

Complete Agenda



Tuag at Ragoriaeth
Towards Excellence



Meeting

GWE JOINT COMMITTEE

Date and Time

10.30 am, WEDNESDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY, 2021

Location

Virtual Meeting

Contact Point

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(DISTRIBUTED 16/02/21)

GWE JOINT COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE

Voting Members

Councillors

Councillor Julie Fallon	Conwy County Borough Council
Councillor Meirion Jones	Isle of Anglesey County Council
Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts	Denbighshire County Council
Councillor Ian Roberts	Flintshire County Council
Councillor Phil Wynn	Wrexham County Borough Council
Councillor Cemlyn Rees Williams	Gwynedd Council

Co-opted Non-voting Members

Rosalind Williams	Church of Wales
Claire Armitstead	Secondary School Representative
Richard Collet	Primary Schools Representative
Jonathan Morgan	Special Schools Representative
Alison Fisher	Governor Representative

Non-voting Officers

Dr Lowri Brown	Conwy County Borough Council
Claire Homard	Flintshire County Council
Garem Jackson	Gwynedd Council
Rhys Howard Hughes	Anglesey County Council
Karen Evans	Wrexham County Borough Council
Geraint Davies	Denbighshire County Council

Officers in Attendance

Dafydd L. Edwards	Host Authority
Sion Huws	Host Authority
Susan Owen Jones	GwE Business Manager
Annwen Morgan	Isle of Anglesey County Council
Arwyn Thomas	GwE Managing Director
Alwyn Jones	GwE Assistant Director
Gareth Williams	GwE Advisory Board Chairman

Observer

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

To receive any declaration of personal interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

To note any items that are a matter of urgency in the view of the Chairman for consideration.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 5 - 11

(copy enclosed)

5. GWE BUDGET 2020-21 - QUARTER 3 REVIEW 12 - 16

Arwyn Thomas and Dafydd Edwards to update Joint Committee members on the latest financial review of GwE's budget for the 2020/21 financial year.

6. GWE BUDGET 2021-22 17 - 21

Dafydd Edwards to present the base budget to the joint committee.

7. ESTYN THEMATIC REVIEW 22 - 74

Arwyn Thomas to present the report to the committee.

8. GWE WORK PROGRAMME - AUTUMN TERM 2020 UPDATE & REGIONAL PRIORITIES 75 - 87

Alwyn Jones to present the report to the joint committee.

9. SUPPORTING SCHOOLS 88 - 90

Arwyn Thomas to present the report to the joint committee.

10. REFORM JOURNEY AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING 91 - 94

Arwyn Thomas to present the report to the joint committee.

11. DISTANCE/REMOTE LEARNING AND PARENT/CARER ENGAGEMENT 95 - 107

Arwyn Thomas to share information with Joint Committee members regarding the strategy and the support available to schools in relation to remote learning.

12. DEVELOPING ACCELERATED LEARNING PROGRAMMES FOR THE WELSH LANGUAGE 108 - 110

Alwyn Jones to seek approval from the Joint-Committee to develop Accelerated Learning programmes for those being educated through the medium of Welsh (First Language).

13. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2021/2022 111 - 114

Arwyn Thomas to request the Joint Committee to agree the meetings calendar for the coming year.

GWE JOINT COMMITTEE – 11/11/2020

Present:

Councillors: Phil Wynn - (Chair - Wrexham County Borough Council), Julie Fallon (Conwy County Borough Council), Meirion Jones (Anglesey County Council), Huw Hilditch-Roberts (Denbighshire County Council), Ian Roberts (Flintshire County Council) and Cemlyn Williams (Gwynedd Council).

Co-opted non-voting Members: Claire Armitstead (Secondary Schools' Representative)

Non-voting Officers: Garem Jackson (Gwynedd Council), Rhys Howard Hughes (Anglesey County Council), Dafydd Ifans (Wrexham County Borough Council) and Geraint Davies (Denbighshire County Council).

Officers present: Arwyn Thomas (Managing Director, GwE), Dafydd Edwards (Gwynedd Council Head of Finance, Host Authority), Sion Huws (Senior Lawyer - Corporate, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Susan Owen Jones (Business Manager, GwE), Annwen Morgan (Chief Executive, Anglesey County Council), Alwyn Jones (Assistant Director, GwE), Gareth Williams (Chair of GwE Advisory Board), Hywyn Jones (Group Accountant, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority), Gwion Jones (Senior Accountant, Gwynedd Council - Host Authority), Bethan Eleri Roberts (Performance Management Manager, GwE), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader, Gwynedd Council) and Natalie Lloyd Jones (Democracy Team Officer, Gwynedd Council, Host Authority).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor Phill Wyn (Wrexham County Borough Council) was elected Chair for 2020/21.

2. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

Councillor Meirion Jones (Anglesey County Council) was elected Vice Chair for 2020/21.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Councillor Ian Roberts (Flintshire County Council), Jonathan Morgan (Special Schools' Representative), Iwan Evans (Gwynedd Council), Richard Collett (Primary Schools' Representative), Karen Evans (Wrexham County Borough Council) and Claire Homard (Flintshire County Council).

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

5. URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent matters

6. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was confirmed that the record presented appropriately reflected the meeting held on 15 September 2020.

7. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS: INTERNAL AUDIT

DECISION

Arrangements were approved as noted in point 4.1 of the report, adding as an exception, where appropriate, that some individual audit reports will need to be presented to the Joint Committee as and when the need arises, rather than waiting for the annual report.

Discussion

The report was presented, noting that the item is presented following the discussion in the last meeting. Thanks were expressed to the Head of Finance and the Managing Director for outlining the protocol and its context. The agreed process was explained, noting that at the beginning of an audit year there will be an agreement as to what will be audited, and this will be shared with the Joint Committee.

It was noted that the Joint Committee needs to make it known whether it requires an annual report or that audit reports are put before the Joint Committee. It was emphasised that the Host Authority Internal Audit Manager will report to the GwE Joint Committee, not to Gwynedd Council.

Comments arising from the discussion:-

- The protocol was welcomed, noting that not all audit items as confirmation of proper administration of grants need to come to the attention of the Joint Committee when they arise, not counting exceptions where it will be appropriate to present them individually, rather than waiting for the annual report.

8. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS

DECISION

The reports were noted and accepted.

Discussion

The GwE Managing Director presented the audit reports, and he noted there are two elements, namely the Pupil Development Grant and the Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant (RCSIG). Attention was drawn to the 'High' assurance level of the audits, which is a reflection of the appropriate arrangements in place for the administration of grants.

Thanks were expressed to all staff members who have been a part of the work involving grants, and to the Host Authority Internal Audit Unit for ratification. Nevertheless, the Chair noted that the Joint Committee accepts the previous recommendation that this type of report will not need to be put before the committee in future.

9. RISK REGISTER

DECISION

The Joint Committee reviewed the contents of the register and accepted the information.

Discussion

The report was presented, and it was noted that the risk register is a regular item on the Joint Committee agenda. It was stated that major risks are highlighted red. The Head of Finance emphasised that the first risk as regards cuts to GwE's Core budget depends on the Government's grant settlement for local authorities in 2021/22. In addition, there will be an announcement on 22 December, therefore it is not possible to look at the budget until January.

During the discussion -

- Thanks were expressed for the work undertaken in such a different situation due to Covid-19. It was emphasised that the way of working has had to change, and it was noted that GwE has adapted its work so as to continue to provide services and support the region's schools and their communities.

10. BUDGET - QUARTER 2 MONITORING

DECISION

The report was accepted.

Discussion

Host Authority Head of Finance and GwE Managing Director noted there was no striking news to report as regards the budget, but that he is providing an update on the financial situation for the 2021/21 financial year.

A net underspend of (£31,502) is estimated, mainly due to a saving in the core travel expenses budget, as school sites are closed because of the pandemic.

Reference was made to the report that explains in detail the reasons for the overspend and underspend.

In response to a question about reclaiming losses from Welsh Government, GwE Managing Director noted that GwE will so where possible, and the Head of Finance confirmed that recompense occurs mainly via the constituent authority accounts.

11. ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

DECISION

The self-assessment tool and the Additional Learning Needs Professional Offer were both approved, which will support Local Authorities and schools to implement the reforms as set out in the Draft Learning Needs Code for Wales.

A further report was requested for the next meeting, noting how the self-assessment tool will work and any financial implications arising as a result of the draft Learning Needs Code.

Discussion

It was noted that Karen Evans is leading this work across the north. The regional ALN Transformation Team produced the self-assessment tool in order to support Local Authorities to assess their readiness for implementing the draft Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code for Wales. It was emphasised that the tool will enable local authorities

to acquire a better understanding of the areas for improvement and to understand their current strengths. It was confirmed that it will also give a regional overview of how ready Local Authorities are for implementing the ALN reforms.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- It was asked whether there is financial support from Welsh Government for implementing the Code. It was expressed that the Government has noted it as a neutral cost exercise.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the additional cost from this Code.
- The importance of raising parents' awareness was noted when moving to a new plan.
- A further report was requested for the next meeting, noting any financial implications arising as a result of the draft ALN Code for Wales.

12. 2020 RESULTS - INDEPENDENT REVIEW BY THE EDUCATION MINISTER

DECISION

It was agreed that the region's main priority during the next phase is to give secondary schools the appropriate support to help KS4 and KS5 learners to receive fair accreditation. In order to implement this it was agreed to use reserves, which are as a result of the underspend.

It was decided to write to the Minister for Education, firstly to thank her for her announcement of 10 November on the arrangements for awarding qualifications in 2021, and to note concerns arising from the meeting.

It was decided to write to Geraint Rees, Chair of the Design and Delivery Group, outlining concerns noted.

DISCUSSION

The GwE Managing Director presented the report on the Independent Review of awarding Qualifications in Wales and comments were received from the Secondary Schools' representative. It was added that the Minister had made this announcement one day prior to the Joint Committee meeting.

Thanks were expressed to all Headteachers and forum Chairs who have been key in conveying the region's standpoint on the matter to the Minister.

Joint Committee members discussed the report and the Minister's statement was welcomed. It was noted that the announcement will give Headteachers and teachers an opportunity to focus on teaching for the time being. However, several questions were raised as regards implementing the statement and that there is a need for clarity as soon as possible.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- It was noted that the independent review reflects the needs of learners rather than the examination system.
- It was expressed that Headteachers and teachers need to have the opportunity to lead on the follow-up discussions and that the Joint Committee should request to meet members of the committee.
- It was suggested that this could be a new way of assessing without examinations in the traditional manner.

- Clarity was requested regarding the situation for pupils in the future in 2022, taking into account that some pupils will have no experience of sitting examinations. The need to consider the health and well-being of these pupils was noted.
- It was noted that the Joint Committee authorises using revenues as a result of underspend to support schools with any additional costs that arise as they implement the recommendations.
- It was suggested to write to the Minister for Education to show appreciation for her statement.
- It was agreed that it would be an idea to convey the concerns of the Joint Committee to Geraint Rees, as Chair of the Board.

13. BLENDED LEARNING RESOURCES

DECISION

The report was noted and accepted, and to support the regional approach and model so as to ensure continuity of learning in north Wales.

Discussion

The report was presented, noting that the report gives an overview of the support available to schools.

There will be a library of blended learning resources available for regional schools, created by teachers, for teachers. Clusters and alliances are in the process of gathering, co-constructing and sharing resources with each other and across the region. This resource will be available via the GwE Support Centre and includes resources from the Foundation Phase up to Key Stage 5. It will allow schools to continue their strong joint working practices through sharing the resources developed. It will be a means to support colleagues across north Wales during this challenging time, and beyond. GwE SIAs will be available to facilitate and support this work. It is hoped that this will lessen the workload, and allow schools to plan for any eventuality.

14. WELL-BEING REPORT

DECISION

The report was noted and accepted, and to support the regional approach to supporting children's well-being and the well-being of the region's workforce.

Discussion

The report on the regional approach to supporting children's well-being and the well-being of the region's workforce was presented. The contents of the plan was discussed, noting that a series of workshops will be offered to school leaders and education officers. .

There will be flexibility for schools to participate in these sessions and use them in their own schools if they wish. Claire Chidley, a highly respected and experienced expert in the field and who works regularly with SOLACE, will be facilitating the workshops.

GwE Managing Director referred to the report, which outlines what the programme will offer. It was noted that the universal offer will be in the form of one 'live' event to launch the programme, and 185 Headteachers have registered to date, which is very

encouraging. Following this, a series of webinars will be offered, which will focus on various themes and aspects of well-being and resilience.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- It was acknowledged that the programme is interesting, and notes several methods of supporting well-being.
- Recognition was given to the authorities who are already providing such workshops so as to support Headteachers and school staff.
- Members welcomed the report, noting its importance in the current climate.

15. ESTYN THEMATIC REVIEW

DECISION

The report was noted and accepted, and it was agreed to hold further discussions following publication of the report.

DISCUSSION

The report was presented, and it was noted that the Joint Committee is already aware of the Estyn thematic review. It was added that a one day session was held back in October, and that Estyn has also held meetings with the Local Authorities. It was expressed that numerous documents and summaries had been sent to Estyn as part of the preparation work.

It was emphasised that the report is a summary of what was presented to Estyn and outlines the work programme, the main outcomes and its impact. No formal feedback has been received from Estyn as yet, and a full national report will be published in December. It was added that local authorities and regional consortia will receive written feedback on their work. The need for further discussion following receipt of the report was noted.

Comments arising from the discussion

- Understanding was expressed as regards the need for the report, but the timing of undertaking the exercise during this time was questioned.

16. SCHOOLS IN CATEGORY

DECISION

The report was noted and accepted, and the next steps were agreed. It was decided to write to Estyn to request prompt guidance and clarity as regards the situation.

Discussion

Joint Committee members were updated on the current situation regarding schools in Estyn Statutory Category and Estyn Review. GwE Managing Director reported the challenges facing schools due to Covid-19.

It was reported that Estyn and GwE visits have been postponed for a while, but that pastoral visits will re-commence this half term. It was noted that no written reports will be produced for the time being. This was elaborated upon, noting that feedback from these visits will assist Estyn to identify the appropriate time to re-commence formal monitoring.

Comments arising from the discussion:

- It was noted that the region is naturally concerned that there is no clarity as regards the next steps.
- It was expressed it is encouraging to hear that Estyn has discussed these matters internally, and that the outcome will be shared in the coming weeks.
- It was suggested to correspond with the chief inspector to seek clarification and hold further discussions.

The meeting started at 10.30am and concluded at 12.35pm.

CHAIR

Agenda Item 5

GwE: Joint Committee 24/02/21



MEETING	GwE Joint Committee
DATE	24 February 2021
TITLE	GwE Budget 2020/21 – 3rd Quarter Review
PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To update Joint Committee members on the latest financial review of GwE's budget for the 2020/21 financial year.• The report focuses on the significant financial variances, with Appendix 1 containing the full financial information.
RECCOMENDATION	To accept the report.
AUTHOR	GwE Managing Director and Gwynedd Council Head of Finance.

1. CONCLUSION

- 1.1 The 3rd quarter review estimates a net underspend of (£42,505), mainly due to savings on travelling costs in the core budget.
- 1.2 However, the impact of Covid-19 can be seen to affect various individual headings, and the following section of this report explains the reasons behind the main variations.

2. FINANCIAL VARIANCES

2.1 Employees:

Quarter 3: overspend £18,455 *Quarter 2 : overspend £31,302*

As reported in the 2nd quarter review, the overspend is mainly attributable to redundancy costs for 2 members of staff who were on temporary contracts but had service carried forward from their previous employment.

There is decrease in the overspend since quarter 2, due to a member of staff being on secondment.

2.2 Rent:

Quarter 3: overspend £58,080 *Quarter 2 : overspend £58,080*

As reported in quarter 2, the expected lack of income under this heading is equivalent to an overspend in 2020/21. The rent income budget is for the use of GwE buildings and is dependent on income from schools, authorities and internal use for projects funded through grants. Since the income is not external, it is not possible to claim for loss of income from the Welsh Government's hardship fund.

2.3 Travel:

Quarter 3: underspend (£120,145) *Quarter 2 : underspend (£94,928)*

It was reported in quarter 2 that a large underspend was expected, but at that time educational visits were restarting, and it was expected that expenditure would increase this year as a result. Of course, in the latest lockdown, there hasn't been any travelling, and it is unclear when school visits will resume.

2.4 Supplies and Services:

Quarter 3: overspend £723 *Quarter 2 : underspend (£25,956)*

In quarter 2 an underspend was reported. By now the situation is clearer, and it is expected that the final position under this heading will be neutral.

2.5 **Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant (RCSIG)**

Quarter 3: neutral *Quarter 2 : neutral*

As was reported in quarter 2, there was a general 3% (£957,939) cut to the RCSIG, and a cut to specific projects (£1,263,019) as a result of their response to the Covid-19 crisis (with GwE's cut being £328,361 and cuts to authorities / schools being £1,892,597). However, given that some projects have been delayed, and with sound financial planning, a neutral position is expected in 2020/21.

Analysis of full grant below:

Delegated*	£27,468,198
Non-Delegated	<u>£ 7,828,872</u>
Total	<u>£35,297,070</u>
Grant	£32,810,790
Match Funding	<u>£ 2,486,280</u>
Total	<u>£35,297,070</u>

* GwE Accounts do not include grants distributed directly to schools.

3. **UNDERSPEND FUND**

- 3.1 At the beginning of the 2020/21 financial year, the fund totalled £480,204.
- 3.2 The fund total at the end of 2020/21 is estimated at £522,709 having taken into account the underspend anticipated above.
- 3.3 There could be financial challenges in 2021/22 due to the uncertainty regarding specific grants, therefore it is suggested that the underspend fund should be put to one side for the time being, before considering the pressures and costs of catching up in 2021/22.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: GwE Budget 2020/21 – 3rd Quarter Review.

OPINION OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective.

Statutory Finance Officer:

Co-author of report.

GWE JOINT COMMITTEE - NORTH WALES COUNCILS - Budget Review 2020/21 : Third Quarter October - De

	Revised Budget	Estimated Expenditure	Over / (Under) Spend Net (Quarter 3)
	£	£	£
Expenditure			
Employees			
Salaries			
- Management, Brokerage, Standards and Administration	910,202	871,204	(38,998)
- Supporting Improvement Advisers	3,780,349	3,751,298	(29,051)
- Staff on Secondment	22,108	22,108	0
- Transferred against 'Specific Projects'	(1,776,327)	(1,720,000)	56,327
Training, advertising and other employee costs	42,043	72,220	30,177
Building			
Rent (includes services)	171,027	171,027	0
'Specific Projects' usage of offices recharge	(58,080)	0	58,080
Travel			
Travel Costs	135,506	15,361	(120,145)
Supplies and Services			
Furniture, equipment, printing, postage, telephone, room hire etc	72,045	72,768	723
Information Technology (contribution to renewal fund)	16,285	16,285	0
Audit Fees	11,308	11,308	0
Brokerage	285,002	285,002	0
Gwynedd Council Host Authority Support Service Costs			
Legal	5,652	5,652	0
Human Resources	9,692	9,692	0
Finance	41,913	41,913	0
Information Technology	46,356	46,356	0
National Model Commitments	469,948	469,948	0
Specific Projects			
Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant	7,828,872	7,828,872	0
Pupil Development Grant - Looked After Children	1,030,400	1,030,400	0
Pupil Development Grant - Strategic Advisor	100,000	100,382	382
Pupil Development Grant - Consortium Led Funding	148,678	148,678	0
Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT)	346,769	346,769	0
ALN System Transformation Grant	75,295	75,295	0
Total Expenditure	13,715,043	13,672,538	(42,505)

	Revised Budget	Estimated Expenditure	Over / (Under) Spend Net (Quarter 3)
	£	£	£
Income			
Core Service Contributions			
- Anglesey Council (19/20: 10.20% - 20/21: 10.15%)	(422,378)	(422,378)	0
- Gwynedd Council (19/20: 17.64% - 20/21: 17.63%)	(733,820)	(733,820)	0
- Conwy Council (19/20: 15.30% - 20/21: 15.30%)	(636,936)	(636,936)	0
- Denbshire Council (19/20: 15.26% - 20/21: 15.30%)	(637,104)	(637,104)	0
- Flintshire Council (19/20: 22.71% - 20/21: 22.68%)	(944,123)	(944,123)	0
- Wrexham Council (19/20: 18.89% - 20/21: 18.94%)	(788,560)	(788,560)	0
Specific Projects			
Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant	(7,828,872)	(7,828,872)	0
Pupil Development Grant - Looked After Children	(1,030,400)	(1,030,400)	0
Pupil Development Grant - Strategic Advisor	(100,000)	(100,000)	0
Pupil Development Grant - Consortium Led Funding	(148,678)	(148,678)	0
Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT)	(346,769)	(346,769)	0
ALN System Transformation Grant	(75,295)	(75,295)	0
Incwm from Secondments	(22,108)	(22,108)	0
Total Income	(13,715,043)	(13,715,043)	0
Total Income over Expenditure	0	(42,505)	(42,505)
Memorandum -			
The GwE Surplus Fund			
	Fund balance as at 1 April 2020		(480,204)
	Add/Less - (Under)/Overspend 2020/21		(42,505)
	Less - Use of the Fund		0
	Fund balance as at 31 March 2021		(522,709)
Information Technology Renewal Fund			
	Fund balance as at 1 April 2020		(71,320)
	Add - Contribution 2020/21		(16,285)
	Less - Use of the Fund		0
	Fund balance as at 31 March 2021		(87,605)



MEETING	GwE Joint Committee
DATE	24 February 2021
TITLE	Base Budget 2021/22
PURPOSE	Present to the Joint Committee : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GwE Base Budget 2021/22 (Appendix 1) • Authorities Financial Contributions (Appendix 2)
RECOMMENDATION	Adopt the base budget for 2021/22 as presented in Appendix 1.
AUTHOR	Gwynedd Council Head of Finance

1. Base Budget (“stand still”)

- 1.1 GwE’s budget is continuing to develop and now reflects the National Model’s core business commitments and a significant number of projects funded by grants.

- 1.2 The financial impact of inflation/price increases has been estimated and included in the base budget (based on “stand still”), including salary increases and CPI increase (see Appendix 1).

- 1.3 The authorities' financial contributions are shown in Appendix 2.

1.4 The attached budget reflects the decision of the Authorities to add inflation in full, and not to implement a cut in 2021/22.

1.5 Currently, there is insufficient information to identify the financial implications of specific grants in 2021/22.

2. Underspend Fund

2.1 The report 'GwE Budget 2020/21 – 3rd Quarter Review' (previous item on the agenda) estimates that there will be about £522,709 in the underspend fund on 31/03/2021, this represents less than 4% of GwE's turnover and in the current climate is an appropriate sum to be kept in reserve.

Appendix:

Appendix 1 - GwE Base Budget for 2021/22

Appendix 2 – Local Authority Contributions 2021/22

VIEWS OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Monitoring Officer:

Nothing to add from a proprietary perspective.

The Statutory Finance Officer:

Author of the report.

