share ideas and experiences. They quickly identified areas of common interest in teaching. This led to the sharing of pupils' work and planning together, starting with a few lessons or shared projects.

They then went on to develop policies and schemes of work across both schools. Staff meetings and all professional learning and training days were conducted together. Staff used technology to share planning and visited each other's classrooms. As the schools worked closer together, it became easier to identify shared objectives. Although the schools have

decided to keep two separate school development plans, there are common threads in each plan. As a result, there is more sharing of resources and staff expertise.

Leaders and staff identified areas of strength in provision in both schools. The schools note that staff were extremely professional in opening up their classrooms and their planning, and in taking an open and honest approach to reviewing the quality of provision and standards. In the second year, as staff developed a wider understanding about each other's schools, everyone, including governors, undertook joint school self-evaluation activities. Staff focused on their own school but shared what was happening in the other school and the outcomes of self-evaluation.

These self-evaluation activities were repeated with both staff and governors in the following year. On this occasion, staff worked in shared groups on aspects of self-evaluation, discussing elements of provision and standards in both schools and identifying where each could strengthen next year. Staff see the collaboration as a useful activity that supports them in their teaching and professional development. Within the last year, staff have initiated action research projects linked to an aspect of the school development plan. They have worked in groups of three to 'try things out' and evaluate the impact on standards and provision. One teacher has taught in both schools to further her own development. Senior leaders have joint meetings, taking ownership of developments across both schools with a shared sense of moral purpose.

### **Impact on leadership, provision and standards**

Standards of teaching have improved and staff regularly discuss pedagogy within and beyond their own setting. They have frequent opportunities to see practice elsewhere with meaningful, ongoing professional development followed up by actions as necessary. For example, staff have worked to improve outdoor learning provision and both schools have seen the impact of this work on pupil engagement and wellbeing. Working in groups of three with a focus on reading has raised standards, and more now choose to read for pleasure. Most importantly, expectations are very high across both schools and Somerton staff feel fully included in the wider school improvement agenda. Working alongside a pioneer school, they have been at the forefront of national developments.

## **Case study 8: Clase Primary School – using professional development to secure improvements**

### **Context and background**

The school leadership team, including the governing body, has shown a consistently strong commitment to improving the school for the benefit of all pupils. This is articulated and shared through the vision, aims and motto of the school and supported by the whole school community.

The headteacher demonstrates a clear understanding of the strategic importance of building leadership capacity at all levels throughout the school. Through modelling and coaching she supports staff, sets high standards, and encourages trust and collaborative working.

Over a number of years, the school has maintained a track record for building capacity through access to high-quality training and empowering individuals, especially in supporting their personal and career development. Senior leaders demonstrate an active commitment to their own development and show drive, ambition and a dedication to the ethos, culture and vision of the school. This includes identifying staff career aspirations and planning potential opportunities during performance meetings. As a result, nearly all staff strongly agree that they are given appropriate opportunity for professional development and that their contribution and skills are valued. Nearly all staff are inspired and encouraged to improve their own practices and to have high aspirations.

### **Strategy and activity**

There are robust performance management arrangements in place, and successful professional learning opportunities for all staff. These processes support school improvement and staff career progression. Training is provided to support individuals to develop their leadership roles and the school has a strong culture of distributed leadership. For example:

- All senior leaders have completed post-graduate training in leadership and management or professional learning. The lead teacher for curriculum and lead teacher for pastoral and nurture support completed a two-year graduate diploma in leadership and management. The lead teacher for ICT/DCF successfully completed the middle leadership training and a further Graduate Diploma in Professional Learning.
- The headteacher is a peer inspector and has effectively supported other colleagues in the local authority and across the regional consortium.
- The deputy headteacher has completed the NPQH, is assessment lead within the cluster and has completed coaching and management course.
- Curriculum leaders are given opportunity to attend regional middle leadership training.
- All teachers in the specialist teaching provision have completed, or are completing, post graduate diplomas in supporting pupils with severe and

complex additional learning needs.

- A few teaching assistants have completed the Graduate Teacher Programme and are now teachers at the school, with one of the first to undertake the training already within a senior leadership role at the school.
- A few teachers have completed a Master's degree in education practice and one of the teaching assistants is completing a Master's degree in supporting pupils with autism.
- The caretaker has completed an apprenticeship in facilities management.
- The senior lead teacher for curriculum has been involved in a regional 'developing senior leadership' internal secondment. This process has supported the development of leadership skills.
- A steadily increasing number of teaching assistants have access to or completed foundation degree courses and continued on to access full degree courses. Some have continued to become teachers.
- All governors have attended a range of training opportunities in school, and with the local authority.

