

## **Supporting leaders and staff in schools and PRUs to evaluate their provision in response to COVID-19 and to identify what has worked well and the areas that require further work**

### **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 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, 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<sup>rd</sup> 2020, the Welsh Government (WG) announced that there would be a phased opening of schools from 29<sup>th</sup> 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 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 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 14<sup>th</sup>. 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.

On January 4<sup>th</sup> 2021, schools remained closed to all children except those of key workers and some vulnerable learners following the introduction of a second lockdown period, with schools providing remote learning for most of the spring term.

In the week commencing 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021, under 7s in the foundation phase started back at schools, with other primary school children and older secondary students (Years 11 and 13) returning back on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021. From 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021 primary, special and secondary schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) returned to provide onsite provision for all learners.

### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

This report provides an overview of how schools and PRUs in North Wales have responded to COVID-19 and is based on evidence gathered by GwE Supporting Improvement Advisers as part of their work in supporting schools during the spring and summer terms 2021. The main focus during this period was to work in partnership with school and PRUs to support them to evaluate the quality and impact of their provision during the lockdown periods.

The template included in *Appendix 1* was used as a '*prompt*' for discussions with the schools which they could also use to record and collate the information gathered. However, there was no obligation for schools to use this template. It was emphasised that the questions presented were only examples of areas and aspects for consideration and not intended to be interpreted as a comprehensive and exhaustive list. The starting point of all discussions was the school's self-evaluation and their processes for gathering evidence.

For each school and PRU, Supporting Improvement Adviser reported on:

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- How the school evaluated its provision and impact during lockdown;
- What the school has identified as the key strengths of its provision for teaching and learning during lockdown;
- How the school is planning to build on its successes to develop the new curriculum;
- What improvements in provision and standards the school has identified as a result of targeting their grant spend;
- School evidence for impact of GwE support/involvement and identification of additional support in going forward;
- Areas that needed further development and support.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

### **PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SECTORS**

#### **How have the schools evaluated their provision and impact during lockdown?**

Overall, primary and special schools have made timely and purposeful use of national, regional and local authority guidance throughout the COVID pandemic. Nearly all schools have managed to evaluate the quality of their provision through lockdown using a variety of useful sources of information and evidence, including regular discussion with other cluster schools and the link GwE officer. Most schools have gathered the views of stakeholders via questionnaires for pupils and parents, telephone calls or conversations with individuals. Many have made significant adaptations and improvements to their provision based on these findings. The nature of inquiries have varied and included a wide range of questions pertaining to checking well-being, ensuring that pupils had appropriate equipment to complete their work, checking availability of a digital connection and relating to the frequency, appropriateness and quality of provision provided across subjects.

Most headteachers and senior leaders have had access to teachers' digital classes, and have informally scrutinised learners work and monitored the quality of both remote and blended learning provision on a regular basis. Some of the best practice have observed live or synchronous teaching and learning, as well as observing remote well-being sessions. Many leaders and staff evaluated provision by monitoring pupils' work on digital platforms such as Google Classrooms and SeeSaw. This has included the monitoring of formative assessments and the quality of feedback to pupils. Some schools have developed systems that allow a constant open and honest dialogue with parents, as well as monitoring the consistency of provision between classes and monitoring the wellbeing of their staff and school community. Some primary schools have managed to undertake more formal book scrutiny sessions, learning walks and the occasional lesson observation (sometimes as part of staff Performance Management).

The quality of provision for supporting pupils' well-being has been a strength, with nearly all schools checking in with pupils and families on a regular basis. There were robust arrangements in place across most schools to monitor attendance and engagement levels during the lockdown periods. Many schools reported that engagement levels improved steadily in the second lockdown in January 2021. A few schools noted some low level disruption when learners returned to school and the inability of a few pupils to re-engage with school life.

Pupils' learning has been tracked through a range of different methods in schools across the region, with many focussing upon a range of basic skills including the use of literacy and numeracy data. Tracking systems for pupils' progress vary in quality between schools. However, nearly all leaders effectively tracked engagement during lockdown and some have developed highly effective systems for tracking and targeting provision for families.