GwE JOINT COMMITTEE - NORTH WALES COUNCILS - GwE BUDGET 2021-22

	Final Budget 2020/21 £	Inflation Adjustment £	Other Adjustments £	Final Budget 2021/22 £
<u>Expenditure</u>				
Employees				
Salaries				
- Management, Brokerage, Standards and Administration	910,202	14,139		924,341
- System Leaders, Supporting Improvement Advisers	3,780,349	80,592		3,860,941
- Staff on Secondment	22,108			22,108
- Transferred against 'Specific Projects'	(1,776,327)	(44,206)		(1,820,533)
Training, advertising and other employee costs	42,043	545		42,588
Building				
Rent (includes services)	171,027	2,218		173,245
'Specific Projects' usage of offices recharge	(58,080)	(753)		(58,833)
Travel				
Travel Costs	135,506	1,758		137,264
Supplies and Services				
Furniture, equipment, printing, postage, telephone, room hire etc	72,045	935		72,980
Information Technology	16,285	211		16,496
Audit Fees	11,308	146		11,454
Brokerage	285,002	3,696		288,698
Gwynedd Council Host Authority Support Service Costs				
Legal	5,652	74		5,726
Human Resources	9,692	126		9,818
Finance	41,913	543		42,456
Information Technology	46,356	601		46,957
National Model Commitments	469,948			469,948
Specific Projects				
Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant	7,828,872			7,828,872
Pupil Development Grant - Looked After Children	1,030,400			1,030,400
Pupil Development Grant - Strategic Advisor	100,000			100,000
Pupil Development Grant - Consortia Led Funding	148,678			148,678
Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT)	346,769			346,769
ALN Transformation	75,295			75,295
Total Expenditure	13,715,043	60,625	0	13,775,668

	Final Budget 2020/21 £	Inflation Adjustment £	Other Adjustments £	Final Budget 2021/22 £
<u>Income</u>				
Core Service Contributions				
- Anglesey Council (20/21: 10.15% - 21/22: 10.16%)	(422,378)	(6,151)	(524)	(429,053)
- Gwynedd Council (20/21: 17.63% - 21/22: 17.63%)	(733,820)	(10,687)	(169)	(744,676)
- Conwy Council (20/21: 15.30% - 21/22: 15.28%)	(636,936)	(9,276)	984	(645,228)
- Denbighshire Council (20/21: 15.30% - 21/22: 15.36%)	(637,104)	(9,278)	(2,349)	(648,731)
- Flintshire Council (20/21: 22.68% - 21/22: 22.72%)	(944,123)	(13,749)	(1,569)	(959,441)
- Wrexham Council (20/21: 18.94% - 21/22: 18.86%)	(788,560)	(11,484)	3,627	(796,417)
Specific Projects				
Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant	(7,828,872)			(7,828,872)
Pupil Development Grant - Looked After Children	(1,030,400)			(1,030,400)
Pupil Development Grant - Strategic Advisor	(100,000)			(100,000)
Pupil Development Grant - Consortia Led Funding	(148,678)			(148,678)
Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT)	(346,769)			(346,769)
ALN Transformation	(75,295)			(75,295)
Income from Secondments	(22,108)			(22,108)
Total Income	(13,715,043)	(60,625)	0	(13,775,668)
Total Income over Expenditure	0	0	0	0

Appendix 2

Funded by	Core				Other	Draft Budget	
	Budget	Inflation	Contribution proportion adjustment	Sub-total	National Model adjustment		
	2020/21 £	1.64% £	£	2021/22 £	£	2021/22 £	%
Isle of Anglesey	374,696	6,151	466	381,313	47,740	429,053	10.16%
Gwynedd	650,980	10,687	150	661,817	82,859	744,676	17.63%
Conwy	565,033	9,276	-875	573,434	71,794	645,228	15.28%
Denbighshire	565,182	9,278	2,088	576,548	72,183	648,731	15.36%
Flintshire	837,542	13,749	1,394	852,685	106,756	959,441	22.72%
Wrexham	699,540	11,484	-3,223	707,801	88,616	796,417	18.86%
Total	3,692,973	60,625	0	3,753,598	469,948	4,223,546	100%



REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

24 FEBRUARY 2021

Report by: Arwyn Thomas, GwE Managing Director

Subject: Estyn Thematic Review

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 Present Estyn thematic report 'Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19' to Joint Committee members (see Appendix 1).

2.0 Background

2.1 In response to a request from the Minister for Education, Estyn was asked to undertake a thematic review of local authority and regional consortia approaches to supporting learning and vulnerable learners during the COVID-19 period.

2.2 The report focuses on the period from the end of the summer term to the end of October 2020. An overview is given of how local authorities and regional consortia have worked with schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) to promote learning and support vulnerable learners during COVID-19 between June and November 2020, which is the period when schools re-opened following lockdown. It captures how local authorities and regional consortia have adapted their work in response to challenges as a result of COVID-19.

3.0 Matters for consideration

3.1 The scope of this thematic report includes the extent of the support provided to schools and PRUs by local authorities and regional consortia during this period. The report focuses on two specific aspects:

- Promoting learning – the quality of the learning offer and how has this been supported through further guidance and professional learning?
- Supporting vulnerable pupils – how did the local authority targeted services and support to vulnerable pupils to support them to engage in learning? What barriers still exist?

3.2 In addition, consideration is given to early planning and implementation as regards the 'Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards: accelerated learning programme' grant across schools and PRUs, and next steps for this work.

3.3 The report includes cameos of local authorities and regional consortia. These have been included to show examples of points raised in the report, giving an indication of the work undertaken across Wales.

3.4 The report outlines the main findings and recommendations for Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities and other partners and providers. GwE will respond to these recommendations when planning and implementing its work programme.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 The Joint Committee is asked to note and accept the content of the report.

5.0 Financial implications

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. GwE will operate within current financial resources.

6.0 Equalities Impact

6.1 There are no new equalities implications arising from this report.

7.0 Personnel Implications

7.1 There are no new personnel implications arising from this report.

8.0 Consultation undertaken

8.1 Consultation took place with GwE Management Board and the Joint Committee.

9.0 Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1 - Estyn Thematic Review

OPINION OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective.

Statutory Finance Officer:

I note that part 5.1 of the above report confirms that there are no financial implications arising from this report, therefore I assume that any response to the recommendations within this thematic review will be prioritised within GwE's existing resources.

Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19

Update report from June to November 2020

January 2021



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

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

Estyn also:

- ▲ reports to Senedd Cymru and provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the Welsh Government and others
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Introduction

This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Minister for Education in July 2020. It provides an overview of how local authorities and regional consortia have worked with schools and pupils referral units (PRUs) to promote learning and support vulnerable pupils during the COVID-19 period between June and November 2020, that is the period after the initial lockdown when schools were reopening. It captures the ways local authorities and regional consortia have adapted their work to respond to the challenges resulting from COVID-19. The work was carried out before all schools returned to remote learning in January 2021 but will be helpful to inform current ways of working.

The intended audience for this report is the Welsh Government, local authority and regional consortia officers and staff in schools and PRUs. It draws on the evidence base in appendix 1 including interviews, survey feedback and documentary evidence. Due to restrictions associated with COVID-19 we were unable to visit schools and PRUs to gather first hand evidence about the quality of provision. The quantitative feedback from the surveys issued can be found in appendix 2. We have also provided detailed feedback to individual local authorities and regional consortia to support their own self-evaluation for improvement. The report is part of a series of publications by Estyn to share learning and support the education system's continued response and recovery (Appendix 3).

The report features 'cameos' from local authorities and regional consortia. These are not case studies as we are unable to evaluate the impact of the work because of restrictions on our activities due to COVID-19. The cameos are included to exemplify points raised in the report, giving a flavour of the work that has taken place across Wales.

Background

In the foreword to his Annual Report 2019-2020, Meilyr Rowlands HMCI (Estyn, 2020, p.4) stated that 'the last months of the 2019-2020 academic year brought challenges to Welsh education the like of which we have not seen in generations. The challenges were many, complex and unexpected. The COVID-19 pandemic changed people's lives, had a huge impact on economies, and caused major disruption to education systems worldwide and in Wales'. His foreword offers an initial account of how schools and other education and training providers coped with the initial lockdown period and strived to support pupils while providing continuity of learning for them remotely. For further information on this initial lockdown period see the [Annual Report 2019-2020](#).

This thematic report focuses on the period from late summer to late autumn. A timeline of significant events during this period can be found in appendix 4.

In late June, nearly all schools reopened to pupils to provide an opportunity for them to 'Check in, catch up and prepare for summer, and September'. In July and August, the Welsh Government published guidance to support schools to reopen to all pupils, on supporting learning and on supporting vulnerable learners (Welsh Government 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Schools and PRUs reopened to pupils in September, with a transition period leading up to all pupils attending by 14 September 2020. Almost immediately, schools began to experience their first positive COVID-19 cases among pupils and staff, reflecting the situation in their communities, and the first of a series of local restrictions to reduce transmission was announced. During September and October, individual pupils, classes or whole year groups were required at times to self-isolate, leading to the need for remote learning provision. The length of self-isolation periods varied from one day to 14 days depending on the reason and personal circumstances¹. Positive COVID-19 cases continued to rise and the Welsh Government announced a two-week firebreak lockdown from 23 October 2020. Schools and PRUs were closed for half-term during the first week of the firebreak. During the second week primary schools re-opened for face-to-face learning while many secondary-aged pupils reverted to distance learning from home.

In early November, around 90% of pupils were in school. The proportion of pupils in school fell to around 80% by the end of November and to around 70% by mid-December, as increasing numbers of pupils were required to self-isolate or their school was closed due to an insufficient number of staff available to supervise pupils on site. Towards the end of the autumn term, an increasing number of parents chose not to send their children to school, even if their school remained open, often due to concerns about being able to meet family or friends at Christmas. The national attendance figures mask considerable variation across schools and local authority areas, as in the local authorities worst affected by COVID-19 only around 50% of pupils were in school towards the end of the term. The national figures also mask considerable variation across age groups, with older secondary school age pupils having the lowest attendance at school.

The scope of this thematic report includes the extent of the support provided to schools and PRUs by local authorities and regional consortia during this period. Although the scope does not include post-16 or pre-school providers, we refer to aspects of these sectors' work where helpful. The report focused specifically on two aspects:

- Promoting learning – the quality of the learning offer and how has this been supported through further guidance and professional learning?
- Supporting vulnerable pupils – how did the local authority targeted services and support to vulnerable pupils to support them to engage in learning? What barriers still exist?

¹ The maximum self-isolation period was reduced to 10 days from 10 December 2020.

We also considered the early planning and implementation for the 'Recruit, recover and raise standards programme' grant across schools and PRUs and the next steps for this work.

At the time of our engagement with schools in October, very few pupils needed to receive blended learning. Most pupils were able to attend school and benefit from face-to-face teaching. Where pupils were required to isolate or shield, schools provided distance learning until they were able to return. A blended learning approach would involve a cohesive, intentional plan for pupils' learning to involve a combination of learning in school and at home which was not required in most schools during the autumn term. At the time of publication in January 2021, all schools have returned to providing remote learning for pupils, with some face-to-face provision in school for vulnerable pupils and those with parents who are key workers.

Main findings

- 1 Local authorities and regional consortia have worked closely together and with the Welsh Government to respond to the evolving context caused by the pandemic. Through the Association and Directors of Education Wales (ADEW), senior leaders have provided good support for each other and collaborated to create shared approaches and resources.
- 2 Local authorities provided valuable support to enable their schools and PRUs to reopen successfully to all pupils in September. Particular strengths were the practical support around health and safety and on communicating with parents and learners. For example, local authorities, working with health care partners where appropriate, supported risk assessments, including for vulnerable pupils and developed welcome packs providing information for parents, carers and pupils. School leaders welcomed the direction from local authorities and regional consortia to focus on pupil wellbeing and felt this was appropriate.
- 3 During the initial lockdown and the autumn term, local authority services had to respond rapidly to support the wellbeing of all pupils, and particularly those known to be vulnerable. Where local authorities already had effective joint working across services and external agencies, this was evident in the efficiency with which they responded to these needs. In other local authorities where collaboration is less well established, the pandemic has been a catalyst to strengthen joint working. The enhanced use of digital communication also contributed to more efficient multi-agency working within local authorities.
- 4 During the initial lockdown, teachers had to respond quickly to the need to provide distance learning materials for pupils. This provision improved though the summer term. As the need for a number of pupils to learn away from the classroom continued in the autumn term, it remained a priority to further improve and embed distance and blended learning provision. Regional consortia and local authorities have developed helpful guidance, playlists of videos featuring good practice and a range of professional learning. However, schools', local authorities' and regional consortia's oversight of the quality of provision is underdeveloped.
- 5 Pupils' learning experiences in the autumn term varied widely across and within schools. This is partly due to the varied impact of the pandemic in different areas and also as a result of the different policies and practices adopted by local authorities in relation to close contacts and the different ways that schools have organised groups and cohorts of pupils. These factors have resulted in considerably unequal learning experiences for pupils who have received most of their autumn term education in school and those who have been taught at a distance for extended periods.
- 6 In his recent Annual Report, the Chief Inspector's noted that 'despite considerable effort by schools, local authorities and central government to provide additional equipment and support, a minority of learners were disadvantaged by lack of access

to suitable computers or adequate connectivity.’ The barriers to learning at home identified in the summer term, including access to digital technology, remained in the autumn term.

- 7 The pandemic has had a greater impact on certain groups of pupils and magnified challenges that already existed. For example, school leaders have told us that pupils eligible for free school meals made slower progress in their learning during the initial lockdown than their peers, with some pupils returning to school with weaker language and numeracy skills than before the initial lockdown started.
- 8 The pandemic has exacerbated some challenges that local authority and regional consortia had already been working with schools to address. Pupils across Wales have experienced the pandemic in very different ways as a result of their home circumstances. The necessity for pupils to work at home for periods of time in the autumn term has highlighted the need for pupils to be able to work independently successfully and for schools to focus on supporting pupils to improve learning resilience.
- 9 Local authorities and consortia have recognised the potential longer-term impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of children and young people. All have offered enhanced professional learning for staff from schools and PRUs on supporting wellbeing, including on bereavement and adverse childhood experiences. Children and young people already challenged because of adverse childhood experiences prior to the pandemic have faced further challenges. Children and young people in stable family environments with very few or no prior adverse childhood experiences may also have been affected by the pandemic. For example, time away from friends caused by lockdowns, isolation periods or having to remain in tight bubbles at school can have an adverse impact on pupils’ social development and their mental health.
- 10 In most cases, local authorities have ensured that statutory processes for pupils in relation to special education needs (SEN), including assessments and annual reviews, have continued during the autumn term. Where there have been delays, this has most commonly been due to the capacity of educational psychology services and other specialist services, caused by staff absence or challenges in delivering services remotely.
- 11 Regional consortium and local authority officers continued to support teachers’ and school leaders’ digital competence during the autumn term. The increased effective use of digital communication has had positive consequences for facilitating more agile, efficient and frequent interactions between and within learning communities across Wales. School and PRU leaders have valued the flexibility of online professional learning opportunities provided by local authorities and regional consortia.
- 12 School leaders across Wales have mixed views about the effectiveness of support they have received from their local authority and their regional school improvement consortium during the pandemic. School leaders in south west Wales are most satisfied with the support they have received from their local authority, while school leaders in north Wales are most satisfied with the support they have received from their regional consortium.

- 13 Local authorities made appropriate early adaptations to the governance arrangements but a few local authorities were too slow in resuming their scrutiny functions. By the middle of July 2020, most councils had begun to hold Cabinet meetings online, but only half of councils had held virtual meetings of their scrutiny committees. As a result, decisions about re-opening schools and providing support for learners in the summer were not scrutinised in half of councils. By the autumn, all council Cabinets were meeting online, and scrutiny committees in most councils were also meeting online.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers to:

- R1 Urgently address barriers to learning at home, particularly where this is due to a lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity
- R2 Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs
- R3 Develop a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionately affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals
- R4 Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils
- R5 Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design

Leadership

Decision-making and governance

- 14 Local authorities and regional consortia have worked closely together and with the Welsh Government to respond to the evolving context caused by the pandemic. Through ADEW – the Association of Directors of Education in Wales – directors of education have worked co-operatively to support each other through the pandemic. Directors have reduced the burden on themselves, their officers and staff in the regional consortia by identifying aspects of work that they can agree to work on collaboratively or on behalf of each other. ADEW has supported national work with Welsh Government such as guidance relating to the continuity of learning.
- 15 Audit Wales has published several reports on how councils' governance arrangements have been affected by the pandemic. Early during the initial lockdown period, councils had to use emergency governance arrangements, meaning that typically 'responsibility for decisions about how councils use public money and provide services fell to senior council officers in consultation with a much smaller number of senior councillors than would usually be involved in decision-making – sometimes just the leader of the council.' (Audit Wales, 2020).
- 16 Some councils were slow to use new regulations that came in to force in April 2020 that made it easier for councils to meet virtually. As Audit Wales noted, 'in some of those councils there is no comprehensive record available online of the decisions taken since lockdown. This makes it difficult for the public to see and understand the decisions their council has taken during lockdown, and who is accountable for them' (Audit Wales, 2020).
- 17 By the middle of July 2020, most councils had begun to hold Cabinet meetings online, but only half of councils had held virtual meetings of their scrutiny committees. As a result, decisions about reopening schools to all pupils and providing support for learners in the summer were not scrutinised in half of councils. By the autumn, all council Cabinets were meeting online, and scrutiny committees in most councils were also meeting online.
- 18 When important decisions are being taken about education services, local authorities should usually take account of the views of school leaders as well as other stakeholders where relevant. Our survey of school leaders across Wales carried out in October 2020 found that the majority of them agree that their local authority involves them effectively in discussions about local education services. However, a few school leaders do not feel involved enough. Local authorities have continued to build on the range of fora they have with school and PRU leaders to communicate, consult and in a few cases, co-construct approaches.

Working together to support schools and PRUs

- 19 School and PRU leaders in south-west Wales were considerably more positive about the work of their local authority than leaders were about their local authority in the

other three regions. For example, they were more positive about the timeliness of advice and guidance from the local authority, how well their local authority communicated with them, and the support provided to enable their school or PRU to re-open successfully to all pupils in September 2020. They were also more positive about how well their local authority involves them in discussions about education services. South-west Wales is the only region where challenge advisers are directly employed by local authorities, rather than by regional consortia, and this may partly explain why leaders are more positive in this region.

- 20 School leaders' views of the support they receive from their regional consortium varies considerably. A majority of leaders agreed that GwE had provided effective support and guidance to support learning in their school or PRU. Nearly half of leaders agreed with this was the case with EAS, but only a minority agreed this was the case with CSC and ERW. A majority of leaders also agreed that GwE had provided useful information on the differences between, and approaches to, distance and blended learning. Just over half of leaders agreed with this was the case with CSC and EAS, but only a minority agreed this was the case with ERW.
- 21 Just over half of school leaders told us that they feel that their local authority cares about their wellbeing. This indicates that there is room for improvement in the relationship between some local authorities and their school leaders. A majority of teachers and most support staff told us that their school cares well for staff wellbeing.
- 22 During the initial lockdown, local authority services had to respond rapidly to support the wellbeing of all learners, and particularly those known to be vulnerable. Where local authorities already had effective joint working across services and external agencies, this was evident in the efficiency with which they responded to needs. For example, in Bridgend, the 'early help locality service model' already meant that multi-disciplinary teams worked out of three bases in the county, working in an integrated way to support families with vulnerable children and young people. These teams were well placed to work collaboratively and provide support through the pandemic. In other authorities where collaboration is less well established, the pandemic has been a catalyst to strengthen joint working. For example, Anglesey and Gwynedd's education psychology service has collaborated with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service to develop a new approach to supporting pupils who are absent from school because of their emotional wellbeing.
- 23 Local authorities have sought to support school leaders in preparing for various scenarios in the face of uncertainty about how the pandemic may affect schools through the autumn and into 2021. A majority of school and PRU leaders told us in our survey that their local authority provides effective guidance to support them to develop flexible plans in the event of further spikes in infections.

Cameo: School Business Resilience Planning

Prior to the increased operation of schools, the Corporate Director for Education and Family Support in Bridgend required all schools including the PRU to produce a business resilience plan. The local authority provided a plan template. Settings were asked to consider a range of possible scenarios and the actions they would take to ensure the continuity of learning. The local authority quality assured the plans and, where necessary required further clarification. Possible scenarios included; the self-isolation of pupils, either individually or as whole year groups; the self-isolation of staff; planning to ensure continuity of leadership. Possible solutions may include the strategic planning and mapping of blended learning; developing the capability and capacity of staff and pupils in using online platforms to support blended learning; producing pre-prepared emergency learning packs for all groups of pupils; use of Welsh Government's 'Recruit, recover and raise standards programme' grant and cover arrangements.

Delivering ongoing priorities

- 24 Local authorities have tried sustain as much 'business as usual' as possible while dealing with the various added needs of schools and PRUs associated with the pandemic. For example, wherever possible, work has continued to reorganise schools and improve school facilities as part of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme. The workload associated with responding to the pandemic has undoubtedly slowed progress in some areas. For example, at the end of March 2020, Neath Port Talbot left the regional school improvement consortium, ERW, and three of the remaining five authorities gave notice of their intention to leave at the end of March 2021. The lack of a clear plan for school improvement services in south west Wales from April 2021 is a significant concern. Elected members and senior officers across all local authorities in the region have been slow to demonstrate that there is a clear vision and plan for how high quality school improvement services that meet their needs will be provided to schools and PRUs from April 2021.
- 25 Planning and professional learning activities focused on preparing for Curriculum for Wales that schools, local authorities and regional consortia had planned for this year have inevitably been disrupted by the pandemic. From September, we had originally planned to begin discussions with all schools in Wales about their early preparatory work to implement Curriculum for Wales from September 2022. Instead, our discussions with schools in the autumn mainly concentrated on how they are responding to the pandemic. Despite the disruption to preparatory work for Curriculum for Wales, our Chief Inspector noted in our latest annual report that the pandemic 'has presented providers with the need and the opportunity to evolve and innovate ... The re-thinking that the lockdown required of schools, combined with deeper engagement with families and support services, has arguably put schools in a better place to co-create with these stakeholders a common vision for realising the Curriculum for Wales' (Estyn, 2020, p.9).

Promoting learning

Supporting schools and PRUs to reopen to all pupils

- 26 Prior to September, many pupils had spent only a few days in school since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, with some not having spent any time in school. In July, Welsh Government (2020c) issued guidance to schools and settings to support the full return to school in September. This set out priorities for learning emphasising the health and wellbeing of pupils and the importance of outdoor learning. Officers from local authorities ensured that they adopted the same priorities in their work with schools at the start of the autumn term. Local authority officers recognised the pressure that school leaders were under as they planned the reopening of schools and the amount of their time that they needed to give to operational matters including keeping staff and pupils safe. In order to support headteachers, most local authorities and regional consortia distilled the guidance about learning and brought relevant information together in one place, as in Carmarthenshire where officers established Y Porth website for this purpose. Many of the headteachers who responded to our survey said that they had sufficient support from their local authority to help them to re-open their school or PRU successfully. Many agreed that their local authority had provided guidance in good time. This contrasts with what school leaders told us about the guidance in the spring and summer terms, when many felt that it was received too late and that they had to put processes in place to support pupils' learning prior to receiving guidance.

Cameo: Supporting pupils' return to school

GwE developed a regional model in line with Welsh Government guidance, with local authorities and schools, to ensure that the individual needs of pupils were met, with consideration to their local context. The model evaluated the school's preparedness and approach to ensure learning for all pupils continued. It focused on three inter-related components that assess pupils' fitness for learning. These include their emotional and mental wellbeing; their health and physical fitness; and their core skills of numeracy, literacy, independence, and readiness for new learning.

The aim of the model was to support schools to assist pupils to return to 'learning fitness' and to promote learning which allows pupils to continue to make progress. Ensuring coherence for pupils between in-school and remote learning is another key element of the model including developing appropriate learning while current curriculum requirements were temporarily disapplied.