### **Impact on provision and standards**

As a result of access to high-quality professional development, many staff have undertaken further leadership roles within the school. This has helped to develop distributive leadership and ensured consistency when staff are promoted within the school or move to other schools. This has also had a positive impact on teaching and learning. An increasing number of staff have undertaken a range of foundation degrees and many have now completed degrees.

Arrangements to develop staff professionally have a positive impact on pupils' progress and wellbeing. Sharing good practice has ensured building capacity within the school and with other schools and education providers. For example, as a result of a senior leadership secondment for a science role, pupils have been able to improve skills in recording their investigations in Years 5 and 6.

Overall, the school has a strong culture of distributed leadership that has impacted significantly on school improvement and teaching and learning.

### **Case study 9: Cardiff High School**

#### **Sustaining and improving effective practice**

Cardiff High School has a long history of excellence in learning and teaching. It was judged excellent during its inspection. The school has been identified as sector leading and routinely works with other schools, at local and national levels to shape and develop the self-improving system.

Cardiff High School's belief that learning is at the heart of everything they

do underpins the school's approach to learning and teaching. In order to strengthen this culture, the school made the strategic decision in 2015 to invest significantly in learning and teaching. As a result, the leadership of learning and teaching was enhanced through the expansion of the senior leadership team to include two assistant heads, who alongside a deputy head lead the strategic vision across the school. Furthermore, a learning and teaching team was established from middle leadership to lead and support the implementation of strategic priorities. With this framework in place, a new vision for learning and teaching was established with the emphasis on:

- leadership at all levels
- developing and sustaining highly effective classroom practice
- professional learning and aspiration to improve for all

### **Leadership at all levels**

Senior leadership established learning and teaching as the key priority for ongoing school improvement. Learning and teaching are the central priority in both the school and departmental improvement plans every academic year. The school recognises that it can always improve and enhance the quality of learning experiences.

The school recognised that meaningful and sustained development of learning and teaching was only possible through the recognition and growth of teacher efficacy. This meant that, in order for the school to realise its vision, it needed to empower teachers to lead learning in their classrooms and to provide the appropriate balance of challenge and support to make this happen. This approach also applied at departmental level where middle leaders are trusted to develop a vision for learning and teaching that is appropriate to each subject-specific context. For example every department was given responsibility for its own approach to feedback to pupils.

Quality assurance of this approach to learning and teaching is underpinned by a philosophy that it is done *with* and not *to* staff and departments and that it is a developmental process to foster further improvement. The school believes that this collaborative approach and its emphasis on professional trust is the essential component in implementing effective pedagogical practice. The model strikes a highly effective balance between support and challenge that is both robust and places learning at the heart of quality assurance processes.

### **Developing and sustaining highly effective classroom practice**

The school wanted to establish a clear pedagogical framework in order to create a consistent language for talking about learning and teaching, provide staff with accessible research informed strategies, and establish professional learning as an entitlement for all staff.

As a result, senior leaders set five core priorities for learning and teaching:

- whole-school learning and teaching model using a specific pedagogical framework
- closing the gap between potential and actual performance for all pupils
- literacy, numeracy and digital competence
- feedback to pupils
- learner voice

The school implemented a commercial learning and teaching model. It felt that the model articulated the core elements required for highly effective learning and teaching:

- deepening thinking
- role modelling
- impact
- challenge and engagement in learning

This model provides a common language for conceptualising learning and teaching while allowing for teacher agency and flexibility of approach.

Closing the gap between potential and actual performance is a philosophy that permeates the school and, as a result, there is a culture of aspiration for all. As part of this approach, the school has adopted several pedagogical strategies based on current educational theory. The strategies promote an emphasis on engagement in learning and high levels of challenge to stretch every learner.

Literacy, numeracy and digital competence are essential cross-curricular skills that the school feels are best applied in context, where relevant, and at an appropriate level. In order to support the collaborative ethos of the school, the learning and teaching team co-plan, deliver and reflect on skills application and progression with subject specialists.

The school believes that feedback should inform planning and effective classroom practice at all levels, and may be given verbally, in written form or digitally. The school's feedback policy outlines the four pillars of highly effective feedback.

- regular and timely
- focused and specific
- acted upon
- sharing practice

Middle leaders take ownership for their subject and context specific approaches to feedback. These are shared with all stakeholders and are regularly quality assured. This results in highly responsive and reflective feedback processes, which are finely tuned and feed directly into the quality of learning experiences in the classroom.



The leadership of learning in the school effectively incorporates learner voice and opportunities for learners to take an active role in informing learning experiences. The school gathers the views of learners in a number of areas including departmental reviews, work scrutiny and subject-specific panels. Pupils are also engaged formally through a school parliament working within school to shape teaching and learning experiences.