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Many schools prioritised working with individuals identified as vulnerable or requiring additional support. Support for vulnerable pupils was often timely and families were provided with a variety of means of learning including paper based activities. However, many leaders have identified that these learners did not always make expected progress during the lockdown period and that some ALN and/or previously struggling learners had experienced some degree of regression in the standard of their language and maths skills. Many schools have put in place appropriate measures to support and target these learners. Nearly all schools have undertaken some form of baseline assessments on return to school following lockdown in order to determine the level of support and intervention needed and to identify target groups of pupils. A number of schools noted pupils' standards had slipped following the first lockdown and implemented successful intervention strategies to raise standards when pupils returned to school in September 2020.

Some schools have noted a deterioration in pupils' Welsh language skills with this being dependent on the language spoken at home.

Headteachers managed to hold regular staff meetings and team meetings on a digital platform throughout the lockdown period, in order to discuss and monitor engagement, pupils' progress and the suitability of tasks, ALN provision and pupils' wellbeing. Nearly all schools have considered the impact of their provision and have adapted accordingly as lockdown continued.

Many schools continued to hold virtual meetings for governors on a regular basis during lockdown, including conducting Headteacher Performance Management. Many have also discussed the findings of questionnaires / evaluations with the governing body, but there have been limited opportunities for governors to visit schools in a formal capacity to conduct monitoring activities and evaluation. However, governors were increasingly involved in self-evaluation during the spring and summer term 2021 in many schools. In some schools this has included evaluating monitoring reports and undertaking activities such as scrutinising pupils' work.

Many primary and special school leaders' have noted that their evaluations have enabled them to continue to focus upon improvement planning throughout the period and have identified the need to improve key skills and wellbeing and continuing to improve provision for Curriculum for Wales and ALN transformation.

### **What have the schools identified as the key strengths of their provision for teaching and learning during lockdown?**

Strength was seen in staff and pupils' ability to adapt quickly to change, with many significantly improving their digital skills and their use of various software and apps. Nearly all school said that the adaptability and creativity of staff when developing remote and blended learning approaches was a strength. There was a marked difference in the quality of provision from the first lockdown to the second lockdown with most schools providing varied and meaningful tasks. Many teachers were able to adapt their provision to provide an offer that was as near to their usual classroom practice as possible. Many schools have reported they have used various digital platforms effectively for teaching, including See Saw, Class Dojo, Teams and Google Classrooms, which have easy access for senior leaders to monitor the standard of provision. Provision of live streaming or synchronous learning improved significantly during the second lockdown.

The quality of teachers' 'Assessment for Learning' via remote learning improved and progressed to include feedback on pupils' work in the form of recorded voice as well as written comments. This enabled a learning dialogue to take place between teacher and pupil in many schools, giving pupils an opportunity to respond to feedback and improve their finished work. Most schools noted a rich variety of tasks were provided, including literacy and numeracy

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tasks, theme work as well as physical, creative, outdoor and well-being activities. Many pupils also gained in confidence with assessing the quality of their own work and were becoming more independent in their learning.

Nearly all schools clearly prioritised its pastoral and well-being arrangements and placed pupil and staff wellbeing at the heart of their approaches during lockdown. The quality of provision for supporting pupils' well-being has been a strength, with nearly all schools checking in with pupils and families on a regular basis. Concerns were raised to the local authorities about families who were uncontactable.

Many schools felt there had been an increased sense of collaboration and teamwork during this period. This extended to their cluster schools and beyond. The development of the GwE Support Centre encouraged the sharing of resources and expertise and contributed to teachers having meaningful discussions about the quality of the provision. The use of digital platforms made the process more time efficient and has paved the way for future working and collaboration between schools.

Many leaders have identified the opportunity to review general communication with stakeholders during the period – this was made more effective and efficient and used to support learning, for example through regular newsletters, video bulletins, effective use of social media, etc. Communication with parents certainly improved during the lockdown period. However, many schools have noted the need to more effectively support parents and carers to help their child to learn.