- 27 Through the school summer break and into the autumn term, regional consortia and local authorities built on the work during the initial lockdown to provide support and guidance to schools for ensuring the continuity of pupils' learning. In some instances, resources provided earlier in the pandemic were revised and updated to make it easier for school leaders and teachers to engage with them. For example, in

the EAS, officers listened carefully to the views of headteachers about the playlist of videos showing effective practice that officers had begun to compile at the start of the pandemic. In the summer term, schools had found the playlist useful as it drew together the national and local guidance about distance learning in one place. As the volume of materials increased, school staff found it more difficult and time-consuming to use the resource and officers responded well to this by streamlining the content into an easier to use web-based resource.

Cameo: 'Supporting Our Schools' website

In response to feedback from stakeholders, the EAS have created a new website to house their support for schools resources. The new website is easier to navigate than the playlist that the service used previously. Resources are clearly labelled and easy to scan. The website contains sections covering different topics such as governance, school improvement, guidance on using the accelerating learning grant funding and curriculum support. The website also contains a link to another new website that houses all resources related to distance and blended learning. These resources are also clearly organised under themes and there are several examples of informative case studies and presentations from schools, as well as links to helpful external resources. In order to make it easy for leaders to identify any new resources, these are signposted each week in a separate section, before being moved to the relevant themed section. The EAS staff are providing online introductory sessions to the new websites. These well-attended, informative sessions are sector specific and available through both English and Welsh. In addition to providing a demonstration of the websites, these sessions also include a choice of breakout sessions involving presentations from schools and an opportunity for discussions in small groups.

Identifying and addressing regression in learning

- 28 Early in the autumn term, schools leaders started to plan how they could best use the funding from the Welsh Government for the 'Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards' programme. The Welsh Government (2020e) issued guidance for schools to support the use of the grant using the work of national and international organisations including the Children's Commissioner and the OECD to identify the impact of the pandemic on pupils' progress in learning. The government acknowledged that, while many pupils had not progressed as much as they could, there were groups of pupils for whom the impact of the pandemic was greater. These included pupils in year groups preparing for examinations, pupils who had made the transition from primary to secondary school and vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils. Local authorities and regions supported schools to plan for the use of the grant. For example, in GwE, officers worked with schools to try to ensure that headteachers used the funding in a sustainable way and aligned its use to local priorities, including the Welsh language strategy, to benefit pupils in the longer term. Across Wales, many schools found it difficult to recruit staff using the grant because they were drawing on a limited number of available people. A few schools employed a teacher or teaching assistant on a shared basis and many schools used the funding to increase the hours of existing staff. In smaller schools, funding was often not sufficient to be able to support recruitment. Although, it is too early for schools and local authorities to

monitor the impact of the grant on addressing pupils' skills deficits, officers from local authorities and consortia have plans in place to do this. Officers in Powys local authority provided helpful advice for governors about how to evaluate schools' use of the funds on pupil progress.

- 29 The impact on pupils' learning and skills from the initial lockdown period differs widely across Wales. In their study into 'Schoolwork in Lockdown', researchers from UCL (Green, 2020) found that children across the United Kingdom spent an average of 2.5 hours each day engaging in learning. Their research shows that 20% of pupils engaged with learning for less than an hour each day and only 17% worked for more than four hours (Green, 2020, p.2). This means that between March and September 2020 nearly all pupils across the UK spent considerably less time than usual learning during the pandemic. In Wales, the number of pupils engaging with learning was lower than the averages for the UK as a whole. The study found that 20% of pupils in Wales were doing no schoolwork at home or less than an hour each day (Green, 2020, p.19). Only 15% of pupils were learning for four hours each day (Green, 2020, p.19). The report highlights substantial inequality linked to deprivation and social groups. Our findings from engagement calls to schools in the October 2020 mirror these findings. Headteachers from schools in areas of social deprivation say that teachers found it more difficult to engage pupils and families with learning through the summer term. We reported on the reasons for this, including access to technology for learning and support from parents in the thematic section of the Annual Report 2019-2020 (Estyn, 2020).

Cameo: Assessing the level of learner engagement in the Vale of Glamorgan

Prior to reopening to all pupils, officers from the local authority, in collaboration with the CSC and schools, developed a matrix to assess the level of engagement of pupils and their wellbeing. Through conversations held between improvement partners and headteachers, information was collected from 55 out of 56 schools in the Vale of Glamorgan. The useful report summarised the key findings, the barriers and challenges encountered by schools and effective practice across the region, and concluded by highlighting ways forward. The information gathered has been used to inform local policy and share effective practice across the local authority through a collection of case studies. In addition, support was provided to schools to help strengthen areas such as increasing the engagement of vulnerable pupils.

- 30 As pupils returned to school in September 2020, leaders and teachers put in place processes to identify the impact of the school closure period on pupils' learning and skills. Many schools used the national online personal assessments for reading and numeracy with pupils in Years 2 to 9 to supplement teachers' own assessments of pupils' skills. Identifying pupils' skill levels following the school closure period was a particular challenge for secondary schools as pupils moved from Year 6 to Year 7. To help schools to identify a baseline for these pupils in secondary schools across the south-east region, the EAS provided schools with funding to support pupil assessment. Generally, local authorities report that pupils have fallen behind with reading and writing skills, and headteachers reported in early October that there has also been a negative impact on the speaking and social skills of younger pupils in the

foundation phase. Local authority and consortia officers are working with schools to address these skills deficits, and are mindful of the need to ensure that schools do not focus on these core skills to the detriment of the wider curriculum.

Supporting Welsh language skills

- 31 An issue identified during the summer term was the learning of pupils in Welsh-medium schools from English-speaking homes, as many of these pupils had not had the opportunity to hear or practise the language. Addressing this issue was one of the aims of the Welsh Government's 'Recruit, recover and raise standards programme'. As the pupils affected by this issue returned to school in September, staff were particularly concerned about the levels of pupils' speaking skills. Local authorities put a number of initiatives in place to support schools and pupils. For example in Neath Port Talbot, the Welsh advisory service developed useful resources and collaborated with Menter Iaith and the Urdd to provide support for schools. In Wrexham, officers ensured that pupils from Welsh-medium schools who have needed to self-isolate since September have received resource packs and weekly face-to-face sessions or online sessions including podcasts. Several local authorities, including Conwy and Bridgend, used their immersion facilities to provide additional support for these pupils and Cardiff increased its provision in this area to help cope with demand. Officers in the regional consortia also provided support for schools. The EAS placed members of its Welsh support team in Welsh-medium primary schools across the region during the autumn term to support staff and pupils to address the deficit in pupils' skills. In our discussions with headteachers from English-medium primary schools, many said that they valued the support for teaching Welsh from local authorities and regional consortia, in particular the resources produced by Welsh advisory team staff to support provision in school.

Cameo: Supporting pupils who are new to the Welsh language

One example of the close alignment of the work of Gwynedd and GwE is their approach to supporting schools to develop pupils' Welsh language skills. The challenge of catering for their linguistic needs when schools reopened for all pupils in September was compounded by the difficulties in running Welsh language units in their traditional form. To support primary schools, the local authority arranged for the specialist teachers to provide an outreach service on a cluster basis, while the cluster's improvement support officer worked with the schools to create and adapt Welsh schemes of work.

- 32 Around 1,000 parents responded to our survey question about support for pupils in Welsh-medium schools. Many of these said that they were happy with the support provided by the school to help their children make progress with their Welsh. Very few parents felt that this was not the case, but those that did said that there was a lack of support for parents who do not speak Welsh and a lack of bilingual resources to enable parents to provide support for their children at home. Most of the pupils who responded to our survey agreed that they are getting good support to help them with their Welsh language skills.

Cameo: Supporting pupils' Welsh language development

In Carmarthenshire, officers identified the need to support pupils to maintain their engagement with the Welsh language from early in the pandemic. The Welsh advisory team adapted and refined their existing resources to provide schools and PRUs with activities to share with pupils and parents. In addition, they created extra-curricular activities and micro-lessons for pupils to recall previous learning, revise grammar, and to develop their reading skills and numeracy skills. They provided worthwhile tasks based on Welsh poetry as a stimulus to learning as well as providing activities to develop pupils' Welsh-speaking skills through the 'Cynllun Clonc' and Flipgrid activities.

Social media was used well to promote Welsh language activities, for example scientific activities for the outdoors and activities on history of the local area. Homework booklets were also distributed to enable parents to support their children with work through the medium of Welsh. Local authority officers and teachers in a number of its secondary schools worked with regional consortia staff to create a wide range of valuable Welsh language resources to support pupils in Welsh-medium and English-medium schools. Officers continued to develop resources for schools throughout the autumn term to support schools to improve pupils' Welsh language development.

Promoting broad curriculum experiences

- 33 Through Modification of Curriculum Requirements in Wales Notices, the Welsh Government temporarily modified the requirement for schools and funded non-maintained nurseries to provide the basic curriculum and associated assessment arrangements. In practice the curriculum narrowed in many schools in the autumn term. Whether the result of their own risk assessments or a misunderstanding of Welsh Government operational guidance, lots of schools determined the need to sanitise resources between uses. In schools where this was the case, it has had an impact on the youngest and the oldest pupils in schools in particular. For example, in the foundation phase pupils have had to access a limited range of resources in their continuous and enhanced provision. In secondary schools, pupils' access to equipment in practical subjects such as art and science has also become more difficult for teachers to manage.

Cameo: Supporting science teaching

ERW subject teams shared clear and helpful guidance which reassured and supported science teachers in the region. For example, the ERW science team gave examples of online sites that included video demonstrations of experiments, and useful and engaging resources that teachers could use for distance learning.

- 34 In a few local authorities, the delivery of shared services to schools, for example peripatetic music tuition for pupils stopped. In other local authorities, including Caerphilly and Cardiff, officers found new ways of providing these services. In Ceredigion, the authority's information technology team provided support to the

music service to enable them to teach virtually. This has enabled pupils to continue to receive instrumental lessons. This way of working has removed tutors' travel time and contributed to maintaining pupils' standards.

Cameo: Caerphilly music service

Local authority officers have worked to ensure that the schools' music service was able to resume its work more fully from September 2020. The local authority has provided clear guidance to music service staff and schools on how this service can be delivered safely in schools. It has also provided detailed guidance and protocols on how the service can be delivered remotely. The guidance covers a range of issues and scenarios, including lessons for individuals and classes, live and recorded sessions and safeguarding considerations. The guidance also provides clear information as to how the Welsh Government's guidance should be followed in the context of the Caerphilly music service.

- 35 In November 2020, the Minister for Education confirmed that, for qualifications in 2021, there will be no end of year examinations for pupils taking GCSE, AS level or A levels. The Minister established a Design and Delivery Group to advise on the process of awarding qualifications without examinations. Plans for this process were again being reviewed as term started in January 2021 with all pupils learning from home due to another national lockdown. Although it is understandable and necessary that plans for awarding qualifications have had to change again this year, these changes, especially in-year changes, can cause great stress and anxiety for pupils, as well as teachers.
- 36 Pupils in key stage 4 following alternative curriculum courses are a particular concern to many schools. There is a great deal of variation in how easily these pupils can access their alternative and off-site provision and this has proved to be a considerable timetabling challenge for schools. A large number of more practical courses such as hair and beauty have not been able to run. As a result, a few pupils who usually access provision of this kind, particularly those who were previously at risk of exclusion, are displaying challenging behaviour or are disengaging. Even when these courses are accessible, often it is with a reduced timetable because the provider cannot allow pupils from one school to mix with another. In Powys, officers engaged with all post-16 pupils through the Powys Learning Pathways website during the summer holidays. This helped pupils to feel supported and engaged after a period of disruption to their learning. At the same time, local authority officers made helpful bridging units available to pupils about to start post-16 courses. These units together with the contact have helped pupils transition to their post-16 studies. During the autumn, pupils had to remain at their own school for all learning as it was not possible to visit other campuses, even if their subject teachers were based elsewhere. Supported by officers in the local authority, subject teachers streamed lessons live so that all pupils could access them. As the local authority had already used remote learning through their 'e-sgol' programme, the transition to online learning was comparatively seamless and schools and pupils are familiar with how to make the best use of it.

- 37 Providers of post-16 education have developed contingency plans for local lockdowns or outbreaks of COVID-19 and continue to amend aspects of the delivery of teaching, training and assessment across the sectors. Where venues for pupils to receive face-to-face teaching or training have had to close, the restrictions on access to pupils' workplaces continue to be a major barrier to learning. Providers offer online activities to maintain learner engagement and interest, however a key challenge on vocational programmes and courses is maintaining the engagement and motivation of pupils during periods of lockdown or self-isolation. These pupils selected practical-based courses and with the current crisis this aspect is often paused or significantly reduced. Providers report that higher level pupils on higher level programmes, even those undertaking academic courses and programmes, may not make the progress that was initially expected due to family reasons such as childcare restricting their study time.

Promoting more effective distance and blended learning

- 38 In her research commissioned by the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee, Dr Sofya Lyakhova of Swansea University (2020) found that, although many pupils fall behind in their academic learning without access to teachers and support from their parents, a small proportion may make gains in learning, particularly in reading. These are pupils who have the ability to self-regulate or as John Hattie (2020) says, 'they know what to do when they do not know and there is limited help available'. Lyakhova's research emphasises the need for pupils' emotional health and wellbeing to be strong in order for them to be able to learn independently. School improvement advisers have noted that building resilience and developing independent skills have become more evident as school priorities since pupils returned to school in the autumn. Local authority and regional consortia officers are aware of the need for a greater focus on teaching and learning strategies that accelerate the development of pupils' abilities in these areas.
- 39 The need for schools to act quickly to address the need for pupils to learn at home became more urgent as the autumn term progressed. It became clear in September 2020 that schools were going to be affected by positive COVID-19 cases and that pupils would be required to self-isolate at home for periods of time. In our survey, many governors said that their schools and PRUs had sound plans in place to ensure that teaching could continue if pupils were away from school because of another lockdown or the need to isolate. A majority of headteachers agreed, saying that local authorities had provided effective guidance to support schools and PRUs to develop flexible plans to deal with further outbreaks of COVID-19 infection. In practice, pupils' experiences as a result of these outbreaks have varied widely across Wales due to the varied impact of the pandemic in different areas and also the different policies and practices adopted by local authorities in relation to close contacts and the different ways that schools have organised groups and cohorts of pupils. This has resulted in further inequity in the learning experiences between pupils who have received their autumn term education in school and those who have been taught at a distance, in some cases for a significant proportion of the term. Where this happens, the barriers to learning at home identified in the summer term, including access to digital technology and parental support, remain. When we surveyed school leaders in October 2020, many headteachers felt that local authorities had been proactive in providing information technology resources and internet connectivity for those pupils

without access to these at home. Teachers and governors were less positive about this support. Around half of governors said that local authorities had provided effective support in this area. Although many teachers from primary schools and PRUs and a majority of those from special schools said that schools were helping pupils to overcome barriers to learning at home, only around half of the secondary school teachers and a minority of the teachers from all-age schools who responded to our survey agreed with this.

- 40 In November 2020, the Children’s Commissioner for Wales (2020) spoke to pupils from Years 9 to 13 to identify any differences in their learning experiences between the summer and autumn terms, in particular the period where all pupils in these year groups were working at home because of the national firebreak. The pupils involved in this work said that there had been improvements in their experiences of distance learning. Their days were structured in a similar way to a school timetable, and teachers had checked that all pupils had access to digital devices and were provided with feedback on their work online in a timely manner. In some schools, pupils had been asked to complete surveys about their learning experiences and, as a result, teachers had made adjustments to suit pupils. For example, some schools provided recordings of lessons that pupils could use at a time that suited them. The issues raised by pupils included the amount of work provided, which meant that they were working long hours, and the inconsistency of provision between different subject areas. They also shared concerns about the lack of support from parents who do not have the skills to support them and the lack of digital skills of some teachers. Many said that they missed interacting with teachers and other pupils and that, although the distance learning offer had improved, it still does not compare well with learning at school. The importance of remote peer interaction was one of the findings from the EEF’s Rapid Evidence Assessment (2020). Across the studies that EEF researchers reviewed, they found a range of strategies to support peer interaction, including peer marking and feedback, sharing models of good work, and opportunities for pupils to participate in live discussions of content. The evidence from pupils and schools indicates that this is an area of distance learning that needs development.
- 41 Across Wales, regional consortia and local authority officers have seen the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to focus on developing the ethos and principles of the Curriculum for Wales, for example the focus on health and wellbeing in schools at the start of the autumn term. In Powys, challenge advisers are promoting the use of the pedagogical principles to enrich pupils’ learning. In Flintshire, officers provided training on using the outdoor environment as a way to develop pupils’ resilience and perseverance in problem-solving. The training was provided for non-maintained settings, nursery and primary schools and PRUs with pupils of primary school age. Across the GwE region, officers recognise that many secondary schools have had to change their approach and plan lessons in thematic blocks due to pupils being in ‘bubbles’. Officers and elected members see this as a strength as it links clearly with the authority’s vision for implementing the Curriculum for Wales. Many secondary schools have made use of resources provided through GwE’s new online ‘support centre’, including multi-disciplinary units of work that fit well with the principles of the Curriculum for Wales. Despite this positive work, there is also a recognition that the pandemic has slowed the progress that schools were making in addressing the implementation of the new curriculum.

Professional learning

- 42 Regional consortia and local authorities increased the range of professional learning opportunities to address the additional need caused by the pandemic. Much of their work in the autumn term focused on supporting schools to understand and develop approaches to distance and blended learning, building on the work they started in the initial lockdown. As schools identified pupils' needs on their return to full-time schooling, officers in local authorities and regional consortia responded by tailoring their learning offer to support teachers to address pupils' specific needs. GwE offer a wide range of opportunities for schools to participate in specific professional learning opportunities to improve pupils' literacy, numeracy and accelerated learning strategies. In Swansea, officers adjusted their learning offer as their understanding of the impact of distance learning on pupils developed. They worked with schools to provide the best fit model for individual circumstances. For example, the local authority supported teachers to design paper materials for distance learning following evidence that pupils do not learn as well in front of a screen when compared with on paper. Officers in Swansea also provided support for schools to develop their approach to assessing pupils' work through virtual platforms. They offered virtual training on approaches that include using mini quizzes, giving feedback using the live-chat facility on platforms like 'Microsoft Teams', using video recordings to explain new tasks and to identify misconceptions and offering whole-class feedback on common misconceptions. A few local authorities, including Cardiff, collaborated with organisations such as the Open University to support professional learning in schools. In Cardiff, schools and the Cardiff and Vale College worked with the Open University to deliver a programme of interactive online workshops, focused on pedagogy and effective learning design.

Cameo: Using evidence from communication with schools to inform professional learning

Officers in Swansea carried out a survey with primary headteachers, seeking information on specific training needs during the pandemic. They analysed the responses and came up with a list of items for future webinars. These included developing the use of live sessions, how to use the tools available via Hwb and other useful platforms/apps and suggestions for easy-to-use tools for teachers to help them when designing online/distance learning activities. As a result, the local authority produced a comprehensive programme of webinars to address these.

- 43 Officers from local authorities and regional consortia used the initial lockdown period to engage with national and international research, to identify effective practice to share with schools. In Bridgend, school improvement partners collated evidence about learning from the Education Endowment Foundation (2020) whose findings include that the quality of teaching is more important than how it is delivered. This has helped schools in the local authority to think about their approaches to distance and blended learning. In Carmarthenshire, officers used the work of Michael Fullan as a basis for moving learning from a distance learning model used during the school closure period to a model that could be used as schools re-opened fully for the autumn term. In the EAS, officers adapted the approach of Simon Brakespear to help school leaders to see their response to the pandemic in phases and to identify what was important and different at each phase.

- 44 Officers from local authorities and regional consortia have started to put plans in place to evaluate the impact of their support for schools on pupils' learning. In Gwynedd, officers recognise that it is not yet possible to draw meaningful conclusions about schools' approaches to distance learning. However, following the first case of a school having to send home a significant cohort of pupils in the autumn term, officers evaluated the distance learning provision. They created a case study for other schools, outlining the implications and the factors that leaders and teachers need to consider when planning for pupils to learn remotely. Following cluster meetings with the regional school improvement service to discuss distance and blended learning, one school in Wrexham trialled using a digital distance learning approach while pupils were in class. One group of pupils completed activities and tasks online while the teacher used direct instruction with other pupils. This allowed teachers to support pupils to use software and upload work to a digital platform while they were in school. It also allowed the school to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the activities and tasks set as distance learning. The school is adapting its approach following feedback from this process. The EAS carried out a survey to gain leaders' perceptions of their learning offer. Local authorities within the region are using this information to help them to develop an overview of their schools' provision. Across Wales it is too early to be able to evaluate fully the impact of this work on schools and pupils as processes to evaluate the quality of learning offers including distance learning are in the early stages of development.
- 45 Training to support teachers' digital competence continued in the autumn term. Officers in ERW provided a series of webinars for primary, secondary and special schools and PRUs that give an overview of the tools available through Hwb to support blended and distance learning, complementing their earlier work. The sessions included specific themes for school leaders, such as what to consider when experiencing individual year group isolation. These webinars also included recordings and live discussions with school leaders from around the region, which school leaders found reassuring when considering how best to implement their own plans. In addition, the team shared online safety and self-review tools, as well as curriculum support for specific areas, for example to develop teachers' practice with coding. A Google Classroom set up specifically for teaching assistants to develop their online skills has attracted over 200 participants. In our engagement calls with schools, headteachers identified the improvement in teachers' ICT skills and their confidence in the use of technology to support pupils' learning as a positive impact of the pandemic on schools. The need for teachers to put what they had learned into practice quickly made the professional learning immediately relevant to their needs.
- 46 Most consortia and local authorities found that, as professional learning moved online, more practitioners have taken up learning opportunities as they no longer involve full days out of school and materials can be accessed at any time. A majority of the support staff who responded to our survey said that they had received effective professional learning to support them to make a successful return to school. Despite the opportunities available for professional learning, our survey also found that 22% of teachers who responded do not feel that they have had sufficient opportunities to support their understanding of distance and blended learning.
- 47 The period since March 2020 has delivered many challenges for local authorities and regional consortia in their work to support schools. It has also provided opportunities

to think differently and to work in different ways. Officers are aware of the need to learn from the experience and are keen to maintain and build upon the new ways of working that have had a positive impact. The use of digital platforms to hold meetings and as a way of delivering professional learning has been both time and cost effective and has enabled more education staff to participate in these more frequently. In the spring and summer terms 2020, teachers had to respond quickly to the need to provide distance learning materials for pupils. This provision improved though the summer term and as the number of pupils needing to learn away from the classroom has increased in the autumn, the need to further improve and embed distance and blended learning provision remains a priority. The pandemic has reinforced issues that local authorities and consortia had already been working with schools to address. These include the impact of poverty on families and in particular on children's learning. Pupils across Wales have experienced the pandemic in very different ways as a result of their local and home circumstances. The initial lockdown period and the necessity for pupils to work at home for periods of time in the autumn term have highlighted the need for pupils to be able to work independently successfully and for schools to focus on supporting pupils to improve learning resilience.

Supporting vulnerable pupils

Preparing for pupils to return in September

- 48 Having briefly welcomed pupils back to their school or PRU at the end of the summer term, leaders' attention turned to supporting vulnerable pupils during the summer holiday as well as preparing for the autumn term. Local authorities organised various summer activities, often led by youth workers. These usually targeted the most vulnerable pupils, such as children looked after by the local authority and those whose behaviour in their community was a concern, and provided a range of useful activities to support personal and social skills as well as their wellbeing.
- 49 Many support services for vulnerable pupils continued through the summer holiday too, such as online counselling, welfare visits to families in need, helplines for those needing support. In Merthyr Tydfil, a local authority officer maintained contact through the summer holiday with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils and their families to support them to remain engaged in learning, with schools reporting that a good proportion of these pupils returned to school in September 2020. In Torfaen, education welfare officers identified pupils who did not engage with the 'Check in, catch up, prepare for summer and September' sessions in schools at the end of the summer term (Welsh Government, 2020d). The officers then worked closely with families to support pupils to return to school in September.