### **Professional learning**

Senior leadership believes that staff wellbeing and professional development are central to the school's exceptionally high standards of learning and teaching. A culture of professional learning is firmly embedded at all levels and is viewed as a professional entitlement for all and by all staff. The school recognises that staff are the most valuable asset and looks to provide regular, high quality and bespoke development opportunities. The school considers itself a highly effective learning organisation.

The school provides numerous pathways for staff to develop professionally:

- research informed strategic vision
- strategic whole-school INSET provision focused clearly on improvement priorities
- a supportive culture of lesson observation, learning walks and sharing good practice
- collaborative approaches to key aspects of learning and teaching pedagogies
- a whole-school coaching ethos and coaching programme
- a whole-school Action Enquiry<sup>2</sup>
- a suite of commercial programmes to develop pedagogy and leadership e.g. those for outstanding teachers, teaching assistants and leaders

The school recognises that the successful leadership of learning in teaching does not exist in isolation. It is only possible to achieve when it works in harmony with all other aspects of the school. The alignment of wellbeing and achievement, curriculum, data, and learning and teaching is needed to ensure that learning experiences are highly effective and achieve the four purposes.

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<sup>2</sup> Action Enquiry supports staff to develop specific action inquiry approaches that are identified through performance management and to undertake relevant research and apply these approaches to their teaching.

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## Appendix 1: Evidence base

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The findings and recommendations in this report draw on visits to a range of partners in the Welsh education system including a sample of 15 schools across Wales. The sample includes primary, secondary and special schools, and English and Welsh medium schools, including examples of schools exemplifying good or excellent leadership. The school visits took place in the spring term 2019. During the visits to these schools, inspectors:

- interviewed senior leaders, middle leaders, class teachers and learning support assistants
- scrutinised the school improvement plan, staffing structure, job descriptions, and professional learning records

Inspectors also visited the four regional consortia and gathered evidence from local authorities, and met with associates from the National Academy for Educational Leadership.

Additional evidence was drawn from:

- primary and secondary school inspection reports from 2015 to 2019
- Estyn thematic survey reports
- additional best practice case studies from the Estyn website

### List of schools visited

Blackwood Primary School, Caerphilly  
Bryn Deva C.P. School, Flintshire  
Cwmtawe Community School, Neath Port Talbot  
Eirias High School, Conwy  
Eveswell Primary School, Newport  
Greenfield Special School, Merthyr Tydfil  
Llanfaes C.P. School, Powys  
Llanishen Fach Primary School, Cardiff  
Llansannor C.I.W. Primary School, The Vale of Glamorgan  
Penycae Community Primary School, Wrexham  
Tredegar Comprehensive School, Blaenau Gwent  
Ysgol Gyfun Garth Olwg, Rhondda Cynon Taf  
Ysgol Gyfun Gwent Is Coed, Newport  
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Y Login Fach, Swansea  
Ysgol Tregarth, Gwynedd

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## Appendix 2: Information about the case study schools

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**The 2019 national three-year rolling average for statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals in primary schools in Wales is 18.4%. This average reduces to 16.4% in secondary schools (Welsh Government, 2019).**

**The national average for pupils of all ages on a school's ALN register is 20.7% in primary schools in Wales. This average rises to 22.5% in secondary schools (Welsh Government, 2019).**

### Cardiff High School

Cardiff High School is a comprehensive school in Cardiff local authority. There are 1,612 pupils on roll, of which 425 are in the sixth form. The school has a specialist resource base serving the local authority for 15 pupils with specific learning difficulties.

The school has a diverse pupil intake. The majority of pupils speak English as their first language. Two hundred and fifty-six pupils are categorised as pupils with English as an additional language and around 39.5% of pupils come from a minority ethnic background. Around 1.4% of pupils speak Welsh as their first language.

The three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 6.3%. The school identifies that around 18.1% of pupils have additional learning needs.

The headteacher was appointed in 2011. The school was last inspected in March 2019.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to education reform in Wales.

### Llanfaes Community Primary School

Llanfaes Community Primary School is near Brecon in Powys local authority. There are currently 237 pupils on roll aged 4 to 11. The school has nine single-age classes. The school shares its site with a pre-school assessment unit and a nursery setting for three-year-olds.

The three year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 5.1%. The school identifies nearly 16% of pupils as having additional learning needs. Nearly all pupils come from a white ethnic background and speak English as a first language. Very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

The headteacher took up post in September 2005. The school's last inspection was in October 2017. The school worked as a pioneer school with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum.

### **Bryn Deva County Primary School**

Bryn Deva County Primary School is in the Flintshire local authority. The school has 304 pupils aged 3 to 11 years. There are 11 classes, including nine that are mixed-age.

The three year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 27.5%. The school identifies 32.6% of pupils as having additional learning needs. Around 20% of pupils speak English as an additional language. A very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

The headteacher took up post in November 2013. The school was last inspected in June 2016.