Key worker provision in schools was strong and improved over the period, moving in most schools from child care to an improved focus upon learning and wellbeing. In many schools during the second lockdown, key worker provision was better aligned to remote blended learning which improved consistency and supported pupils' transition back to school. Teaching assistants played a notable role in providing this support in many schools.

Many primary schools made very good use of a range of reliable and useful pupil performance indicators, including standardised spelling, reading and numeracy data and/or teacher assessment data to gauge the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on pupil progress and standards. Schools subsequently identified struggling pupils who required additional support. Across the clusters, pupils requiring supplementary support receive a range of effective strategies and programmes, e.g. SAFMEDS numeracy fluency, Headsprout, Reading Eggs, ELSA and the new RILL language programme. This use of diagnostic assessment has enabled these schools to closely monitor pupil progress.

Following the full-time return to school in March 2021, many schools have set up a valuable range of evidence-informed academic and well-being provision such as Seasons for Growth, Friends Resilience and ELSA programmes.

### **How are the schools planning to build on its successes to develop the new curriculum?**

A positive outcome that has arisen during to the pandemic is the development of strong collaborative work within schools and across clusters. This is a very strong growth point regionally for preparing and implementing the new curriculum. The four transversal themes of the school as learning organisation (trust, time, thinking together and technology) have been very evident throughout the lockdown periods. The increased use of technology has allowed relationships and collaboration to develop further providing a strong base for schools and clusters to move forward with their preparations for the new curriculum.

Many staff members have had to rapidly upskill as provision moved on to the digital platform. Most headteachers have identified the digital competence is an area that has developed well

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over the past twelve months and they are very keen that this progress in pupils and staffs digital learning is continued. Schools have undertaken a range of professional learning offered by regional consortia around the use of digital technology to support teaching and learning. A greater number of practitioners are now able to confidently use an increasing range of technology to support the learning. Many primary schools have based their remote and blended learning provision on the 12 pedagogical principles as outlined in the *Successful Futures* report. Schools intends to build on their growth points during the lock down periods to further evolve the breadth of experiences and progress of learners. An example of this is the increased emphasis on the pedagogy of big questions related to *What Matters* statements / Areas of Learning and Experience. The majority of schools noted they used this time as an opportunity to experiment with teaching methods, choosing to continue the practice of sharing work on digital platforms within the classroom, in order to develop pupils' independent learning skills.

Nearly all primary and special schools have already started to consider their vision for the new curriculum considering what is relevant to the local area, Wales and the wider world.

The well-being of both staff and pupils was a key focus for all schools throughout the pandemic and continued when pupils' returned to school. Most schools have noted that they will build on this work to develop their whole school approach to wellbeing. Nearly all schools have greatly developed the well-being element and learning in the outdoors, appreciating the contribution of these areas to a broad and balanced curriculum.

The development of the GwE Resource Centre has encouraged primary and special schools to share their resources and plans. Headteachers plan to continue to share work on curriculum development across their cluster and to work together to develop a 3-16 continuum for their local curriculum. Many schools are making good progress in planning a local curriculum that includes planning for pupil voice and engaging with a variety of community stakeholders. Many primary schools are building on the innovative, creative and collaborative practice developed during the pandemic to prepare for implementing the new Curriculum for Wales.

Many primary and special schools' planning now reflects the 4 purposes of the new curriculum and time has been allocated to staff to further develop their knowledge and understanding through attending purposeful professional learning. Many schools have also developed dimensions of Schools as Learning Organisations through giving staff time to work on Curriculum for Wales aspects. Schools have established processes in order that staff can share newly acquired information or good practice. Schools in some clusters are participating in a range of useful and effective cluster initiatives, e.g., the cluster peer review work (School Partnership Programme) and engagement with evidence-based projects with Bangor University, e.g., NPEP enquiry project.

### **What improvements in provision and standards have the schools identified as a result of targeting their grant spend?**

In most primary schools, Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards (RRRS) funding has targeted groups of learners to address identified gaps in their learning. The grants have also been targeted at pupils showing low resilience, lack of confidence and poor engagement. Many schools have used the grants to provide Basic Skills support and intervention following lockdown. Resources were purchased and support staff allocated to deliver interventions. Some schools struggled to find additional staff to cover these roles and so have used the grant to extend the working hours of some staff already on their books, whilst ensuring that the additional hours are spent to support the identified groups of learners.