Cameo: Re-engaging pupils through summer activities

Officers in Denbighshire recognised that some vulnerable pupils would benefit from additional input in order to successfully re-engage with learning. They secured grant funding to deliver engaging and enriching activities to target vulnerable young pupils and those from economically disadvantaged areas. The Education and Children's Services worked in partnership with the Youth Service and external partners to provide a summer holiday activity programme over five weeks. This helped to bridge the gap between the initial lockdown period and the full reopening of schools to all pupils in September by inspiring young people through sport, music, drama, team building and craft activities. Activities included lessons on African drumming, a drama workshop hosted by a West End star, and team games on a beach. All participants received free lunch and bus passes in order to facilitate attendance.

- 50 While scientists warned of the potential for a 'second wave' of COVID-19, this was unpredictable both in terms of timing and scale. The Welsh Government committed to returning all pupils full-time in the autumn, with scope for a staggered start in September. Local authority officers, and sometimes regional consortium officers, worked closely with school and PRU leaders across Wales to ensure that school sites were safe for pupils. In some cases, health and safety officers jointly carried out risk assessments with school and PRU leaders. In other cases, leaders carried out their own assessments and these were sent to officers to be checked. Local authorities have helpfully held drop-in online meetings or used a digital forum for headteachers to discuss health and safety issues with officers.

- 51 Where relevant, individual risk assessments were carried out for vulnerable pupils with special educational needs and those requiring extra support, and often local authority officers supported this process and assisted with any resulting concerns. For example, officers in Caerphilly worked with parents and school staff to discuss the use of PPE when a child with autistic spectrum condition spits when distressed. Officers provided staff in another school with surgical respiratory protection masks for when working with pupils who require aerosol or suctioning procedures.
- 52 Schools and PRUs across Wales prioritised pupils' wellbeing at the start of the autumn term. Regional consortia and local authorities provided professional learning, guidance and resources to help staff think through the potential issues. Much of the professional learning offered to leaders, teachers and support staff across Wales focused on understanding how trauma can affect children and young people, and how staff can identify those who are struggling and support them. For example, GwE offered a 'Return to school trauma-informed schools programme', which included practical strategies and key teaching and learning principles and models. In EAS, teaching assistants were offered training in delivering a 'coping and connecting' six-week intervention programme to support targeted vulnerable pupils settle back to school life. In Powys, existing school-to-school support continued, with staff at the PRU training school staff across the local authority on supporting pupils' behaviour and readiness to learn on their return to school.
- 53 Professional learning also focused on the importance of relationships, with schools and PRUs encouraged to give time to this at the start of the autumn term. For example, CSC purchased access to the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) for all schools, and ERW commissioned Professor Robin Banerjee to deliver professional learning to develop staff understanding of self-efficacy and connection as key to supporting wellbeing.
- 54 Some local authorities provided parents and carers with information and advice to support pupils' return to school. For example, Carmarthenshire created a 'Welcome back' pack that explained what pupils might experience when using school transport and practical suggestions on how to support their child's wellbeing.

Cameo: Supporting vulnerable pupils' wellbeing needs in preparation of the return to school

In collaboration with the Educational Psychology team, leaders and teachers in Neath Port Talbot provided a 'One Page Profile' via Microsoft Forms for all pupils to complete before the 'Check-in, catch-up, prepare for summer and September' period. This was an effective approach to gain direct, individual information from pupils regarding their wellbeing during the initial lockdown. This information served as a guide for teachers to plan more diverse and bespoke provision on their return, especially for specific vulnerable groups such as pupils with SEN.

- 55 Most pupils were happy to return to school in September 2020, for the social contact with friends as well as to progress their learning. Many headteachers we contacted commented on how engaged most pupils were, and how positively they were accepting new routines and procedures. Our survey of pupils in October 2020 found

that 77% agreed or strongly agreed that felt safe in school. Prior to the pandemic, 89% of pupils, on average, told us they felt safe in their school when they surveyed as part of their school inspection. This indicates the anxiety that a few pupils were feeling on returning to school, despite the protective measures that were in place. In particular, pupils expressed concern about the unsafe behaviour of a very few pupils who did not follow their school's rules and put others at risk. Some school leaders have noted that enforced changes to how the school operates, such as staggered break times, zones for different year groups and one way systems, have had a positive impact on pupils' behaviours and they are considering which changes may be useful to continue when the pandemic is over.

- 56 Pupils who were moving to a new class within their school or PRU or a new school or PRU in September 2020 had missed out on usual transition activities, including visits to familiarise themselves with the site and staff. Schools and PRUs made up for the lack of visits and opportunities to meet new staff in the summer term through helpful video tours and staff introductions alongside information on websites to help pupils prepare for their transition. In our survey, 92% of pupils moving to a new class in September felt that teachers helped them settle, with only a very few disagreeing.
- 57 Some primary schools have commented that young children starting school for the first time in September 2020 are less ready for school than is usually the case. They also noticed that children that who had their first year in school disrupted by the initial lockdown had regressed in their readiness for learning. For example, schools identified weaknesses in the development of these pupils' social and communication skills, and more children than normal are unable to toilet and feed themselves. This is making it harder for young pupils to settle, and is stretching the resource of staff to support them.

Cameo: Sharing a school's approach to supporting skills in the early years across Monmouthshire

One primary school in Monmouthshire noticed that the sudden ending of school in March had a significant negative impact on pupils in the reception class. From March, many of these young pupils made less progress in relation to their personal, social and learning skills than would have normally been expected. To help address this, leaders, teachers and support staff worked with parents to create a framework of skills to tackle this deficit. The local authority noted that the school's strategy seemed to be successful and shared the learning from this with other schools..

- 58 While almost all pupils returned to school or PRU in September 2020, a very few did not and some parents opted to educate their child at home. The number of pupils being educated at home has been steadily rising in recent years, but there has been a sharper increase this year. Around half of local authorities report that the number of families choosing to educate their children at home has increased as a result of the pandemic.
- 59 The Welsh Government postponed the introduction of statutory guidance and regulations on elective home education due to COVID-19, so local authorities

continue to have limited responsibilities and powers in relation to ensuring that every child's right to an education are upheld. Local authorities have varying degrees of success in their efforts to encourage these families to engage voluntarily. For the large proportion of families that are willing to engage, local authorities offer varying extent of support to parents and carers of children educated at home. For example, in Anglesey, officers established an elective home education forum to help to strengthen the procedures around home education and in Neath Port Talbot inclusion officers worked with schools to provide guidance to parents of pupils with a statement of special educational needs.

- 60 A very few pupils did not return to their school or PRU because of specific health and safety concerns that meant the risk to themselves or staff was too great. This included, for example, pupils with severe health conditions and those with extremely challenging behaviour. In these rare instances, local authorities have worked with schools and PRUs to ensure that these pupils can continue to learn from home as much as possible.
- 61 Local authorities often proactively supported vulnerable young people to return to school in September 2020. For example, in Ceredigion a team of youth specialists was attached to each secondary school. Youth workers, specialist behaviour workers and youth justice workers supported pupils who were known to be at risk of not engaging in their education. This support, in addition to that provided by the schools themselves, contributed to high attendance rates for these pupils.

Supporting wellbeing

- 62 For children and young people already challenged by several adverse childhood experiences, the pandemic may have magnified the challenges they face and taken a heavy toll on their wellbeing. Even children and young people in stable family environments with very few or no prior adverse childhood experiences have been significantly affected by the pandemic. For example, time away from friends caused by lockdowns, isolation periods or having to remain in tight bubbles at school can have an adverse impact on pupils' social development and their mental health. Indeed, schools and local authorities noted that some of the pupils they had become concerned about were not pupils that they would previously had recognised as vulnerable.
- 63 During the initial lockdown, schools and local authorities refined their approaches and systems for identifying and monitoring vulnerable pupils and sharing information between agencies. In Cardiff, for example, the local authority set up a new data system for collecting information on vulnerable pupils. The information was reviewed weekly by a 'joint vulnerable pupils panel', which planned a co-ordinated response across services.
- 64 During the initial lockdown, local authority services had to respond rapidly to support the wellbeing of all pupils, and particularly those known to be vulnerable. Where local authorities already had effective joint working across services and external agencies, this was evident in the efficiency with which they responded to needs. In authorities where collaboration is less well established, the pandemic has been a catalyst to strengthen joint working. For example, Anglesey and Gwynedd's

education psychology service has collaborated with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service to develop a new approach to supporting pupils who are absent from school because of their emotional wellbeing.

Cameo: Multi-disciplinary working – sharing information and providing solutions

A key feature of Bridgend's ability to adapt and respond quickly to the needs of children and young people, particularly those identified as vulnerable, has been the strong connections that exist across and within service areas. For example, the pre-existing 'early help locality service model' across the borough helps to ensure that professionals share relevant information with one another. Multi-disciplinary staff are co-located at three sites across the borough. Discussions and solution-focused work with families involve different specialist services. This integrated approach helps to ensure also that support is prioritised and allocated appropriately.

The development of the multi-agency safeguarding hub, in place for the past two years, has also contributed to a sharing of intelligence around safeguarding concerns for individuals. Colleagues from South Wales Police, the local health board and local authority are co-located and provide a single point of contact for agencies to refer into.

- 65 In the summer term 2020, school leaders often noted that they had been inundated with information, guidance and suggested resources and activities to support pupils' wellbeing and to support vulnerable pupils. This was a reflection of how all agencies, including local authorities, regional consortia, health services, police and justice services, local and national voluntary organisations, were keen to support children, young people and their families. Taking account of feedback from senior leaders, agencies helpfully rationalised their communication with schools during the autumn term.
- 66 In most cases, local authorities have ensured that statutory processes for pupils in relation to special education needs (SEN), including assessments and annual reviews, continued during the autumn term. Where there have been delays, this has most commonly been due to the capacity of educational psychology services and other specialist services, caused by staff absence or challenges in delivering services remotely. In Wrexham, the local authority has employed a locum educational psychologist to boost capacity in their service and help complete outstanding assessments. Local authority services, schools and PRUs have adapted so families and professionals involved with their child's education can meet online where necessary to facilitate statutory processes. During the autumn term, services gradually resumed face-to-face work to support assessment of pupils with SEN, although headteachers were frustrated by inconsistent approaches across agencies to returning to face-to-face work.
- 67 Local authority services to support pupils with special educational needs have found ways to continue support for pupils. For example, in Caerphilly, the regional SENCOM service for pupils with sensory difficulties has worked remotely with pupils through video conferencing technology and provided bespoke training to school staff so that they can support pupils with hearing or visual impairments.

- 68 Our survey of parents and carers in October 2020 found that the majority of those with children who receive additional support agreed that the school or PRU is considering their child's needs and providing appropriate resources, support and guidance for them. A similar proportion felt that the school or PRU makes appropriate arrangements for their child to discuss their feelings, health and wellbeing or concerns. On both matters, a few parents disagreed. Where parents and carers had concerns, these related to poor communication about how their child's needs would be met, support outlined in a statement for special educational needs not being provided, reduced support for pupils with autistic spectrum condition, and general concerns about the usual support not being provided.
- 69 The Welsh Government gave local authorities additional funding this year to increase the capacity of counselling services. These services are provided directly by some local authorities, although more commonly the service is commissioned from an external provider. In some cases, the funding has been used to extend access to Year 4 and Year 5 children as local authorities are only required to provide a service for Year 6 children in primary school. In the Vale of Glamorgan, the local authority has employed a play therapist to provide support to younger children in primary schools, to complement the counselling service. Lots of counsellors have completed additional training in counselling online. While some counselling services resumed face-to-face sessions with children and young people during the autumn term, others continued to provide sessions online or over the telephone as they did during the initial lockdown. Young people around Wales have mixed views about counselling via video or telephone calls: some find it easier to talk to a counsellor this way whereas others have not engaged and are waiting for face-to-face sessions to resume.
- 70 Some local authorities and consortia are supporting schools to use their 'Recruit, recover, raise standards' programme grant from the Welsh Government to increase capacity to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of pupils. For example, in Ceredigion, schools have used the funding to increase the hours of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants, working under the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service 'In-Reach' pilot.
- 71 Safeguarding work with children, young people and families continued online through the autumn term when circumstances meant that this was the best option. While the rate of children placed on the child protection register was a little lower than usual during the initial lockdown period, the rate rose through August 2020 and peaked in September before dropping again through the autumn term. The peak rate was not a significant increase compared to typical fluctuations or the long term trend for rising numbers of children being placed on the register nationally. There is no clear correlation between the local authorities seeing the highest increases in the rate of children placed on the child protection register and the incidence of COVID-19 in the community.
- 72 Young people have often spent more time online than usual due to periods of self-isolation and restrictions on activities that they would usually be involved in. In Monmouthshire, the local authority recognised the increased safeguarding risk associated with this. Local authority officers worked with their schools, the PRU and the Home Office to hold more frequent Channel Panels to review concerns about pupils relating to extremism or radicalisation.

- 73 School attendance was understandably affected by COVID-19 in the autumn term. After pupils gradually returned at the start of September 2020, attendance peaked at 88% at the start of October. Attendance dropped through October as the incidence of COVID-19 began to rise sharply in some parts of Wales. Attendance was 90% in the first week after the firebreak in November, which included half-term, before dropping through the rest of the autumn term. Attendance in the autumn term is highest for pupils in primary schools, with the exception of nursery pupils. Pupils in Years 11, 12 and 13 have the lowest attendance. Much of the absence is explained by pupils having to self-isolate. Although recorded as authorised absence, schools provide distance learning for these pupils, although for logistical reasons there is often a delay of a day or so before the full distance learning offer is in place for self-isolating pupils. School leaders report that pupils often make slower progress in their learning when self-isolating.
- 74 There is a close correlation between school attendance rates and local COVID-19 rates. Through the autumn term, pupils were affected unequally as enforced self-isolation due to close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case affected certain parts of Wales more than others. Some pupils experienced several weeks of distance learning during the autumn term due to self-isolation, whereas other pupils were in school every day.
- 75 The 'Test, Trace and Protect' (TTP) strategy in Wales is a partnership between the Welsh Government, local authorities and NHS organisations. The purpose of the strategy is 'to enhance health surveillance in the community, undertake effective and extensive contact tracing, and support people to self-isolate where required to do so' (Welsh Government, 2020f). The strategy appears to have been implemented slightly differently across Wales when a positive COVID-19 case has been confirmed in a school. In some local areas, much larger groups of pupils have been regarded as a close contact compared to other areas despite schools having similar protective measures in place. This has particularly affected older pupils in secondary schools, with some of these pupils having several weeks away from school in self-isolation during the autumn term. The local variation in implementation of the TTP strategy has impacted pupils' progress and wellbeing unequally across Wales.
- 76 When pupils are required to self-isolate, some local authorities work with schools to share this information across services and with partners so that vulnerable pupils can be offered additional support. For example, in cases where a pupil is on the child protection register in Denbighshire, officers make contact on the first day of self-isolation to ensure that support is in place. When several hundred pupils from a school serving an area of high deprivation were required to self-isolate, Denbighshire's Youth Support Team worked constructively in partnership with local police officers to support young people who were gathering outside during the day instead of self-isolating.
- 77 Schools, PRUs and education services sometimes reported that they had noted a rise in concerns about pupils' mental health. All local authorities have sought to ensure that schools and PRUs are aware of all the support that is available for pupils struggling with their mental health.

Cameo: Guidance on supporting learners' mental health and wellbeing

From the outset, Swansea has prioritised the health and wellbeing of learners and staff. The improved sharing of information across the local authority and with external agencies during the pandemic, allowed officers to focus on common issues affecting learners across Swansea. In particular it became evident that there could be an increase of learners self-harming, suffering from anxiety and depression or attempting to take their own lives. As a result, the local authority produced timely guidance for schools to support their learners and information on where to seek further help. The guidance was also shared with a neighbouring local authority to help support their learners.

Supporting vulnerable pupils

- 78 Schools have found it particularly challenging to support all their vulnerable pupils. Our survey of support staff found that many of them feel that they have been providing effective support to vulnerable pupils, with hardly any disagreeing. In the same survey, just over half of teachers felt that they were able to meet the needs of their vulnerable pupils, with around two-in-ten teachers disagreeing.
- 79 Children and young people who are Gypsy, Roma or Travellers often miss more school than most pupils for cultural reasons. Local authorities have worked hard to maintain contact with families and encourage them to return to school in September. For example, officers in Carmarthenshire used an existing WhatsApp support group to keep families engaged and as a platform for offering support where needed. This authority is also providing these families with access to a tailored package of activities to support language skills as this was identified as a common concern.
- 80 Pupils with English or Welsh as an additional language are particularly vulnerable to making little progress when they are expected to learn from home, as was the case during the initial lockdown and periods of self-isolation in the autumn term. Often these pupils' parents or carers do not understand English or Welsh and therefore find it difficult to support their child's learning. In Newport, the Gwent Education Minority Ethnic Service (GEMS) continued to support pupils at home during the autumn term. Multi-lingual staff in GEMS kept in regular contact with families affected, to support pupils to continue learning as well as to monitor their wellbeing.
- 81 Operation Encompass is a relatively new scheme where police services commit to contacting key staff in relevant schools before the start of the next school day if they have been called to an incident of domestic abuse at a child's home. This early information enables schools to offer immediate support to pupils affected. As lots of schools remained in contact with vulnerable families during the school summer holidays and the two-week firebreak in the autumn term, authorities such as Cardiff worked with police services to extend the scheme to operate through these periods too.
- 82 Children and young people looked after by local authorities are among the most vulnerable in Wales, both in terms of their wellbeing as well as their education outcomes. Local authorities have often added in extra checks and support for these

children and young people during the pandemic. For example, in Bridgend local authority officers visited care placements weekly, which helped them to identify potential placement breakdowns and be proactive in providing additional support where needed rather than waiting for placements to fail. Anglesey and Gwynedd local authorities provided looked-after children with a laptop to enable them to continue learning at home during lockdown or self-isolation periods.

- 83 Pupils in work-based learning have faced redundancy or anxiety related to potential redundancy during the autumn term. Some vocational courses, such as hair and beauty, have been significantly affected by the pandemic. This has disproportionately affected vulnerable pupils who are more likely than their peers to follow vocational routes at ages 14-19. For example, older secondary-aged pupils in Merthyr could not continue with junior apprenticeships run by the local college. This caused considerable disappointment for these young people, the vast majority of whom returned to school full-time while the local authority had to make alternative provision for the rest.

Cameo: Local authority support for vocational provision

In one secondary school in Pembrokeshire, leaders had already planned to evaluate and review its vocational provision during the last academic year. They worked with a local authority officer to carry out this evaluation. The school no longer employs an external vocational provider and has created its own vocational provision. It has employed three staff from the previous provider and a qualified teacher to supervise the provision. This has resulted in a significant financial saving for the school as well as allowing leaders to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the provision more closely. Around 230 learners currently access the vocational provision as part of their curriculum. The school has worked with the local authority so pupils from other providers can also access this provision. Through its vocational courses, the school now provides a crèche, nursery, and a motor vehicle workshop that serves the local community.

- 84 It is difficult to assess the impact of the pandemic on the proportion of young people in Wales who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Work to monitor and support young people to secure a suitable destination at the end of Year 11 into the autumn was significantly affected. Given the pandemic's national impact on employment and training generally, it is not surprising that early information from some local authorities suggests that more young people are NEET at age 16 this year than in recent years. In Swansea, pupils that schools and the PRU had identified at risk of becoming NEET were prioritised for support in the summer 2020. The young people were referred to multi-agency early help hubs for support and guidance on their next steps, and local authority officers continued to monitor their progress in the autumn term and provide support where necessary. As a result, nearly all of these vulnerable pupils have been engaged in some form of education, employment or training during the autumn, despite the challenges brought by the pandemic.

Cameo: Supporting disengaged pupils

Wrexham local authority planned a programme to target Year 9 learners who have become increasingly disengaged with education during the COVID-19 period or have become vulnerable due to their COVID-19 experiences. The programme includes 15 weekly sessions where between 10 and 15 pupils from six secondary schools take part in activities and challenges to develop their engagement with learning and resilience. Activities include problem-solving workshops, outdoor activities, workshops with motivational speakers and support from Careers Wales delivered online.

- 85 Pupils eligible for free school meals have poorer outcomes than their peers. The pandemic has hampered the efforts of the education system to support these pupils to achieve better outcomes than their predecessors. Headteachers have told us that this group of pupils made slower progress in their learning during the initial lockdown, with some pupils returning the school with weaker language and numeracy skills than before the lockdown started. In addition to the annual Pupil Development Grant, the Welsh Government has provided schools with additional funding through the 'Recruit, recover, raise standards' grant. Local authorities and regional consortia have advised schools on how this grant could be used to fund suitable strategies to support pupils eligible for free school meals to catch up on their learning during the autumn term and beyond. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, the local authority has worked with the Child Poverty Action Group to strengthen its support for pupils living in poverty. For example, a cluster of schools has focused on identifying the local barriers to learning that exist because of poverty currently and is working with the Action Group and local authority to address these.
- 86 Rising obesity in children and young people is a national concern as it leaves them susceptible to poor physical health. Obesity is primarily caused by what children and young people eat and drink and how physically active they are. It appears that pupils have had fewer opportunities to be physically active at school during the autumn term than would usually be the case. In our learner survey, 77% agree they have enough chance to exercise, which is lower than the average response from inspection surveys where 86% of pupils agree. A lot of schools have reduced the time pupils have for lunch breaks in order to protect bubbles of pupils using facilities, meaning that pupils have less time to play and be physically active. Very few schools ran any after school clubs during the autumn term that involved physical activity, and the usual sports competitions between schools have not taken place. Local authorities have taken different approaches to access to outdoor play equipment and parks, and leisure facilities and gyms have been forced to close locally and nationally at times due to government restrictions.
- 87 Local authority youth workers played a significant role in supporting vulnerable children, young people and their families during the initial lockdown and have continued to provide support through the autumn term. Youth workers are often highly skilled at building relationships quickly with young people, gaining their trust and finding creative ways to support young people, especially those who are at risk of disengaging with their education. Youth workers already used technology to communicate with young people, and have built on this during the pandemic by

setting up more online spaces where young people can connect safely with each other and with youth workers to socialise and discuss issues that interest or concern them. Some of these spaces were set up for specific groups, for example for young people wishing to chat online in Welsh or for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people.

- 88 Youth workers have struggled to maintain contact with a very few vulnerable young people who do not have regular internet access or do not like to use online tools. Despite the effectiveness of online communications, young people often regret the lack of in-person social interaction they have had this year. Where safe to, youth workers have re-established opportunities to meet with young people in person. For example, youth workers in Powys have visited the key market towns between 5pm and 7pm during the autumn to engage with young people informally, which has provided useful opportunities to check on their wellbeing and help them to access support if required.
- 89 Despite having extremely heavy workloads, some local authority services have created space to consider what is working well and how they could improve the way they are supporting vulnerable pupils and their families.

Cameo: Evaluating family experiences

The ALN and Social Inclusion team in Conwy is eager to learn more about the effect of this pandemic on vulnerable learners and their families. As a result, officers are involved in a project that is based on 'Evaluating family experiences during lockdown', including focus on COVID-19 bereavement support and enhanced counselling support. This has been supplemented by training for individual schools delivered by the Educational Psychology Service on request. This is in preparation for another possible lockdown situation.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

As part of the work we engaged in discussions with 340 schools and PRUs across Wales and held meetings with staff in every local authority and regional consortia.