### **Greenfield Special School**

Greenfield is the only special school maintained by Merthyr Tydfil local authority. The school is in Pentrebach on the southern outskirts of Merthyr Tydfil. The school employs 22 full-time teachers and 68 learning support staff. There are currently 173 pupils on roll aged from 3 to 19 years. All pupils have statements of special educational needs for severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder or behaviour, emotional and social difficulties.

Nearly all pupils come from Merthyr Tydfil. Nearly all of the pupils are from English-speaking backgrounds. Around 38.5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, around the national average for special schools (42.3%).

The headteacher was appointed in September 2014. The school was last inspected March 2017.

The school worked as a pioneer school with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward curriculum developments. It is also involved in developing the national evaluation and improvement resource.

### **Llanishen Fach Primary School**

Llanishen Fach Primary School is in Rhiwbina, in Cardiff local authority. There are 500 pupils on roll, including 71 part-time nursery pupils. The school has two classes in each year group and three mixed classes, and a learning resource base providing education for 15 pupils from across the local authority. This provision caters for pupils with severe and complex learning needs and pupils with medical needs.

The three year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 6.6%. The school identifies 14.8% of pupils as having additional learning needs. Many pupils come from a white ethnic background and nearly all speak English as a first language. Very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

The headteacher took up post in September 2009. The school's last inspection was in April 2014. The school worked as a pioneer with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward curriculum reform.

### **Cwmtawe Community School**

Cwmtawe Community School is an 11-16 school in Neath Port Talbot local authority. There are 1,233 pupils on roll. Most pupils come from Pontardawe and the surrounding area, with about 50% opting to attend the school from outside its catchment area. The school has two specialist teaching units for dyslexic learners and for autistic spectrum disorder.

The three year rolling average of the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is 16.1%. The school identifies around 41.4% of pupils as having additional learning needs.

Around 5% of pupils come from minority ethnic groups and a very few pupils come from homes where English is not the first language. Around 15% of pupils are fluent in Welsh because they are either from homes where the predominant language spoken is Welsh or they have attended a Welsh-medium primary school.

The headteacher was appointed in 2014. The senior leadership team also includes two deputy headteachers, two assistant headteachers and a business manager. The school was last inspected in October 2018.

The school worked as a pioneer school with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to professional learning.

### **Blackwood Primary School**

Blackwood Primary School is in Caerphilly local authority. There are 450 pupils currently on roll between the ages of 3 and 11 years. There are 14 single-age classes and a further two part-time nursery classes. Around 23.2% percent of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies around 14.7% of pupils as having additional learning needs. A very few pupils from a minority ethnic background or speak Welsh at home.

The headteacher was appointed in 2018. The school was last inspected in May 2017.

### **Somerton Primary School**

Somerton Primary School is in the city centre of Newport. There are 182 pupils on roll aged from 3 to 11 years of age, including 14 part-time nursery pupils. They are taught in six mixed-age classes and a reception class, with a few pupils spending part of their day in nurture provision.

The three year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 40%. The school identifies around 28.6% of pupils as having additional learning needs. Just under a third of pupils come from an ethnic minority background and around 22.5% speak English as an additional language. A very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

The school was last inspected in June 2019. The interim executive headteacher took up post in September 2016 and is also the substantive headteacher of Eveswell Primary School. The local authority has opened a consultation into the possibility of creating a permanent federation between the two schools.

## Clase Primary School

Clase Primary School is a community primary school in Swansea local authority. There are currently 309 pupils on roll, including 37 part-time pupils in the nursery. The school has 12 classes and four specialist teaching facilities for pupils with autism and moderate learning difficulties.

The three year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 56.5%. The school has identified around 44.3% of its pupils as having additional learning needs. Currently, 11% have a statement of special educational needs. Many of these pupils are in the four specialist teaching facilities, with only a few in mainstream classes.

Few pupils come from a minority ethnic background. Very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

The school was last inspected in March 2019. The headteacher has been in post since September 2010.

## Glossary

<b>Action enquiry</b>	Action enquiry is teacher-led and school-based research which means that the teacher action researchers can focus on problems that are of immediate concern to them.
<b>Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act</b>	This Act establishes the statutory system in Wales for meeting the additional learning needs of children and young people.
<b>Enhanced provision</b>	The purpose of an effective <b>continuous provision</b> is to offer children a constant environment that is safe for them to explore whilst challenging their learning. It should allow children the freedom to explore and become independent in making choices. <b>Enhanced provision</b> is when resources that are added to <b>continuous provision</b> that match the topic or the interests of children.
<b>Person centred practice</b>	An approach to care that consciously adopts the perspectives of individuals, families and communities, and sees them as participants as well as beneficiaries of trusted systems that respond to their needs and preferences in humane and holistic ways

### Numbers – quantities and proportions

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

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