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Targeted areas of support include literacy, numeracy, digital competence, early intervention in phonics and developing independent learning skills. There are many examples of targeted support leading to improvement in pupils' IT skills and general confidence in using hardware and software. Nearly all schools have undertaken baseline formative assessments on return to school following lockdown in order to identify target group pupils. Good use has been made of the accelerated learning resources developed by GwE which were based on research into effective intervention strategies. Many schools are reporting that pupils who are receiving additional support as a result of the grant are making good progress in their learning following their small group provision. Schools are very aware that there may be a long term impact on pupils' learning and well-being that is not yet visible.

Many primary schools have offered nurture support to children who are struggling since the lockdown. Increased wellbeing provision has been made available as more pupils were struggling to adjust following lockdown. Wellbeing surveys and teacher and parent referrals have been used to identify pupils for targeted intervention. Wellbeing provision has also been extended to include support for families to ensure that pupils and parents are able to deal with this unprecedented situation.

Most schools have used some of their professional learning grant to develop their staff's digital competence to deliver effective remote and blended learning as well as using the funding to develop their knowledge and understanding for implementing the Curriculum for Wales

### **Impact of GwE support/involvement and identification of additional support in going forward**

During this period of often overwhelming challenges, many primary and special schools noted that they have valued and benefited from the regular contact and support provided by GwE link officers, especially in helping them maintain a positive mindset. Headteachers have appreciated the reassurance and pastoral support provided by their Supporting Improvement Adviser (SIA) and the regular checks on their wellbeing. Many schools commented on the useful general advice and support from GwE and the local authority throughout the challenging year, for example, the risk assessment dashboard co-created by GwE and LA was extremely helpful and timely. Schools noted that there was a good balance between challenge and support with strong focus on wellbeing and safety. Most schools have appreciated the genuine concern for their wellbeing and also the practical support provided by GwE regarding operational issues, e.g., risk assessments, self-evaluation reports, guidance on remote and blended learning and the resource library (GwE Support Centre). Coaching and mentoring provided by SIAs was also well received as well as the bespoke support for individual schools.

Headteachers greatly appreciated the role of the School Improvement Advisor (SIA) in providing initial guidance and support to schools and clusters to develop their remote and blended learning provision. Many noted that the facilitation of cluster meetings were initially crucial to share ideas and good practice for developing their remote learning provision and more recently in planning for the new curriculum. Many noted that the cluster meetings were both supportive and informative as well as having a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

In addition to the support for teaching and learning and operational issues, headteachers have expressed their appreciation to the support provided for their strategic planning and especially in preparation for the new curriculum, e.g. vision building, change management and curriculum design workshops. They have been able to manage daily operational issues whilst also maintaining a focus on their long term planning for implementing the new curriculum. Many headteachers appreciated the consistency in the approach taken across the region. GwE's encouragement and facilitation of collaborative working has also encouraged greater

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consistency across clusters and the sharing of expertise and resources. It has also enabled co-planning and joint working to implement the reform journey.

Professional dialogue between schools and the link SIAs has helped to ensure that their planned grant expenditure is targeted appropriately. Schools have generally appreciated the time-saving benefits and usefulness of the grants dashboard to monitor spending. Many schools has also appreciated the range of professional learning offer available and the flexibility regarding delivery and timing. Many schools commented on the range of online training and webinars available through the GwE Support Centre and noted that this had impacted positively on the quality of their blended and remote learning provision.

## **SECONDARY SECTOR INCLUDING RELEVANT SPECIAL SCHOOLS AND PRUs**

### **How have the schools evaluated their provision and impact during lockdown?**

In response to the operational and learning guidance provided by Welsh Government, secondary schools have had to adapt their quality assurance processes and systems. There has been a strong focus and commitment across almost all schools and PRUs to constantly reflect on, review and further develop practice at all stages during the pandemic. There are numerous examples where schools have effectively utilised the expertise of the link SIA to support them with this work.