We issued surveys to seek the views of:

- leaders
- teachers
- support staff
- governors
- parents/carers
- learners in key stages 2 and above

In addition, we looked at a range of documentary evidence provided by local authorities and regional consortia as well as nationally available guidance, data and research.

Appendix 2

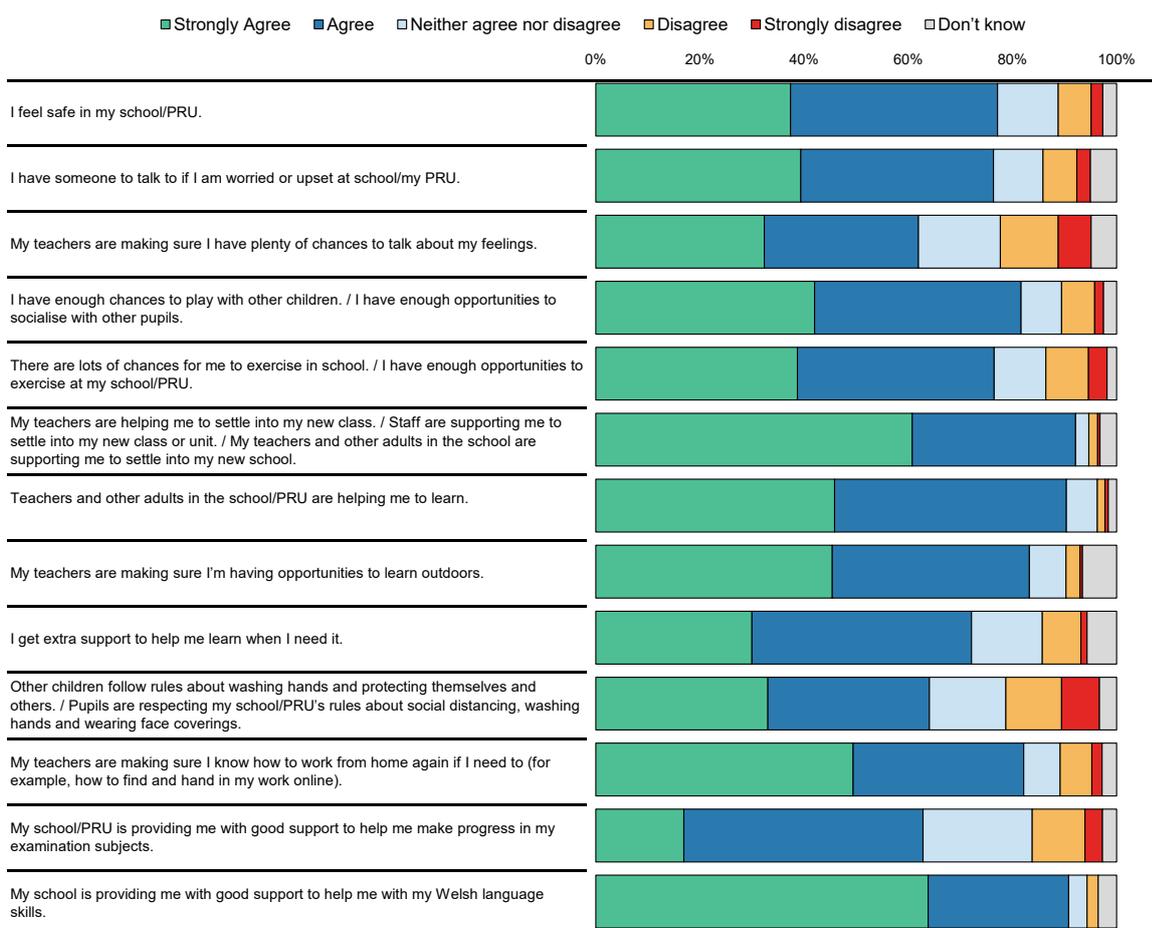
In addition to the calls to schools and LA, we issued and promoted surveys to stakeholders.

We had individual surveys for learners, parents or carers, school or PRU leaders, teachers, support staff and governors or members of PRU management committees. Some of the questions were directed at specific groups within those populations, so not all questions have been responded by all participants.

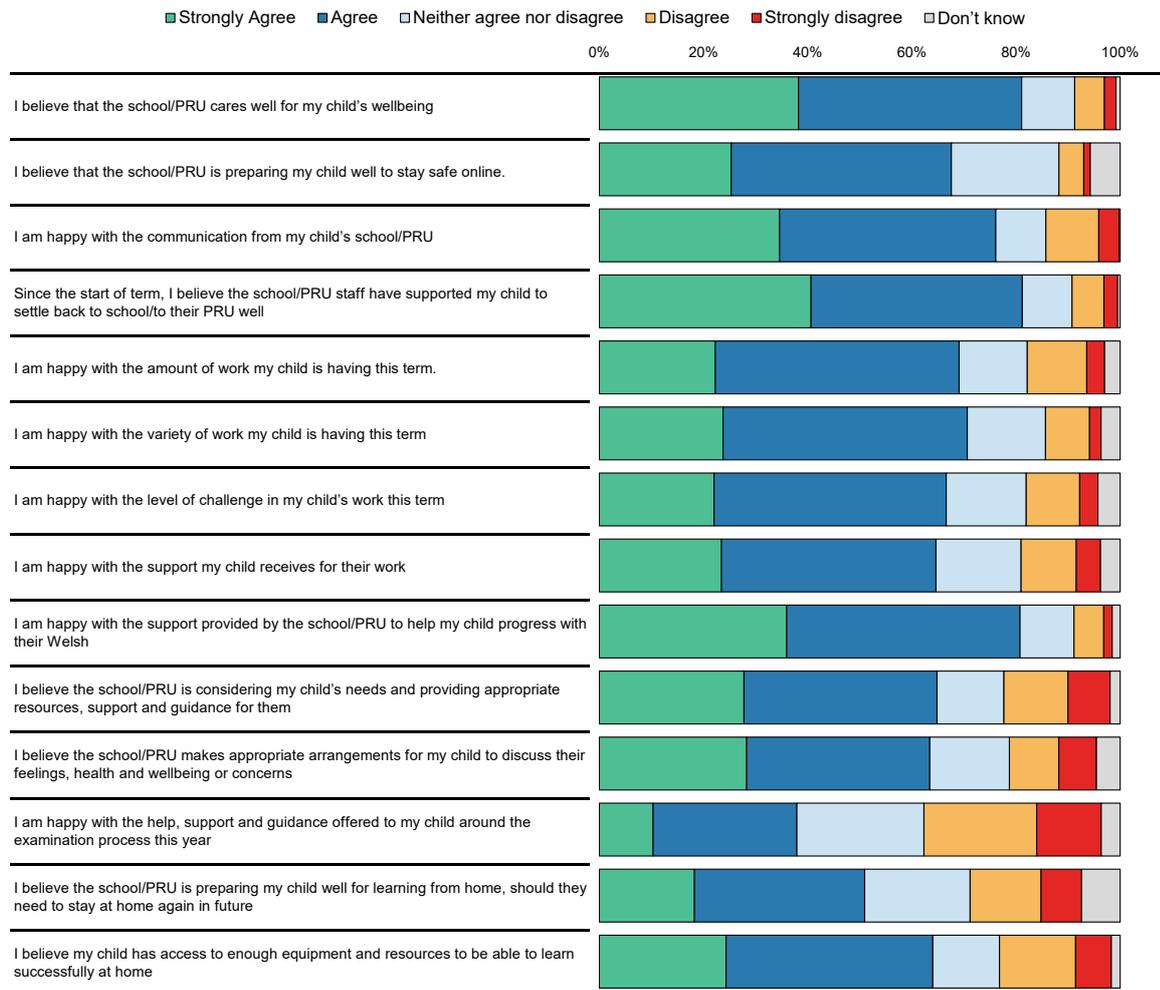
The responses are summarised below.

Stakeholders were also able to leave a comment to explain their answers or provide additional information. These were analysed and the information used to inform this report.

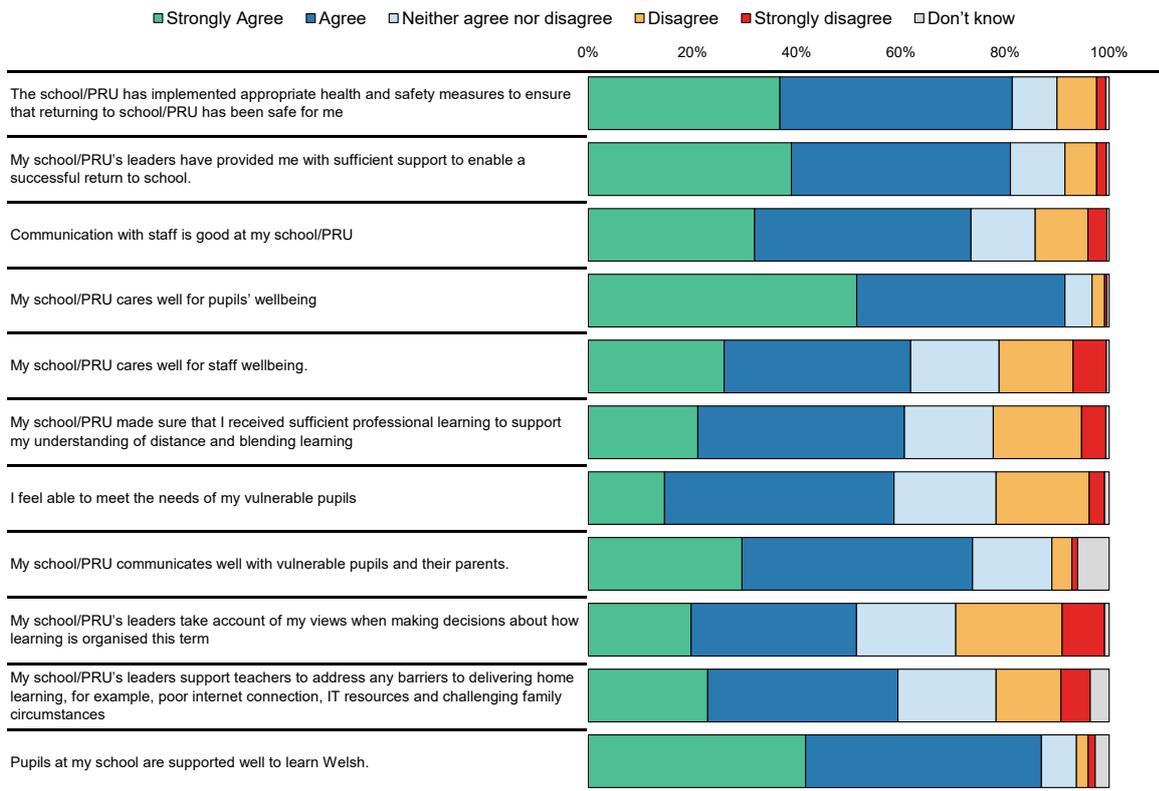
Learners (760 responses)



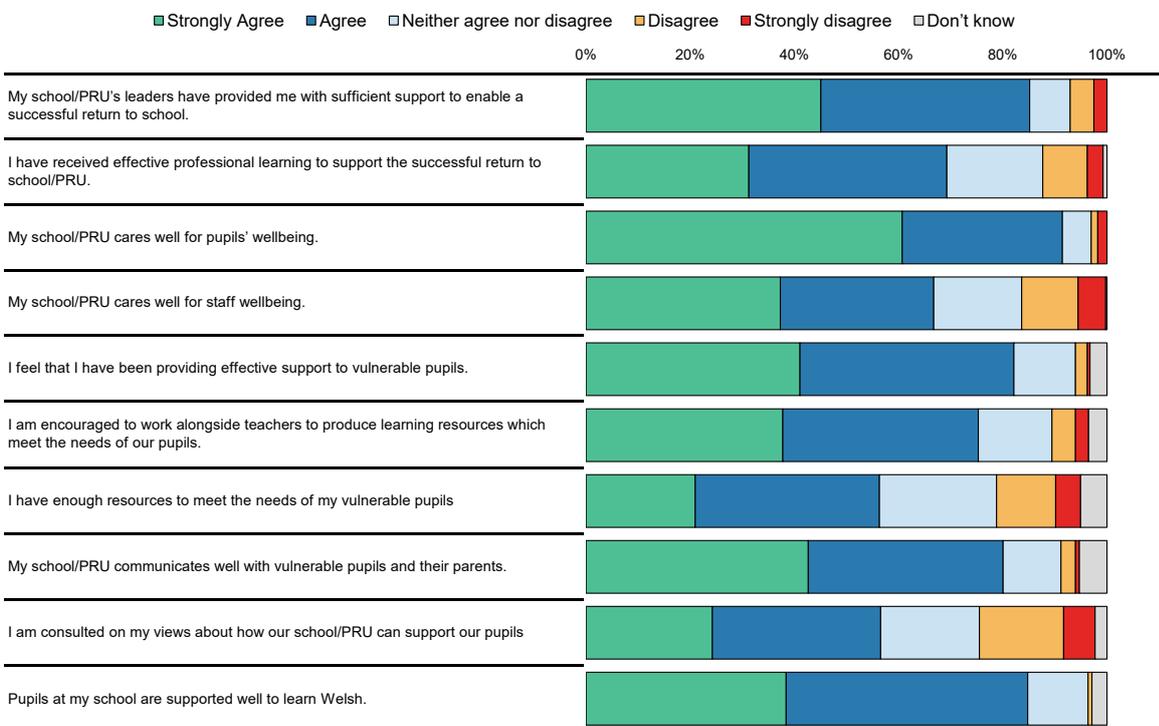
Parents and carers (3620 responses)



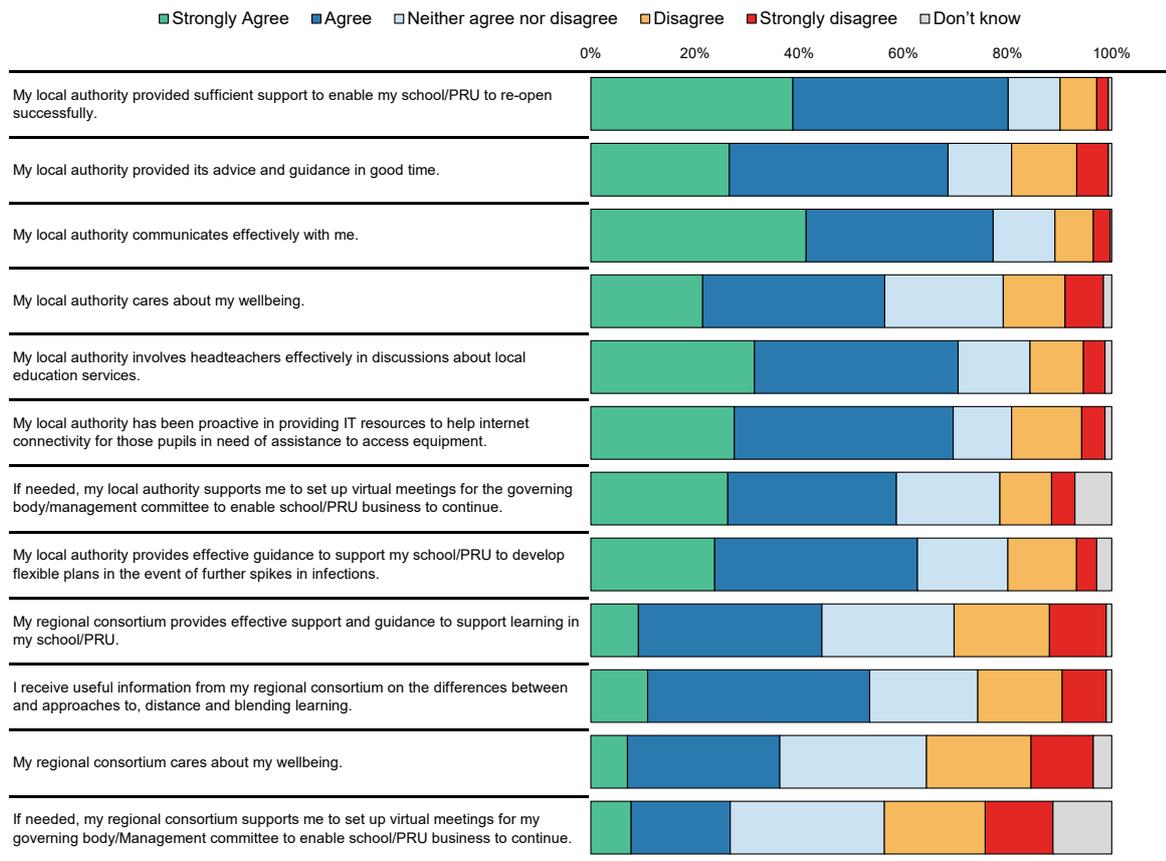
Teachers (908 responses)



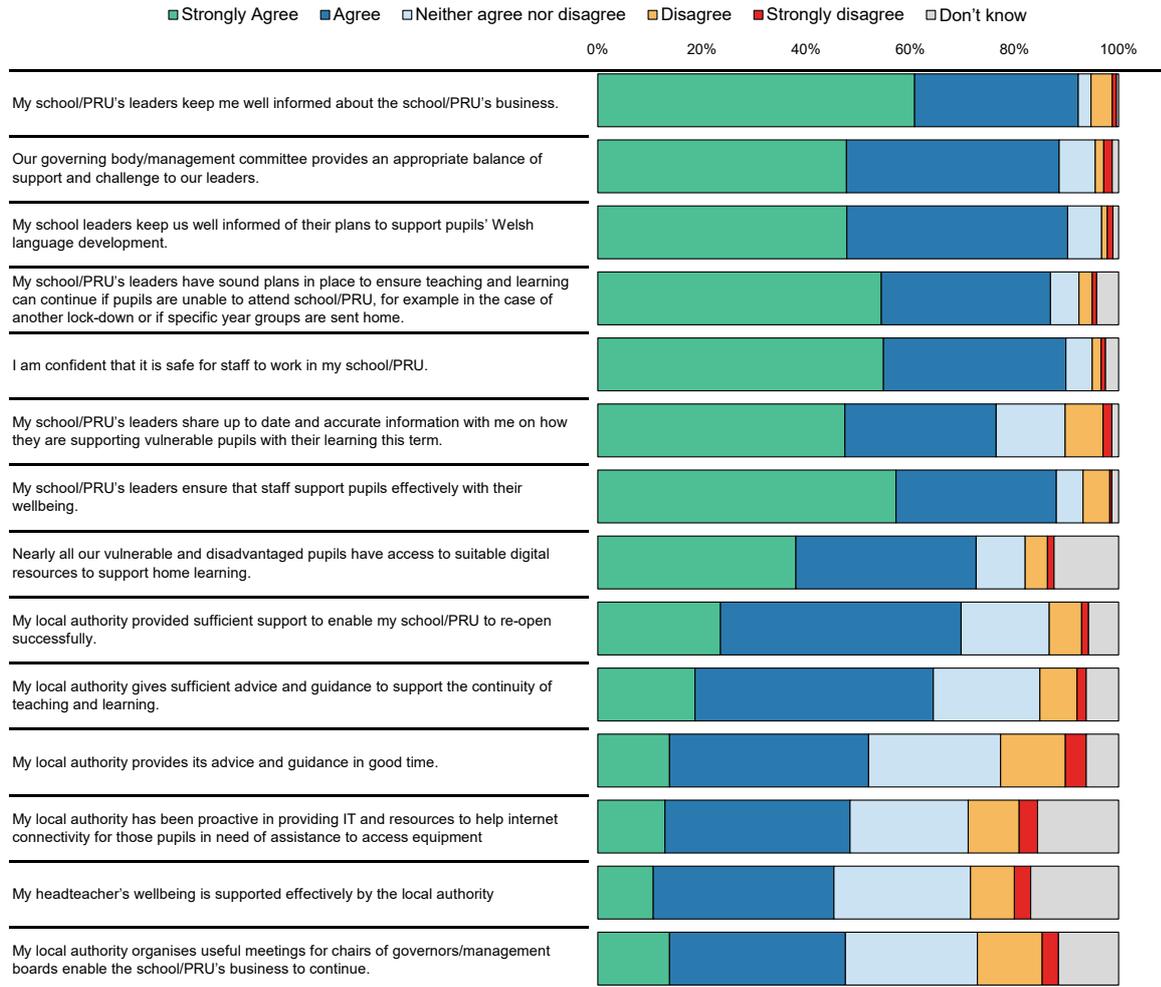
Support staff (397 responses)



Leaders (312 responses)



Governors (245 responses)



Appendix 3: Estyn publications

Guidance

- [Advice for school and PRU leaders and governors on how to continue with school and PRU business during the Covid-19 pandemic](#)
- [Arrangements for September 2020 Planned approaches across maintained schools and PRUs](#)
- [Cameos and ideas for continuity of school business during Covid-19](#)
- [Cameos and ideas from schools and PRUs on continuing with school business](#)
- [Key principles to support the continuation of school and PRU business](#)
- [Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from adult learning in the community partnerships](#)
- [Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from further education colleges](#)
- [Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from primary schools](#)
- [Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from PRUs](#)
- [Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from secondary schools](#)
- [Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from special schools](#)
- [Supporting wellbeing and learning during COVID-19 – approaches from work-based learning providers](#)
- [Engagement work: Primary sector update – autumn 2020](#)
- [Engagement work: Secondary sector update – autumn 2020](#)
- [Engagement work: All-age school sector update – autumn 2020](#)
- [Engagement work: Maintained special school and pupil referral unit \(PRU\) sector update – autumn 2020](#)
- [Engagement work: Post-16 sector update – autumn 2020](#)

Thematic reports

- Community schools: families and communities at the heart of school life [thematic report](#) and [training materials](#)
- [Insights into how independent schools and specialist colleges have responded during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- Learner resilience – building resilience in primary schools, secondary schools and pupil referral units [thematic report](#) and [training materials](#)

Blog posts

- [Adverse childhood experiences \(ACEs\) - how can schools support children and young people who live in difficult circumstances?](#)
- [Is your school one that puts families and communities at the heart of its work?](#)
- [Now learners have returned to schools and colleges, what part have we played and how will our role change in the future?](#)
- [Our support for Welsh education and training in the current climate](#)
- [What can schools and PRUs do to strengthen pupils' resilience?](#)
- [Working together to support teaching and learning during COVID-19](#)

Appendix 4: Timeline

March 2020



- Chief Inspector for Wales announces immediate suspension of all of Estyn's inspections.
- Minister for Education announces that schools will close for statutory provision of education by 20 March. Also, announces suspension of GCSE and A level examinations for summer 2020.



April 2020

- Suspension of the Childcare Offer for Wales. Funding to be used to support vulnerable children and the childcare costs of key workers.
- Welsh Government announces £1.25 million for additional mental health support for children who may be experiencing increased stress or anxiety as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak. They announce £3 million for local authorities to purchase hardware and secure internet connectivity to ensure learners in Wales are not 'digitally excluded'.
- Estyn release advice for school and PRU leaders on how to continue with school and PRU business. In collaboration with Welsh Government, regional consortia and ADEW we release 'Developing Approaches to Support Distance Learning'.
- The Minister for Education sets out five key principles for when and how schools would return.



May 2020



- Welsh Government announces £3.75 million of funding to support mental health in schools and publishes a COVID-19 Resilience Plan for the post 16 sectors, including further and higher education, apprenticeships, employability and adult learning.



June 2020

- Further education colleges and work-based learning providers begin to re-open for face-to-face learning for a priority groups of learners.
- Minister for Education announces that she will use the Coronavirus Act 2020 to disapply temporarily basic curriculum requirements for Wales.
- Most schools re-open to pupils to provide an opportunity for them to 'Check in, Catch up and prepare for summer, and September'.



July 2020

- Estyn publishes several thematic reports and sector specific insights to support Wales to keep learning. In conjunction with the four regional consortia we also release 'Models of blended Learning' guidance to help from September.
- Welsh Government introduces the Curriculum and Assessment Bill to provide a legislative framework for the new curriculum and assessment arrangements. They announce the 'Recruit, recover and raise standards' scheme to employ 900 extra teaching staff in schools.
- Welsh Government announces additional funding of over £50 million for universities and colleges to maintain jobs in teaching, research and student services, invest in projects to support economic recovery, and support students suffering from financial hardship.



August 2020

- Wales's Childcare Offer is re-established. Working parents are again able to access 30 hours of early education and care.
- Estyn releases 'Planned approaches across maintained schools and PRUs', to capture a variety of approaches in response to common challenges across different education sectors.
- Welsh Government pledges an additional £4 million to support childcare providers affected by COVID-19 and further funding of up to £264m for local authorities to support a range of services, such as social care, education and leisure.
- Education Secretaries for Wales, England and Northern Ireland announce that exam results will be based on teacher assessment.
- Minister for Education guarantees that learners' final A Level grade will not be lower than their AS grade. Published GCSE and revised A-level results based on teachers' assessments show a notable increase in grades over previous years.
- The Minister for Education announces an independent review of the arrangements for awarding grades for the 2020 summer examinations.

September 2020



- All pupils return to school, phasing in during the first two weeks of term.
- Minister for Education announces a commitment to provide free face coverings for all learners in secondary school and further education settings.
- Minister for Education announces that all pupils eligible for free school meals will continue to receive provisions if they are shielding or have to self-isolate.
- Estyn begins engagement calls to schools, PRUs, and post-16 settings on request from the Welsh Government to carry out a thematic review of the extent and impact of local authorities' and regional consortia's approaches to supporting schools, their school communities, governing bodies and learners. Estyn also opens a survey for learners, governors, parents and school staff to share their experiences.



October 2020

- The Education Policy Institute (EPI) publishes a report that describes the way the Welsh Government provided laptops and wi-fi devices to address the lack of access to online learning caused by the coronavirus pandemic as 'commendable'. The report states that, in contrast to other UK nations, the Welsh Government was able to draw on 'well established infrastructure to act quickly following the closures'.
- Minister for Education publishes an updated action plan setting out the next steps in Wales' reform journey, ahead of the introduction of the new Curriculum for Wales in 2022. The action plan, known as Our National Mission, shows the steps the Welsh Government has taken in response to the coronavirus pandemic and its response to the independent report published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
- Minister for Education announces that "there will be an uplift of pay to reward our highly skilled and hardworking teachers in Wales." This includes an agreement in principle to accept all of the Independent Welsh Pay Review Body's recommendations for 2020/21.
- Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services announces £12.5m package of funding to support vulnerable children and families.

November 2020



- Pupils in Years 9-13 remain at home for the week after half-term as part of the national 'firebreak'.
- Minister for Education announces that there will be no end of year exams for learners taking GCSEs, AS levels or A levels in 2021. In place of exams, the Welsh Government intends to work with schools and colleges to take forward teacher managed assessments, including assessments that will be externally set and marked but delivered within a classroom environment under teacher supervision.
- Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services launches the new 'Parenting. Give it Time' campaign providing information, support and advice for parents. The new campaign covers issues reflecting parents' concerns during the pandemic, including how to understand and respond to children's behaviour.

December 2020

- Estyn publishes its insight reports on the immediate effects of the pandemic on schools, PRUs and all age settings. These reports summarise the findings made from the engagement calls carried out during September and October.
- Estyn publishes the Chief Inspector's Annual Report for 2019-2020. This annual report reviews the standards and quality of education and training in Wales from September 2019 to March 2020. It also offers an initial account of how schools and other education and training providers supported pupils and students during lockdown while providing continuity of learning for them remotely.
- Minister for Education decides that all secondary schools and colleges in Wales will move to online learning for the last week of term, with local decisions to be made about whether or not other schools would be open that week.



Glossary

Distance learning	Where work is set and/or lessons broadcast (live or pre-recorded) to learners at home. This means that they are not required to attend school to access.
Blended learning	Where learners are provided with a combination of face-to-face learning provided in school, which is complemented by cohesively planned distance learning tasks and activities
CSC	The regional consortium for school improvement for central south Wales
EAS	The regional consortium for school improvement for south east Wales
ERW	The regional consortium for school improvement for south west Wales
GwE	The regional consortium for school improvement for north Wales

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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REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

24 FEBRUARY 2021

Report by: Alwyn Jones - GwE Assistant Director

Subject: GwE Work Programme and Priorities

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To present an updated report to the Joint Committee members on GwE Work Programme for the Autumn Term 2020 and to outline our priorities in going forward.

2.0 Background

2.1 Since 23rd March 2020, the response to COVID-19 has dramatically changed our lives. In this challenging context, the education system and schooling has been significantly disrupted. During the Autumn Term, the level of disruption to schools varied considerably across the region, with some schools regularly having whole year cohorts self-isolating at home for an extended period, to others that were able to open to all pupils throughout the term.

2.2 Staff in the Local Authorities and GwE have continued to adapt their work, providing effective services and support for all their school communities during the COVID pandemic. During this very difficult period, GwE have kept true to their vision and values as an organisation that is continually learning. The OECD's transversal themes of Trust, Thinking together, Time and Technology have remained at the heart of the work with schools and partners.

2.3 The service in its entirety has re focused several times during the COVID period to meet the needs of the range of stakeholders. At the heart of the refocusing has been the need to ensure that the well-being of school leaders, their staff and learners is paramount to the decision-making and ensuring that the right level of support, operational or professional, can be directed accurately by the service.

3.0 Considerations

3.1 GwE sees itself as a partnership organisation, especially with the Local Authorities and even more so during the lockdown period and in moving forward. One of the main strengths of work across North Wales has been the consistent messaging from the six local authorities

- through their political education portfolio holders and directors working with GwE to have one common message for the schools in North Wales. This consistency of messaging has been not only welcomed by schools but also by teacher unions and non-teaching unions who welcomed the clarity of messaging and support for their staff.
- 3.2 GwE have worked effectively with Welsh Government on policy and continuity of learning. It has also worked consistently with the other regions and with Estyn in preparing guidance and resources for distance/remote and blended learning and to provide advice on formative and continuous assessment.
- 3.3 The six local authorities and GwE have taken a collegiate and collective regional approach to supporting schools throughout the COVID pandemic. This was clearly demonstrated in the consistent regional approach in developing a supportive framework to ensure that all regional schools had the right policies in place together with a comprehensive risk assessment in order to create a safe environment to welcome the children back into schools.
- 3.4 Teamwork, joint working and collaboration has also been at the heart of the work with schools. All schools in the region are part of a cluster, alliance or a forum where they can come together to discuss operational issues as well as sharing best practice regarding distance/remote and blended learning. This joint work facilitated by GwE staff has been very successful and sets a very strong infrastructure in place for future work and working relationship across the region.
- 3.5 Schools who were causing concern prior to lockdown have had access to clear and targeted support to help them through this difficult period. This has been at several levels including network support, support to senior leadership and middle management in those schools and support with provision of distance/remote and blended learning.
- 3.6 GwE have provided practical support for leaders to enable them to consider their whole school strategic planning of provision for distance/remote and blended learning, refine and evaluate their evolving provision and consider planning for various scenarios where pupils may be in school and / or at home over the coming academic year.
- 3.7 GwE is also supporting schools in evaluating the quality of their blended learning and distance/remote learning provision, sharing local examples and case studies of effective provision to reduce variation where it exists. Live streaming is developing well and enhancing the blended learning experience. Many schools acknowledge that parental engagement has been a key factor in securing effective distance/blended learning. GwE and the Local Authorities have provided a range of guidance to support school in improving parental engagement, including the sharing of good practice.
- 3.8 GwE have also adopted a regional approach to accelerating learning, working on a tri-level approach which includes universal support led by the consortium, targeted support jointly led by the consortia and the local authority, with the acute being the responsibility of the local authority. This work has been developed on an evidence base approach working closely with Bangor University and regional staff to ensure a range of high-quality resources to support physical and emotional wellbeing, literacy and numeracy, these being made available to all learners across, all age range in all schools. The impact of this work will be

captured through a regional dashboard which will include all grants made available to schools by Welsh Government during this financial year.

- 3.9 The GwE Professional Offer for this academic year has been rationalised and concentrates on 5 main areas: Wellbeing, The Reform Journey, Developing the Workforce, Accelerating the Learning and Digital Learning. In addition, GwE will continue to facilitate cluster working to support the development of Curriculum for Wales, ALN Transformation and the Welsh Language.
- 3.10 During the COVID period GwE has continually reflected on the effectiveness of the work. Both internal and external resources have been used to ensure that we have a balanced perspective on the quality of the work. This has included working with the Education Development Trust and Steve Munby to develop the organisation and plan our future infrastructure. GwE is currently working with Professor Graham Donaldson to develop a range of think pieces to support schools in implementing the new curriculum.
- 3.11 Documented activities and time spent, together with a summary of activities, outcomes and impact are outlined in Appendix 1. The work programme for GwE officers for the spring term is also outlined in Appendix 1.
- 3.12 The work programme and our priorities will be reviewed continually to respond to the Covid-19 situation and government guidance and regulations and agreed with the GwE Management Board and Joint Committee. The work programme and its mode of delivery will also be discussed and agreed with Head teachers and schools.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 The Joint Committee is asked to approve the content of the report, the GwE work programme and draft priorities for 2021-22 which will be reviewed continually to respond to the Covid-19 situation and government guidance and regulations.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6.0 Equalities Impact

- 6.1 There are no new equalities implications arising from this report.

7.0 Personnel Implications

- 7.1 There are no new personnel implications arising from this report.

8.0 Consultation Undertaken

- 8.1 Consultation with the GwE Management Board and GwE Joint Committee.

9.0 Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 - Updated report on GwE work programme

OPINION OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective.

Statutory Finance Officer:

I appreciate that the work programme has been reviewed to respond to the Covid-19 situation, and that this has been planned thoroughly, inclusively, and to be delivered within GwE's existing resources.

UPDATE REPORT ON GWE WORK PROGRAMME (AUTUMN TERM 2020)

Background and context

The response to COVID-19 has dramatically changed our lives. In this challenging context, the education system and schooling has been significantly disrupted. On 23rd March, schools were re-purposed to support children of key workers and some vulnerable learners whilst also supporting all learners to stay safe and keep learning at home.

On June 3 the Welsh Government (WG) announced that there would be a phased opening of schools from 29th June, 2020 to give all pupils the opportunity to “check in, catch up and prepare.” Welsh Government published their Learning Guidance [<https://gov.wales/keep-education-safe-guidance-learning-over-summer-term>] to provide advice on learning and teaching taking place in schools and settings for the remainder of the summer term and to support practitioners as they prepare for the autumn term.

On July 9th, the Education Minister confirmed that all pupils would return to school in September, and that schools were required to return to full capacity by September 14th. Welsh Government published further learning guidance [<https://gov.wales/guidance-learning-schools-and-settings-autumn-term-covid-19>] for the autumn term that gave schools and supporting partners a common set of priorities for learning, regardless of the level of operations in response to COVID-19.

During the Autumn Term, the level of disruption to schools varied considerably across the region, with some schools regularly having whole year cohorts self-isolating at home for an extended period, to others that were able to open to all pupils throughout the term.

Work programme

Staff in the Local Authorities and GwE have adapted their work in order to continue to provide effective services and support for all their school communities during the COVID pandemic. During this very difficult period, GwE have kept true to their vision and values as an organisation that is continually learning. The OECD’s transversal themes of Trust, Thinking together, Time and Technology have remained at the heart of the work with schools and partners.

The service in its entirety has re focused several times during the COVID period to meet the needs of the range of stakeholders. The ability to be flexible and agile and to work effectively together in different teams, often cross sector, has had significant impact on organisational behaviour and external perception. At the heart of the refocusing has been the need to ensure that the well-being of school leaders, their staff and learners is paramount to the decision-making and ensuring that the right level of support, operational or professional, can be directed accurately by the service. Regular contact with school leaders has been well received and has contributed to Head teachers feeling that they could turn to a professional colleague to share challenging issues and to find solutions to address day-to-day issues. These included operational discussions on opening school safely as well as professional discussions regarding distance/remote and blended learning.

Weekly staff meetings have contributed to a consistency of approach in ensuring common messages to school teachers and leaders. There has been a strong emphasis on modelling appropriate and supportive behaviour throughout the period. This has included very regular contact with headteachers to ensure that they get the appropriate support to operate

effectively and also as a sounding board to support their own well-being. Further support for senior leaders well-being has been provided through a series of workshops and webinars which will support their resilience during this difficult period. GwE staff have also conducted face to face pastoral visits to schools during the autumn term on behalf of the Local Authorities.

GwE sees itself as a partnership organisation, especially with the Local Authorities and even more so during the lockdown period and in moving forward. GwE have worked effectively with Welsh Government on policy and continuity of learning. It has also worked consistently with the other regions and with Estyn in preparing guidance and resources for distance/remote and blended learning and to provide advice on formative and continuous assessment. It has also strengthened the working relationship between those parties with positive professional exchanges, ensuring that the stakeholders are getting quality advice and resources.

One of the main strengths of work across North Wales has been the consistent messaging from the six local authorities through their political education portfolio holders and directors working with GwE to have one common message for the schools in North Wales. This consistency of messaging has been not only welcomed by schools but also by teacher unions and non-teaching unions who welcomed the clarity of messaging and support for their staff. One such example is the operational group of local authority and regional staff working on and developing risk assessments policy, advice and guidelines, and creating a regional dashboard which is a strong foundation for all schools to be able to reopen with risks being identified and locally managed and supported.

The six local authorities and GwE have taken a collegiate and collective regional approach to supporting schools throughout the COVID pandemic. This was clearly demonstrated in the consistent regional approach in developing a supportive framework to ensure that all regional schools had the right policies in place together with a comprehensive risk assessment in order to create a safe environment to welcome the children back into schools.

The framework included resources to support planning for:

- 1) Health and safety requirements
- 2) Site and facilities arrangements
- 3) Transport
- 4) Staffing arrangements
- 5) Blended teaching and learning
- 6) Inclusion and pupil support
- 7) Key management tasks.

Teamwork, joint working and collaboration has also been at the heart of the work with schools. All schools in the region are part of a cluster, alliance or a forum where they can come together to discuss operational issues as well as sharing best practice regarding distance/remote and blended learning. This joint work facilitated by GwE staff has been very successful and sets a very strong infrastructure in place for future work and working relationship across the region.

One noteworthy aspect of the work has also been the bespoke nature of support for teachers and schools. GwE have worked on the strengths of individuals within the team and redeployed them where they have provided the maximum impact in their roles in supporting individual local authorities, schools, clusters, subject and phase networks. This bespoke provision of support based on strong principles of collaboration, exchanging and sharing and developing the best practice is a key learning principle that we will continue to develop in the next stages of evolving the service.

Schools who were causing concern prior to lockdown have had access to clear and targeted support to help them through this difficult period. This has been at several levels including network support, support to senior leadership and middle management in those schools and

support with provision of distance/remote and blended learning. Schools that have found the lockdown and post lockdown period difficult due to staff having to self-isolate have been supported in various ways. This has included modelling of exemplar materials, webinars, shared materials and resources. Also, GwE staff directly leading, directly teaching in schools or providing distance learning to learners.

A lot of time and energy have been put in place to contact international experts and to research international practice to learn and establish the principles of effective distance/remote and blended learning. Discussions with international colleagues including the OECD have also deepened thinking within the organisation. GwE have provided practical support for leaders to enable them to consider their whole school strategic planning of provision for distance/remote and blended learning, refine and evaluate their evolving provision and consider planning for various scenarios where pupils may be in school and / or at home over the coming academic year. This has supported schools to have a better strategic overview of their provision.

GwE is also supporting schools in evaluating the quality of their blended learning and distance/remote learning provision, sharing local examples and case studies of effective provision to reduce variation where it exists. Live streaming is developing well and enhancing the blended learning experience. Schools now realise that COVID will be with them for an extended period and are planning more strategically and effectively.

Self-evaluation and improvement processes have become an intrinsic part of the work of schools. As schools and settings are becoming more confident with the delivery of learning at a distance, so they will be better able to adapt their self-evaluation processes and tools to monitor, evaluate, review and revise if appropriate, the provision.

School leaders acknowledge that one of the greatest challenges to the delivery of blended and distance/remote learning has been and continues to be ensuring that staff and pupils have the necessary skills' set and resources available to them. There has been a rapid pace of upskilling for some staff to move to digital platforms. Schools have undertaken a range of planned professional learning offered by regional consortia around the use of digital technology to support learning. This has also proved to be an opportunity as a greater number of practitioners are now able to confidently use an increasing range of technology to support learning.

Many schools acknowledge that parental engagement has been a key factor in securing effective distance/blended learning. GwE and the Local Authorities have provided a range of guidance to support school in improving parental engagement, including the sharing of good practice.

Many schools also acknowledge that there are ongoing operational challenges that change on a day-to-day basis, where a range of scenarios have to be planned for including cohorts of learners self-isolating or individual / small groups of learners and staff self-isolating. There are many examples of how schools are managing these complex situations well, having clear whole school strategies. GwE and the Local Authorities continue to support schools, using clusters and networks of schools to support each other and share resources and strategies. GwE have also adopted a regional approach to accelerating learning, working on a tri-level approach which includes universal support led by the consortium, targeted support jointly led by the consortia and the local authority, with the acute being the responsibility of the local authority. This work has been developed on an evidence base approach working closely with Bangor University and regional staff to ensure a range of high-quality resources to support physical and emotional wellbeing, literacy and numeracy, these being made available to all learners across, all age range in all schools. The impact of this work will be captured through a regional dashboard which will include all grants made available to schools by Welsh Government during this financial year.

During the autumn term, GwE have provided opportunities for schools to form alliances or to work within developed clusters to address gaps in provision and alternative ways of delivery to meet any future lockdown scenarios. This work is ongoing and will:

- Identify, develop and share blended learning resources within the cluster/alliance and with other regional clusters/alliances;
- Ensure all identified and developed resources are submitted through their Supporting Improvement Adviser to be included on the GwE Support Centre;
- Support schools within the cluster with their provision to meet any future 'lockdown scenarios';
- Prioritise additional support for the secondary sector in preparation for the awarding of examination grades in 2021.

Schools in the GwE region will have a significant collection of resources for each age group.

The GwE Professional Offer for this academic year has been rationalised and concentrates on 5 main areas: Wellbeing, The Reform Journey, Developing the Workforce, Accelerating the Learning and Digital Learning. In addition, GwE will continue to facilitate cluster working to support the development of Curriculum for Wales, ALN Transformation and the Welsh Language.

During the COVID period GwE has continually reflected on the effectiveness of the work. Both internal and external resources have been used to ensure that we have a balanced perspective on the quality of the work. This has included working with the Education Development Trust and Steve Munby to develop the organisation and plan our future infrastructure. GwE is currently working with Professor Graham Donaldson to develop a range of think pieces to support schools in implementing the new curriculum.

The Estyn thematic report '*Local authority and regional consortia support for school and PRUs in response to COVID-19*' (January 2021) concluded that '*school leaders in north Wales are most satisfied with the support they have received from their regional consortium.*'

The report goes on to state that:

'A majority of leaders agreed that GwE had provided effective support and guidance to support learning in their school or PRU' and that 'a majority of leaders also agreed that GwE had provided useful information on the differences between, and approaches to, distance and blended learning.'

Main outcomes and impact of the work

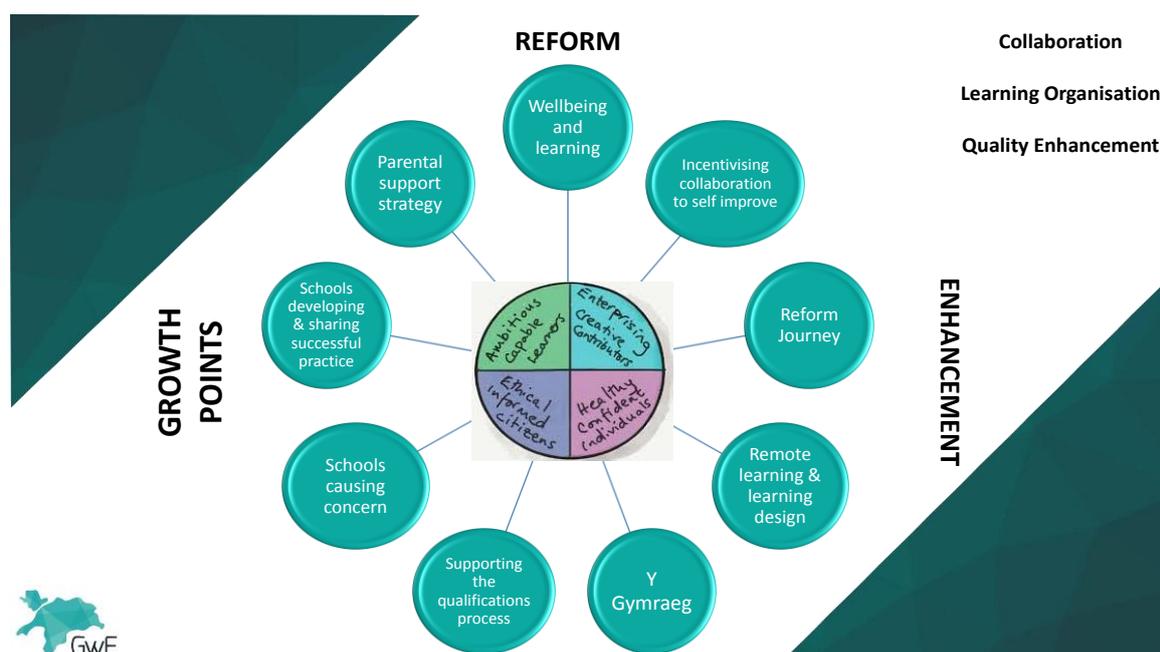
- Effective collegiate and collective regional approach between the six local authorities and GwE.
- Joint working has ensured strong governance and regional consistency in support, messaging and guidance given to schools.
- Strengthened collaboration between peers at a cluster/alliance/forum level has ensured effective co-constructed strategic thinking and direction.
- Clear regional and local approach in place for effective repurposing of both the service and its schools.
- Schools are well informed and confident that effective support is available should any needs arise.

- School leaders' wellbeing supported through regular and clear communication.
- Clear guidance given on how to prioritise and structure both Remote/Distance and Blended Learning.
- Schools provided with coherent guidance and resources to effectively support vulnerable learners with their wellbeing, engagement and learning.
- Best practice being shared across schools and clusters, i.e. engaging with reluctant learners and families, digital platforms and communication systems, blended learning models, etc.

Other outcomes and impact

- Effective communication provided via single point of contact (SIA) for school leaders and ease of access to support.
- Schools have been able to remain open to key workers in the event of staff shortages.
- Schools are well informed and confident that support is available should any needs arise. School leaders' wellbeing is supported through regular communication.
- Shared understanding of the importance of the welfare of pupils, parents and staff
- Clear guidance given on how to prioritise and structure both distance/remote and blended learning.
- Schools having access to a wealth of quality resources for reference as they plan for and deliver distance/remote and blended learning.
- Comprehensive distance/remote and blended learning models available for schools to adopt, adapt or refer to. This has in turn ensured strengthened leadership and improved balance of work that can be completed at home.
- Co-ordinated approach to supporting schools which has led to greater consistency and quality of distance/remote and blended learning across the region.
- Best practice being shared across schools i.e. engaging with reluctant learners and families, digital platforms and communication systems etc.
- Strengthened use of ICT to enable effective communication between schools, within schools and with school stakeholders.
- School staff being upskilled through the use of a digital platform for professional development.
- Information shared with the LA is up to date and timely support is given to any School.
- In conjunction with the LA, ensured that the process of appointing school leadership candidates is appropriate and fair.
- Consistent messages disseminated to schools by GwE / LA officers.
- Strengthened collaboration between peers at a cluster level through digital means ensuring co-constructed strategic thinking.
- Strengthened collaboration between local authority officers and GwE.
- Clear regional and local approach in place for adapting schools for different purposes.
- Effective cascading of key messages to school staff to ensure consistency and clarity.
- Increased collaboration between regions and other stakeholders.
- Increased understanding of key messages and work streams.
- Stronger awareness amongst school leaders of effective strategies to ensure continuation of school business.
- Quality Professional Learning developed in readiness for future needs.
- Newly Qualified Teachers having clarity regarding completing their induction year.
- Strong partnership work with Bangor University to ensure initial teacher training students have clarity on the appointment system for next year.
- Strong partnership working with Caban to ensure increased research opportunities and recognition of excellence by School staff.

Next steps and draft high level priorities 2021-22



The four purposes should be the starting point and aspiration for schools as they prepare to design the new curriculum and support their learners to become:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world; and
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Our draft priorities outlined below are aimed to support schools as they work towards those four purposes.

1. Wellbeing and Learning

- Continue to work closely in partnership with Local Authorities to provide wellbeing support for practitioners and learners in schools and settings.
- Continue to provide support to school leaders on the identification, engagement and support for specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners including those who have been disproportionality affected by school closures.

2. Incentivising collaboration to self-improve

- Further strengthen the culture, behaviour, systems and processes so that leaders and teachers are incentivised to adopt a collegiate approach to school improvement.
- Continue to work closely with schools and settings in order to continue to deepen the peer work already established, and to identify the aspects that schools could offer to other schools to develop specific aspects of Professional Learning.
- Provide professional learning to further develop peer review.

3. Reform Journey

- Provide professional learning and bespoke support and guidance to schools and settings to help them realise the Reform Journey and prepare for the new curriculum.
- Develop a regional qualitative framework for holistically capturing and evaluating progress in a school.

4. Remote learning and Learning Design

- Support schools and settings to ensure that their remote learning provision is designed to provide a high quality learning experience for their pupils.
- Continue to share regionally developed exemplars – modelled approaches for teaching and learning as part of remote learning.
- Support schools and settings to evaluate current practice for remote and blended learning, identifying strengths and areas for development.
- Support schools and settings to evaluate pupil's progress and to identify the next steps for their development.

5. Y Gymraeg

- Provide support for schools and settings who teach through the medium of Welsh as their first language to improve the Welsh First Language skills of their learners, and especially those from non-Welsh speaking homes.

6. Supporting the qualifications process

- Support schools and settings to implement the recommendations of the Design and Delivery Board for the awarding of qualifications in 2021 and 2022.

7. Schools Causing Concern

- Intensively support secondary schools in statutory category, and those causing concern, to improve performance.
- Provide bespoke support to schools and settings in line with agreed school improvement priorities that reflect the current situation and positions of schools and settings.

8. Schools developing and sharing successful practice

- Provide access to a range of regional and national professional learning, including access to coaching and mentoring, for all educational practitioners in schools and settings that is appropriate to their role and responsibility in line with professional standards.
- Continue to work with clusters/alliances in the region to collect, collate and make available blended learning resources as part of an online resource library.
- Continue to facilitate cluster/alliance working and peer to peer support to ensure the continuity of learning and sharing of effective practice and lessons learned from a range of schools and settings for remote and blended learning.

9. Parental support strategy

- Develop a parental support strategy to help parents and carers on how to best support their child's learning.

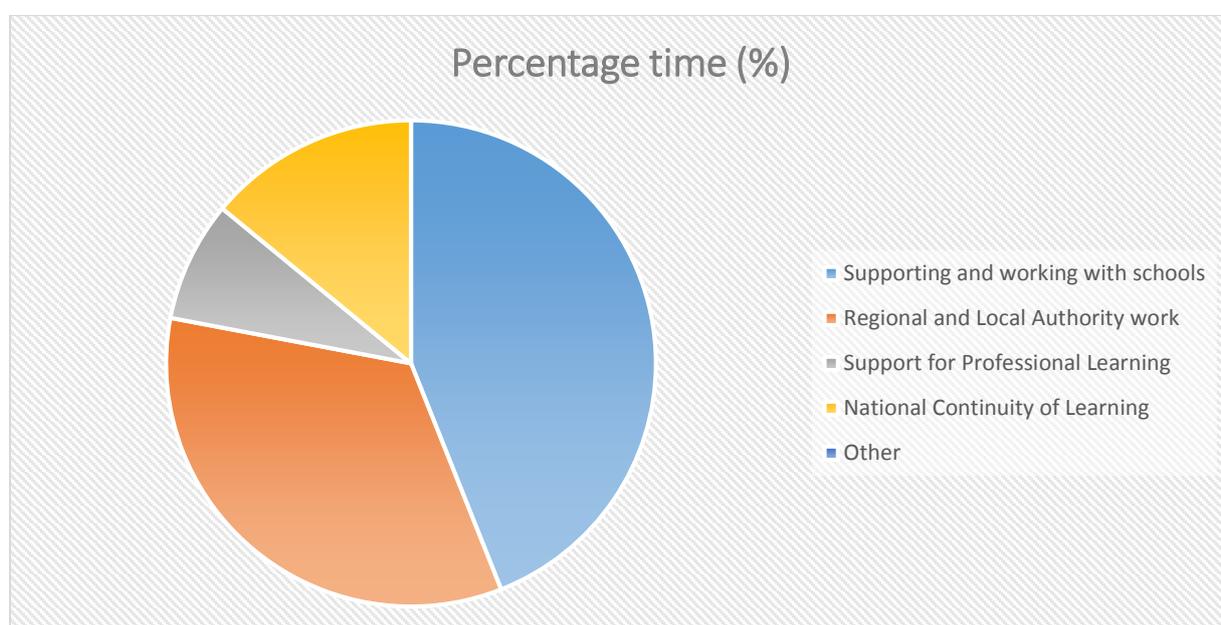
***Additional note:** We will be continuing to ensure appropriate use of grant funding allocated to schools.

Appendix 1: Documented activities and time spent

All Supporting Improvement Advisers (SIAs) 'check-in' with their line manager each morning and a list of their daily tasks is documented in their calendars. Below is a summary, of the activities that have been undertaken by GwE staff since the first lockdown:

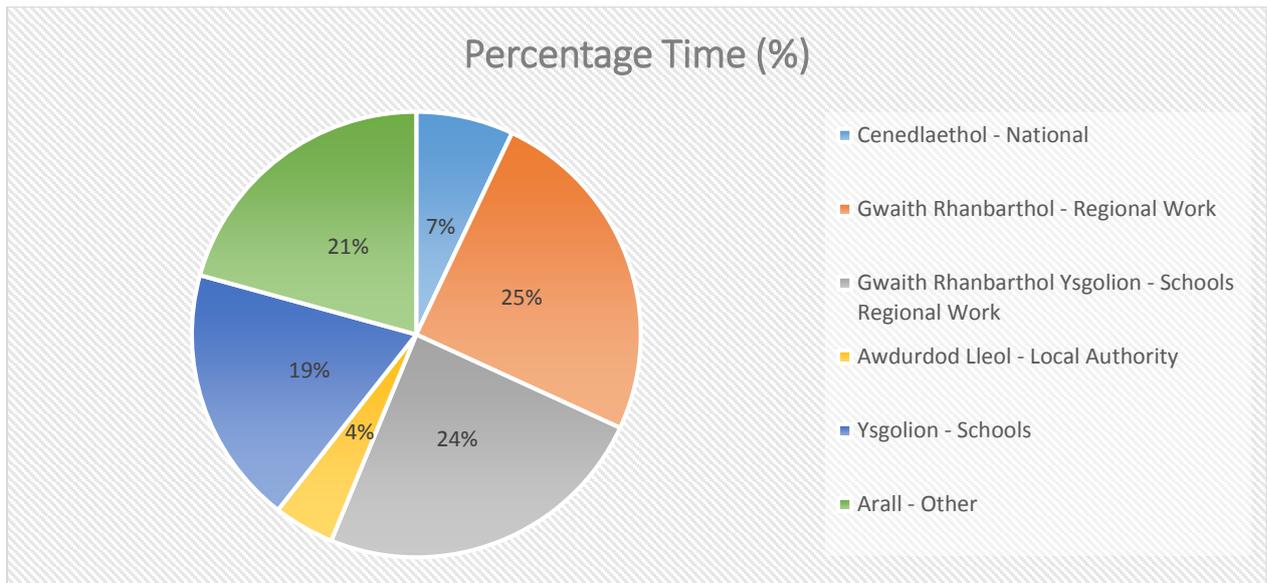
1. Covering the period between March 23rd and May 22nd, 2020.

Category	Hours	%
Supporting and working with schools	9049	44%
Regional and Local Authority work	6992	34%
Support for Professional Learning	1645	8%
National Continuity of Learning	2879	14%
Other	45	<1%



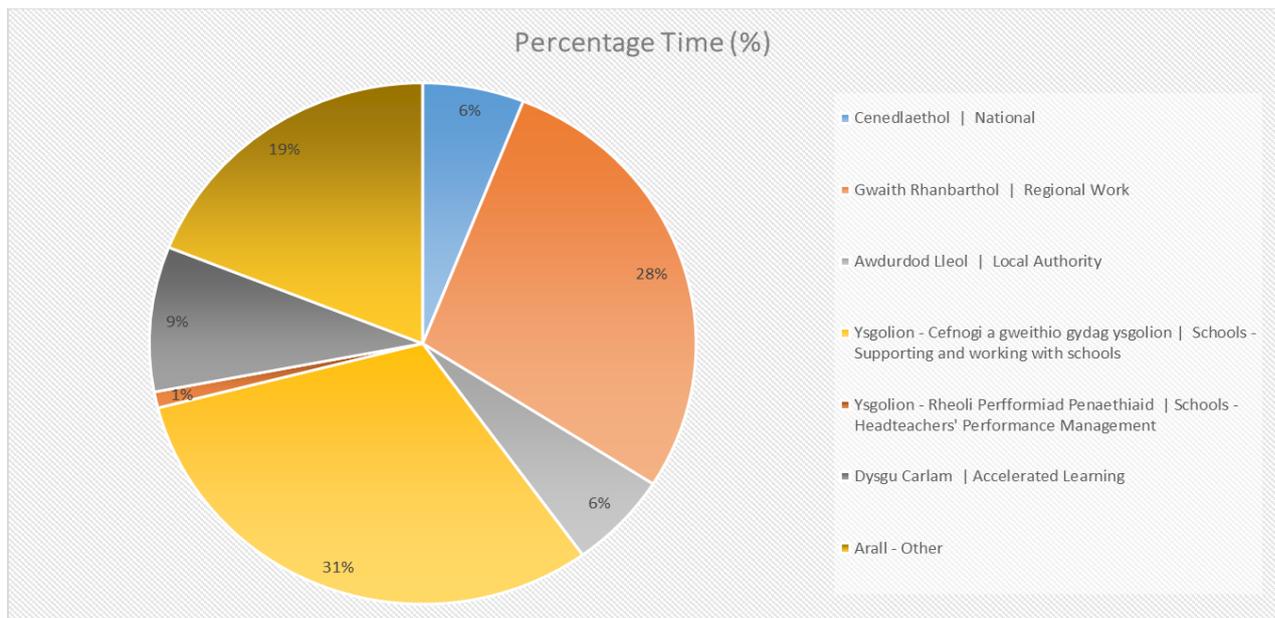
2. Covering the period between June 1st and July 17th, 2020.

Category	Hours	%
National	1044	7%
Regional Work	3704	25%
Schools - Regional work in supporting schools	3619	24%
Local Authority meetings	653	4%
Schools – bespoke/cluster support	2788	19%
Other, e.g., preparing, developing guidance/resources, researching, reading, improving digital skills (webinars), etc	3084	21%



3. Covering the period between September 1st and December 31, 2020.

Category	Hours	%
National	2284	6%
Regional Work	10675	28%
Local Authority	2284	6%
Schools - Supporting and working with schools (virtual), school visits, supporting the work of clusters and alliances, Professional Learning	11789	31%
Schools - Headteachers' Performance Management	380	1%
Accelerated Learning	3423	9%
Other	7223	19%





REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

24 FEBRUARY 2021

Report by: Arwyn Thomas, GwE Managing Director

Subject: Supporting Schools

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To present information to Joint Committee members regarding the main focus of GwE's work over the next two terms.

2.0 Background

2.1 GwE staff have adapted their work in order to continue to provide services and support all our schools and their communities. Over the next two terms, our work will primarily focus on supporting school leaders and staff to identify achievements and outstanding matters for attention.

3.0 Matters for consideration

3.1 The service will support school leaders and staff so as to ensure all schools are in a strong position to:

- report on pupil standards and progress [including vulnerable groups] during lockdown
- develop and further improve experiences and learning outcomes for learners
- further develop effective practice in blended learning and distance learning
- promote and further support the wellbeing of learners and staff
- report with confidence on the impact of grant expenditure and support
- prioritise with confidence and accuracy the courses of action for 2021-22

- identify with confidence the exact aspects for which additional support is required
- maximise opportunities for peer engagement

3.2 Working with the link school will allow all Link Supporting Improvement Advisers [SIA] to:

- understand the school's position in regard to progress, strengths and areas for further attention
- understand how grants are used and their impact on standards and quality
- understand the school's position in relation to CfW/ALN/y Gymraeg milestones
- know what the school requires in terms of further support
- understand how peer work is developing and its impact to date
- be aware of good practice, to be shared more widely
- be in a strong position to respond to scrutiny enquires regarding the school from the Core Lead or from Estyn in any proposed inspection in 2021-22

3.3 All SIAs will uphold the following principles in their engagement with link schools:

- not regard the work as a '*re-categorisation of schools*' or '*a pseudo-inspection*' the school
- implementation will be a '*process*' and not an '*event*'
- a process that is undertaken '*with*' schools rather than '*to*' schools and the starting point will be the school's own evaluation and sources of evidence
- ensure diagnostic collaboration and discussions over a period of time and not regard the exercise as a '*tick-in-the-box exercise*'
- remember that the aim is quality enhancement not quality assurance
- where appropriate and desirable, promote '*peer*' input to the work
- ideally, discussions should involve other staff members, rather than merely the Headteacher
- in the secondary, the Link SIA will need to ensure further input from the Subject SIA
- in some instances, there will be a need to work with the school to develop processes, or to collate and summarise evidence
- for the majority, the work will span two terms but it is acknowledged that some schools will be in a more mature position to discuss over a shorter period of time

3.4 The work programme will be continually reviewed in response to the Covid-19 situation and Government guidelines and regulations, and be approved by GwE's Management Board and Joint Committee. In addition, the work programme and its delivery will be discussed and agreed with Headteachers and schools.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 Joint Committee members are asked to approve the content of the report and main focus of GwE's work over the next two terms.

5.0 Financial implications

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6.0 Equalities Impact

6.1 There are no new equalities implications arising from this report.

7.0 Personnel Implications

7.1 There are no new personnel implications arising from this report.

8.0 Consultation undertaken

8.1 Consultation took place with GwE Management Board and the Joint Committee.

OPINION OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective.

Statutory Finance Officer:

I appreciate that the work program has been revised to respond to the Covid-19 situation, and that this has been thoroughly planned, is inclusive, and is to be delivered within GwE's existing resources.



REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

24 FEBRUARY 2021

Report by: Arwyn Thomas, GwE Managing Director

Subject: The Reform Journey and Professional Learning

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To present information to Joint Committee members regarding the professional offer to support the Curriculum for Wales.

2.0 Background

2.1 As you are aware, Wales has an ambitious reform programme, which has been shared via Welsh Government's 'Our national mission' and goes into detail about the courses of action and priorities to deliver the Curriculum for Wales.

2.2 Even though the title is Curriculum for Wales, the reform is much wider than curriculum reform alone as this has an impact on all aspects of educational life, including developing an evaluation, improvement and accountability framework, the Additional Learning Needs Act and developing a million Welsh speakers as part of Cymraeg 2050. Throughout this reform, there is a strong commitment to supporting and developing leadership on all levels, and professional learning is a key part of supporting the workforce.

2.3 Across GwE we have developed an integrated approach to address this work, as we fully realise that the reform should be considered from the standpoint of schools. Our support is testament to this, with the full GwE team collaborating with colleagues in the Local Authorities to embed and agree on common and consistent messages.

2.4 In October 2020, ['The journey to 2022'](#) was published, a document co-constructed with Welsh Government, Estyn and the regional consortia. The purpose of the document is to set out shared expectations that should empower school leaders as they work in their own schools and across their collaborative networks, so as to take ownership of the changes in their school and plan and sequence the right kind of activities as they prepare for the new curriculum.

2.5 In this context, Professional Learning is of key importance, and GwE will offer support to schools in various ways to achieve the steps noted in ['The journey to 2022'](#). As part of the professional offer to support this publication, and to assist schools to take action towards the milestones, a series of sessions for senior leaders in schools commenced in January 2021 with a focus on 'Change Management' and 'Developing a Shared Vision' in the first instance, before moving on to planning the curriculum. These sessions were developed in collaboration with the other three regions in Wales.

3.0 Matters for consideration

3.1 The majority of schools now recognise the need to go through the process of identifying how to manage change and create a shared vision before rushing to plan the Curriculum. Originally, both these sessions were designed to be whole day, face to face workshops, and more than 250 headteachers and deputy headteachers had registered to attend back in March 2020 before we had to postpone due to the lockdown. The sessions have now been adapted so that we can deliver the

presentations virtually and in an interactive manner, and 893 headteachers and members of Senior Leadership Teams have registered to attend.

- 3.2** The Professional Learning offer continues to be offered as a cluster as we are keen to develop discussions within clusters, appreciating that schools are at different points on the journey. There is flexibility for schools to participate in these sessions and they are recorded should anyone be unable to attend.
- 3.3** Working through Covid-19 has been a challenge for us all. It has meant that we all need to work in a new way. We have seen better learning partnerships with parents, more emphasis on well-being, improved digital skills, teachers having a space to be creative and create original learning opportunities and collaboration between schools and external bodies. There is also an opportunity for schools to reflect on new ways of working to assist them to move forward with this reform agenda.
- 3.4** As a service, we have opportunities to meet as a full team on a regular basis, to try to 'make sense' of the new Curriculum and develop consistent messages. GwE is working with Professor Graham Donaldson to develop a range of think pieces to support schools to implement the new curriculum, creating a series of prompt papers including - Vision, Pedagogy, Assessment, Leadership, Curriculum Design and Reflection in terms of the 4 purposes.
- 3.5** Following the Minister for Education's announcement on 5 February 2021 confirming that children aged three to seven will return to school after half term on 22 February 2021, and along with the ongoing discussions in the secondary regarding arrangements for awarding grades in the summer of 2021, it was decided to postpone for the time being the 'Developing a Shared Vision' sessions arranged for clusters. This decision is based on feedback received from headteachers across the sectors. We will continue to hold discussions with schools as regards when it will be timely to resume these sessions.

3.6 The work is continuously reviewed to respond to the Covid-19 situation and government guidance and regulations, and approved by GwE's Management Board and Joint Committee. In addition, the work programme and its delivery will be discussed and agreed with headteachers and schools.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 The Joint Committee is asked to note and approve the content of the report.

5.0 Financial implications

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. GwE will operate within current financial resources.

6.0 Equalities Impact

6.1 There are no new equalities implications arising from this report.

7.0 Personnel Implications

7.1 There are no new personnel implications arising from this report.

8.0 Consultation undertaken

8.1 Consultation with GwE Management Board.

OPINION OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective.

Statutory Finance Officer:

I note in part 5.1 of the report that there are no financial implications arising from the report and that GwE will act on this matter within its current resources.



REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

24 FEBRUARY 2021

Report by: Arwyn Thomas, GwE Managing Director

Subject: Distance/Remote Learning and parent/carers engagement

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To share information with Joint Committee members regarding our strategy and the support available to schools in relation to remote learning.

2.0 Background

2.1 Welsh Government has set clear expectations for schools (Guidance on learning in schools and settings: coronavirus updated 15 January 2021) in terms of the priorities for learning in schools and settings throughout the response to COVID-19 and as we move to recovery.

2.2 As part of the regional strategy, two documents have been produced to further support and assist schools to respond to questions and queries regarding remote learning.

2.3 The first document is for school policy or statement steering purposes on how remote learning is delivered (Appendix 1 - Remote/Distance Learning guidance for North Wales' schools). It can be used to provide further detail on remote/distance learning for governors or parents/carers. The second document, 'Remote/Distance Learning Guidance for parents/carers in North Wales Schools' (Appendix 2), can be shared and used with parents/carers.

3.0 Considerations

3.1 The documents build on Welsh Government guidance and provide an overview of the practices schools can adopt to strengthen further their practices in remote learning.

3.2 These guidance documents aim to:

- Support Heads and teachers to plan remote learning as part of the provision for learners

- Support Heads and teachers to manage the expectations of parents/carers and stakeholders
 - Support Heads and teachers to maximise live learning
 - Support Heads to evaluate remote learning and when reporting to stakeholders including the governing body
- 3.3 Many schools acknowledge that the engagement of parents/carers has been crucial in ensuring effective remote/blended learning. In response, GwE and the Local Authorities have provided a range of guidance documents to support schools to improve parent/carer engagement, including developing resources and good practice.
- 3.4 A regional strategy needs to be developed to improve parent/carer engagement so that they can effectively support their children throughout and beyond the COVID period.
- 4.0 Recommendations**
- 4.1 The Joint Committee is asked to note and accept the report and to support our strategy and the support in place for schools in relation to parent/carer engagement and remote learning in North Wales.
- 5.0 Financial Implications**
- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. GwE will operate within current financial resources.
- 6.0 Equalities Impact**
- 6.1 There are no new equalities implications arising from this report.
- 7.0 Personnel Implications**
- 7.1 There are no new personnel implications arising from this report.
- 8.0 Consultation undertaken**
- 8.1 Consultation with GwE Management Board.
- 9.0 Appendices**
- Appendix 1 - Remote/Distance Learning guidance for North Wales' schools
- Appendix 2 - Remote/Distance Learning Guidance for parents/carers in North Wales Schools
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OPINION OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective.

Statutory Finance Officer:

I note in part 5 above that there are no financial implications arising from the report and that GwE will implement this key issue within its current resources.

Remote / Distance Learning guidance for North Wales Schools

January 2021

What is Remote or Distance Education?

In the context of this paper, we will define remote or distance learning as a broad term which encompasses all learning that takes place outside the classroom, with the teacher not present in the same location as the pupils. This could be either live teaching or material prepared by the teacher and accessed by the pupil at a later date. In contrast, Blended learning consists of a mix of face-to-face and remote methods. This would be a relevant title if learners were accessing some of their education in school with direct contact with the teacher during lockdown period

Purpose of guidance

- To support Head teachers and teachers in planning remote learning as part of provision for learners
- To support Head teachers and teachers in managing parental and stakeholder expectations
- To support Head teachers and teachers in making best use of live learning
- To support Head teachers to evaluate remote learning practices and when reporting to stakeholders including the governing body

Guidance overview

1. Guidance Context
2. Expectation for Learning during the lockdown period
3. Considerations when planning Remote Learning
4. Practice in Remote Learning – what does the evidence say?
5. Practice in Remote Learning –guidance and examples of practice in North Wales schools
6. Further reading and guidance

1. Guidance Context

Schools are currently operating in extraordinary and challenging circumstances and, in a very short period of time, have had to manage significant change in their methods and practices. No more so than in the use of technology and the digital learning environment which has become an essential part of these practices, notably through Blended and Remote Learning. Schools across North Wales have shown significant creativity in responding to this change and the needs of learners, whether they are learning at home or in school. Likewise, there are difficulties and challenges that school staff face in doing so.

Welsh Government clearly set out expectations of schools (***Guidance on learning in schools and settings: coronavirus*** updated January 15th 2021) in which they state what learning should look like for learners. This document builds on that and gives an overview of practices school can adopt to further strengthen their practices in remote learning.

Delivery of this expectation and how learning will look in practice has to be flexible to accommodate the local context and varying needs of different learners and their parents. Whilst taking account of pressures on parents, in particular those who are trying to balance supporting home learning with working from home themselves, we also need to be mindful of the pressures on head teachers, teachers and wider school staff and the parameters within which they are inevitably working. They face a balancing act of maintaining face-to-face contact with pupils on site whilst planning, preparing and delivering online learning for the whole age and ability range, providing feedback on learning, and often providing IT support. Whilst teachers need to be available to offer support for learning to both pupils and parents, boundaries need to be set to allow staff a work-life balance.

Teachers and leaders know their schools and their learners, and are the right people to make detailed decisions about the design of their pupils' learning. This document aims to bring together identified successful practice for teachers and leaders in North Wales to consider as they develop their remote learning practices and respond to challenges.

2. Expectation for learning during the lockdown period

The curriculum in Wales differs from other regions of the UK, therefore expectations linked to learning are also different and specifically tailored to improving pupils' progress within our national context. In order for pupils to make progress and succeed in their education in Wales, teachers provide a range of activities which support and maximise learning, these activities often necessarily differ from activities and provision which are seen in other parts of the UK.

Welsh Government guidance states that *'if during the next academic year there is a return to lockdown the following expectations apply in terms of contact and duration of learning.*

- *All learners should be contacted regularly to 'check in' – this would provide an opportunity to check on the safety and well-being of the learner as well as to explore their learning experience and consider possible additional support.*
- *All learners should be provided with the duration of learning time they would receive were they in their school or setting, regardless of whether or not some of their learning is taking place at home or elsewhere. There will be exceptions to the implementation of this expectation; however, it should be the starting position for all learners.*

Likewise, Welsh Government expectations of remote learning for pupils in exam years notes when learners in years 10, 11, 12 and 13 are required to learn remotely, and for the period of the spring term until half term:

- *We expect this group of learners to receive daily contact from their school in support of learning, motivation and well-being. We expect them to receive four hours of meaningful learning per day, which will be an engaging combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning and support, using digital and non-digital means as appropriate to the group and the subject. We are not setting out expectations at a level of detail below this – teachers and leaders know their schools and their learners, and are the right people to make detailed decisions about the design of their pupils' and students' learning.*
- *We expect learning resources provided by schools to be of sufficiently high quality to enable learners to progress as closely as possible to how they would have progressed if they were in class. We expect resources and activities to reference and contextualise widely available content from sources including Hwb, WJEC, BBC, SAC and Universities.*
- *We expect schools to support digitally excluded learners in accessing remote learning opportunities by distributing school devices with appropriate end user agreements. If there are problems in issuing devices or connectivity challenges, schools must report this to their local authority EdTech lead.*
- *We expect schools to be aware of and record learners' engagement with the remote learning offer*

3. Considerations when planning remote learning

- Ensuring pupils are safe, both on and off-line
- Ensuring access to technology is key, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Schools need to think carefully about whether pupils have access to the right kind of devices when using

digital remote education. If learners do not have a device and a device cannot be provided, or are unable to access digital learning (for a range of reasons), it might be better to consider non-digital approaches as well. This might include sharing of hard copies, paper based tasks or packs. There should be no detriment in provision whichever approach is taken.

- When using digital remote education, internet access is relied upon. Again, there needs to be consideration as to whether pupils have this and what can be provided if they don't.
- Pupils with additional learning needs may not be able to access digital learning or may struggle with this
- All pupils will need to learn through a range of approaches, including physical, social and creative styles. The balance of these may need to differ between different age groups.
- Equality of access of provision for key worker and vulnerable pupils in school.
- Schools must consider pupil wellbeing when planning remote learning provision and especially in relation to screen-time.

4. Practice in remote learning – What does the evidence say?

Quality of teaching is key and is more important than how lessons are provided

- Pupils can learn and make progress through remote teaching. Fundamental to all learning through whichever medium, are the key elements of effective teaching must be present with clear explanations, scaffolding and feedback. This is far more important than how or when they are provided. Research shows that there was no clear difference between live remote teaching or using pre-recorded video. What is important is whether the explanation builds clearly on pupils' prior learning or how pupils' understanding is subsequently assessed. Allowing time for giving feedback to learners and assessing formatively is key in ensuring progress.

Opportunity for Peer Interactions is important

- Opportunities for learners to see each other and to work together online can provide motivation and improve learning outcomes. Practices can include collaborating on an activity, peer marking and feedback sessions, sharing models of good work with each other and opportunities for live discussions around content.

Supporting pupils to work independently can improve learning outcomes

- Working independently will be a natural way of working for pupils learning at home. Supporting learners, especially vulnerable learners to work independently by providing checklists or daily plans is of particular benefit.

Pupils make the most progress when their wellbeing is good

- Ensuring Pupils' wellbeing includes being aware of their physical, mental and social health. Long periods of time on-screen are not good for children's health and development at any age, particularly for younger children. Home learning activities which include a range of on and off-screen physical, social and creative pursuits, including tasks tailored specifically to enhance wellbeing, improve pupils' ability to perform at their best across the whole curriculum.

5. Practice in Remote Learning –guidance and examples of practice in North Wales schools

Remote learning is one way of delivering a high-quality curriculum using good quality learning.

Remote education provision needs to be aligned to the classroom curriculum as much as possible. As

in any classroom curriculum, it needs to be carefully sequenced to ensure that pupils obtain the building blocks they need to move on to the next step. Learning Objectives and Success Criteria should be made as explicit remotely as they would be in the classroom. Remote education is not the same as digital education. Sometimes, it may be more effective to deliver remote education through worksheets or a textbook, although by now, most schools have a digital platform so that they can provide online education where that is the most appropriate method. Online methods can include both live and material prepared by the teacher and accessed by the pupil at a later date. It is important that remote learning isn't over-complicated. When using digital remote education, the platform shouldn't be too complicated to use while lessons do not need to be full of graphics and digital illustrations. Simple graphics that highlight the key concepts and features is sometimes all that is needed. More important are the key elements of effective teaching i.e. clear objectives, expectations and feedback.

Examples of effective practices in North Wales schools:

- Learning is a combination of live sessions, live chat, pre-recorded videos, tasks and activities set to be completed with support of teacher/parent as well as independent tasks.
- The timing of the live sessions varies to accommodate working parents, multi-sibling households, and the availability of digital devices. Some schools offer a live registration session first thing in the morning followed by a literacy or numeracy session where new learning is introduced. Others find it is more beneficial to do a live session part way through the day to address any difficulties encountered whilst completing tasks. Some checked in a second time at the end of the day to review learning.
- Tasks set and shared on a daily rather than weekly basis, in order to control the pace of learning and maintain engagement. Some schools provide a weekly overview/timetable for those families who are unable to join a daily check in due to parents' work commitments.
- Specific practice in Foundation Phase learning includes planning opportunities to repeat and consolidate new and existing skills through play/active and experiential based learning experiences; planning opportunities so that the children are free to respond in a way that's developmentally appropriate for them e.g writing, drawing, make short video/audio recording, take a photo and model making; using submitted examples from children as an example of effective practice for their children (with permission).
- Use recorded material to enhance learning at home for example make videos of reading stories, singing songs and number games/facts
- Teachers in clusters arrange meetings, sometimes lined to age groups, to discuss and share ideas re: tasks and activities that have worked well. There are examples of co-planning and co-creation of resources between schools.
- Most secondary schools follow the 'normal' school timetable with some adaptations to facilitate learning. Lessons are a little shorter to allow learners a break; the day is slightly truncated to improve learner focus and completed tasks are uploaded to a learning platform during or at the end of the day. Classes may be live in some instances or pre-recorded. Live lessons involve teacher initiation of a task, followed by learner independent work with the teacher available for questioning and a plenary session to end the lesson. There will be no one prescribed way of undertaking this; the focus should be on learning and accessibility of support and resources for the learner.

Feedback and Assessment for Learning are more important than ever

Feedback and formative assessment are still as important as in the classroom. It can be harder to deliver immediate feedback to pupils remotely than in the classroom, but many teachers have found

some smart and innovative ways to do this through chatroom discussions, live 1-to-1 interaction, messaging and adaptive learning software such as Headsprout etc. It is important for teachers to stay in regular contact with pupils and are available to learners for at least parts of every day. Some schools have daily whole class feedback sessions to close the school day while others do this on a more individual basis where every child has a weekly slot with a teacher. Low-stakes quizzes and fun assessment tasks can be built in to remote education, as can written assignments and retrieval practice activities with older learners.

Examples of practices in North Wales schools:

- Daily check ins between pupils and teacher to review work completed and explain or introduce new learning activities
- In Primary schools the teacher is available online throughout most of the school day for support and feedback including celebrating home learning and addressing any misconceptions. Teachers highlighting children’s increasing ability to demonstrate positive dispositions to learning, including critical and creative skills in line with the Four Purposes of the new Curriculum for Wales.
- Teacher giving group feedback sessions to enable individual feedback and peer interaction.
- Teachers make best endeavours to ensure that ALN pupils work on their IDP targets.
- ‘Helpwr Heddiw’ sessions integrated into live session to encourage pupils to maintain their Welsh oracy skills.
- Live small group work with a TA supporting e.g. those with ALN, EAL or younger pupils, or those pupils whose progress was being supported through the Accelerating Learning Grant
- Parent evening sessions taking place remotely.

Live lessons

There is a misconception that remote learning should only consist of back to back streaming of lessons. Use of live lessons can have advantages if they are planned and delivered effectively and form part of a comprehensive package of support. Using effective teaching approaches, a live lesson can prepare a child for the day’s activities, they can make curriculum alignment easier, can keep pupils’ attention and gives the teacher more control over the learning environment. However, this needs to be balanced with a learner’s (and teacher’s) wellbeing. Time away from the screen is important for both learner and teacher. This gives the learner opportunity to partake in their own independent learning and gives the teacher opportunity to plan, prepare and have individual contact with learners giving feedback and providing next steps.

Different approaches to remote education suit different types of content and pupils. Mixed models can be seen across our schools with a blend of live teaching, recorded material, pre-prepared activities and individual learner contact.

Advantages of live remote streaming	Potential downsides to consider before using live remote streaming
Enables teachers to give clear messages to learners and ensure their understanding of a task/ concept before they proceed. This can reduce workload	Negative impact of too much 'screen time' on pupils including developing a bad posture, and other physical problems due to staying hunched in front of a screen.
Increases pupil engagement and understanding of tasks	It needs to be carefully timetabled and worked around the ‘care in school’ timetable i.e. the

	timetable of the key worker / vulnerable children who are in school
Gives the teacher more control over the learning environment	Technical difficulties can reduce equity e.g. access to chromebooks, laptops, tablets, also internet access/ connectivity issues
Learners are able to get live feedback through the 'chat' in private if desired	Evidence suggests that concentration online is shorter than the length of a typical lesson
There a number of useful tools available to keep pupils interested and involved e, e, Jamboard, live quizzes, Padlet; Mentimeter etc.	In continuous live streaming , it can be hard to build in interaction and flexibility
It can improve the engagement of pupils who lack the self-discipline to work independently	Some pupils unwilling to contribute orally and not comfortable putting cameras on.
Wellbeing - pupils can see each other and their teacher interact and collaborate. This includes vulnerable pupils who are in school.	Some teachers with toddlers at home that make live streaming very difficult.
Helps parents to understand tasks and concepts , learning intentions etc. in order to be able to support their child's learning	

Examples of practices in North Wales schools:

- Daily live lesson to introduce activities and to set the expectations for the activities.
- Providing tasks and activities that are completed independently off-screen.
- Paper packs/hard copies made available on request for those who are having difficulty with digital aspects.
- In primary schools teachers have time each day when not available online to allow them time to plan and prepare content for the following day e.g. record videos etc. Other staff are available to support during this time if needed.
- Use a 'home learning book' as a record of any work completed at home, which can be brought into school as evidence on a child's return. It also supports the idea that not all tasks have to be completed online.
- Instructions for tasks explained on a pre-recorded video to support pupils who have difficulty with reading, processing written instructions, and who are completing tasks with limited parental support. Additional, extension tasks provided that can be completed independently, consolidate skills but also provide parents with time to complete their own work if required.

Engagement and Communication

Engaging learners in an online environment is difficult. There are distractions all around and teachers aren't physically present to manage situations. Parents will also be finding it difficult adapting to a whole new way of working. Communicating and working with parents during this time, without putting additional burden on them, can support home learning. Regular communication with both Learners and Parents increases the feeling of belonging to the school community. This regular communication and improved sense of community is being seen through a variety of means in our schools. Whole-school or class digital assemblies and feedback, newsletters to pupils and parents or online drop in sessions can all help parents and pupils alike them feel part of the community, even when learning remotely. Maintaining relationships are key during these difficult times.

Examples of practices in North Wales schools:

- Engaging constructive feedback: for example using a questionnaire for parents to ascertain what is working well in the home environment and what further support is needed.
- A weekly assembly presented live or pre-recorded and regular videos of stories being read.
- Phone calls home to those who are not engaging regularly with learning to check on wellbeing and to offer support
- Weekly surgery for parents on a 1-1 basis to address any concerns about their child's learning e.g. support with IT.
- Cluster primary schools liaise with the secondary school around the timing of any live sessions as this impacts on the availability of devices in multi sibling households.
- Providing activities to engage the whole family together e.g. a weekly family quiz; sharing easy recipes that parents and children can make together, outlining the numeracy and literacy skills that this activity can develop.
- Reflecting on lockdown and developed a rationale of why they have adopted the approaches they have. Capturing this in their risk assessment and sharing with Governors

6. The above guidance has been collated from the following documentation. Much more information, examples and guidance can be found within these documents:

- Guidance on learning in schools and settings: coronavirus - [Guidance on learning in schools and settings: coronavirus | GOV.WALES](#)
- Expectations of remote learning in exam years - [Expectations of remote learning for pupils in exam years - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)
- Welsh Government Live streaming guidelines - [Live-streaming and video-conferencing: safeguarding principles and practice - Keeping safe online - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)
- What's working well in remote education – [What's working well in remote education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- EEF Rapid Evidence Summary (Distance Learning) - [Rapid Evidence Assessment summary.pdf](#)
- Hwb Supporting Distance Learning - [Distance learning - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

This regional guidance was created in consultation with all six North Wales Local Authorities



Remote / Distance Learning guidance for Parents in North Wales Schools

Good learning happens when your child is clear about what they are learning, have time to complete the work and have opportunities to discuss and improve their work.

Different teaching approaches suit different types of learners and subjects. A mix of ways to provide learning can be seen in your school and across our schools with a blend of live teaching, recorded material and pre-prepared activities. Every Individual teacher is well/best placed to decide what is the most practical and effective way for them to provide remote learning during this difficult time for everyone.



What is Remote or Distance Education?



Remote or distance learning is all learning that takes place outside the classroom, with the teacher not present in the same location as the learners. This could be either live teaching or material prepared by the teacher and accessed by the pupil at a later date. What is important is that your child is clear about what they are learning, have time to complete the work and have opportunities to discuss and improve their work.

What should I expect from my child's school?

Welsh Government clearly set out expectations of schools in which they state what learning should look like for learners during these extraordinary and challenging circumstances. Further guidelines were published regarding learners in exam years (Yr10, 11, 12 and 13). These guidelines can be found here:

[Guidance on learning in schools and settings: coronavirus | GOV.WALES](#)

[Expectations of remote learning for pupils in exam years - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

How your child's learning will look in practice will need to be flexible to accommodate the context and varying needs of different learners and parents within your school. Whilst taking account of pressures on parents, in particular those who are trying to balance supporting home learning with working from home themselves and those balancing the education of more than one child, we also need to be mindful of the pressures on school staff. They also face a balancing act of maintaining face-to-face contact with pupils on site whilst planning, preparing and delivering online learning for the whole age and ability range, providing feedback on learning, and often providing IT support.



The curriculum in Wales differs from other regions of the UK, therefore expectations linked to learning are also different and specifically tailored to improving pupils' progress within our national context. In order for pupils to make progress and succeed

in their education in Wales, teachers provide a range of activities which support and maximise learning, these activities are often different from activities and provision which are seen in other parts of the UK.

How should remote learning look in my child's school?

Remote education can take place in a variety of ways. Most schools have a digital platform so that they can provide online education where that is the most appropriate method. However, sometimes it may be more effective to deliver remote education through other methods including worksheets or a textbook. Online methods can include both live lessons and material prepared by the teacher and accessed by the pupil at a later date. What is important is that your child is clear about what they are learning, have time to complete the work and have opportunities to discuss and improve their work.



There are some people who think that remote learning should only consist of back to back live streaming of lessons. This isn't necessarily the case, especially with younger learners. A sensible approach to live lessons can have advantages, which include:

- Teachers being able to give clear messages to learners and ensure their understanding of a task/ concept before they proceed with the work.
- Learners are able to get live feedback regarding their work enabling them to know what they have done well and where they need to improve.
- Improving the engagement of pupils who lack the self-discipline to work independently.
- Learners can see each other and their teacher and can interact and collaborate.
- Helps parents to understand tasks and concepts , learning intentions etc. in order to be able to support their child's learning

However, there are some potential downsides to consider before using live remote streaming:

- Negative impact of too much 'screen time' on pupils including developing a bad posture, and other physical problems due to staying hunched in front of a screen.
- Technical difficulties can be frustrating e.g. access to equipment, internet access/ connectivity issues etc.
- Learners have limited IT equipment or have to share equipment with family members.
- Evidence suggests that concentration online is shorter than the length of a typical lesson in school.



Just to remind you, different teaching approaches suit different types of learners and subjects. A mix of ways to provide learning can be seen in your school and across our schools with a blend of live teaching, recorded material and pre-prepared activities. Every Individual teacher is well/best placed to decide what is the most practical and effective way for them to provide remote learning during this difficult time for everyone.



If you have any queries please get in touch and we would be happy to discuss this further.



REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

24 FEBRUARY 2021

Report by: Alwyn Jones - GwE Assistant Director

Subject: Developing Accelerated Learning programmes for the Welsh language

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To seek approval from the Joint-Committee to develop Accelerated Learning programmes for those being educated through the medium of Welsh (First Language).

2.0 Background

2.1 The response to COVID-19 has affected our lives greatly. In this challenging context, there has been a profound effect on the education system and schools.

2.2 In the context of the Welsh language, Estyn's thematic report '*Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19*', published in January 2021, highlights the concern that pupils are losing their Welsh, especially those from non-Welsh speaking homes.

2.3 This problem is likely to be further exacerbated following the lockdown at the beginning of the spring term 2021 with schools returning to remote learning. The period has highlighted the need to have clear plans and strategies in place to equip teachers to ensure progression in our learners' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills through the medium of Welsh, across the ability and age range.

3.0 Considerations

3.1 There is an immediate need for 'Accelerated Learning' plans to target learners' Welsh language skills. There is some concern that learners could change medium from Welsh during this period, especially in the early years, because of their non-exposure to the language as per the normal arrangements, and inability to practise sufficiently at home.

3.2 Both languages need to be treated on an equitable footing, and effective accelerated learning programmes need to be in place to develop learners' Welsh reading and language skills that accommodate the needs of the age range, their ability and category of need.

3.3 Expectations as regards what can be achieved in the short-term will need to be managed, and schools and stakeholders should take the following into account:

- Schools are unlikely to have access to an adequate range of resources to deliver several catch-up programmes upon re-opening; therefore, a longer-term strategy will be needed to reinstate Welsh language skills fully.
- According to research, specific programmes have proved more successful than others are at improving core skills, which will need to be a consideration when developing similar programmes for Welsh.
- A baseline should be set as a starting point for analysing the scale of the issue and the types of interventions needed to reinstate Welsh language skills.
- Consideration should be given to the skills, understanding and capacity of staff to deliver any required programme or intervention; and
- The role of parents/carers in supporting learners to recover their language skills should be taken into account.

3.4 The professional development needs of staff, or the school's capacity, in terms of meeting learners' needs will need to be identified. Comprehensive and focused professional development will need to be ensured so that staff are well informed to effectively deliver the Welsh language accelerated learning programmes.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 The Joint-Committee is asked to approve the content of the report and plans to develop Accelerated Learning programmes for those being educated through the medium of Welsh (First Language).

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6.0 Equalities Impact

6.1 There are no new equalities implications arising from this report.

7.0 Personnel Implications

7.1 There are no new personnel implications arising from this report.

8.0 Consultation undertaken

8.1 Consultation with GwE Management Board.

OPINION OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective.

Statutory Finance Officer:

I note that part 5.1 of the report confirms that there are no financial implications arising from this report. Therefore, I assume that GwE will operate within its existing resources.

Agenda Item 13

GwE: Joint Committee 24/02/2021



REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

24 February 2021

Report by: Arwyn Thomas - GwE Managing Director

Subject: Calendar of Meetings

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To request the Joint Committee to agree the meetings calendar for the coming year.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Joint Committee shall meet as and when required to suit the needs of the Service in accordance with the Service timetable provided that there be a minimum of three meetings per year, one of which shall be specified as the annual general meeting.

2.2 In Appendix 1 is the proposed calendar (draft) for adopting.

3.0 Considerations

3.1 Due to the current situation, the Joint Committee to continue to meet virtually. The situation will be reviewed continually to respond to the Covid-19 situation.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 The Joint Committee is requested to:

4.1.1 Approve the meetings calendar as proposed within Appendix 1.

4.1.2 That the Chair be authorised to make amendments to the calendar, and the medium for meetings, as required.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6.0 Equalities Impact

6.1 There are no new equalities impacts arising from this report.

7.0 Personnel Implications

7.1 There are no new personnel implications arising from this report.

8.0 Consultation Undertaken

8.1 Consultation has been undertaken with the 6 North Wales Local Authorities, to avoid any duplication with Council meetings.

9.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Proposed GwE Joint Committee Meetings 2021/2022.

OPINION OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective.

Statutory Finance Officer:

I support the recommendations, as the proposed dates of GwE Joint Committee meetings, as proposed here, are fit for purpose.

Specifically -

- 14 July 2021 will be timely for obtaining 2020-21 pre-audit accounts (following relaxation of statutory timescale due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic).

- 22 September 2021 will be timely for obtaining and approving the independent auditors' report on 2020/21 accounts (again following extension of this year's statutory timescale), and
- 16 February 2022 will be timely for approving the 2022/23 budget (hopefully, Welsh Government funding will be sooner than this year's settlement timescale).

Appendix 1

Proposed Amended GwE Joint Committee Meetings 2021/2022

MEETING	DATE	TIME	MEDIUM / VENUE
GwE Joint Committee	14/07/2021	1.30 p.m	Virtual
GwE Joint Committee	22/09/2021	1.30 p.m	Virtual
GwE Joint Committee	10/11/2021	10.30 a.m	Virtual
GwE Joint Committee	16/02/2022	10.30 a.m	Virtual
GwE Joint Committee	25/05/2022	10.30 a.m	Virtual
GwE Joint Committee	13/7/2022	1.30p.m	Virtual