In almost all schools, middle leaders and/or senior leaders have regularly monitored the quality of provision via Google classrooms (or other digital platforms), or by sampling pupil work at various interims. In nearly all schools, senior and middle leaders have tracked pupil engagement and have held meetings to discuss, for example, quality of provision, challenge in the level of learning, quality of feedback and pupil voice feedback. An example of good practice is a school using Google Meet to record live sessions which were then utilised for professional learning for the purposes of improving and enhancing delivery. There are other examples of senior and middle leaders informally undertaking 'drop ins' during live-learning sessions via prior arrangement.

Many schools have held sessions for departments to share best and effective practice, leading to higher levels of staff confidence in sharing work and approaches, and in collaborating with other colleagues. Middle Leaders in most schools have access to Teams / Google Classrooms in their subjects / year groups. This has provided an overview and an opportunity to quality assure teaching and learning in their own curriculum areas. Findings have been discussed with senior leadership teams to inform any further developments or adaptations required. In one example, when learners and parents had noted that remote learning during lockdown at times was overwhelming, a school responded by offering a break between online lessons, lengthening lunch time, offering a half day on wellbeing to encourage time away from the screen. A parent noted in a feedback questionnaire to one school that the wellbeing sessions have allowed the opportunity "to re-connect with my child" during the intensity of the lockdown period.

Parental and teacher feedback, have both been important in evaluating impact, but it would be fair to conclude that most schools have more effectively evaluated the quality of provision through stakeholder and pupil voice, and through an analysis of levels of engagement and wellbeing rather than via scrutiny of skills and standards as previously would have been the case. However, evaluation for improvement requirements has been more analytical since Easter 2021 in the majority of schools.

Senior and pastoral leads and their teams in all secondary schools, have monitored pupil engagement in remote and blended learning. Most schools use tracking software to track pupil engagement which is available to all members of the school community. Many have prioritised

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the engagement and progress of the most vulnerable learners, providing additional support where needed and also making every effort to ensure they attended face-to-face support in the onsite Hubs during periods of lockdown. Strong structures have been established in most secondary schools to contact learners and parents/carers to discuss concerns and to offer support. When appropriate, concerns were escalated to the attention of the Local Authorities.

Schools and PRUs have used surveys and questionnaires to evaluate the impact of changing working practices on staff and on their learners. In nearly all cases, schools have used parental feedback from questionnaires to enhance educational provision. Examples of this include reducing the number of different subjects taught in one day to developing project based work for a longer time scale, to allow the pupil's work to better fit in with the family's IT capacity.

Professional dialogue between senior and middle leaders has been a feature of evaluation processes. Scrutiny of pupil work involved looking at books and tasks completed on-line. Virtual parents' evenings have also been an important source of evaluative feedback. Many schools have commented that parents' evenings have been successfully conducted - with effective use of new software to schedule appointments online. Schools have evaluated the systems from teachers and parents' feedback, and some say they are likely to continue with the system moving forward.

Some schools evaluated their learners' digital skills in order to focus training on approaches, platforms and digital tools that would be most easily accessible and have the greatest impact on online teaching. Survey results from staff have also been used by schools to plan the professional needs of staff. For example, one school invested in training all staff as Google Educators Level 1.

In many secondary schools, senior leaders have prioritised the monitoring of assessments in Key Stages 4 and 5, including those to inform the Centre Determined Grades, checking that they were robust and rigorous. The awarding of Centre Determined Grades has taken a considerable amount of time during the spring and summer terms 2021 for both subject teachers and leaders at all levels.

In some Welsh medium/bilingual schools, a strong focus has been placed on the constant evaluation of pupils' Welsh language skills, especially those pupils who are from non-Welsh speaking homes or have been part of immersion programmes. This has helped some schools maintain and improve the learners' Welsh language skills.

Following a multiagency pilot during 2019-2020 with a small number of schools, Welsh Government and Estyn have been working with local authorities and regional consortia during spring/summer 2021 to offer all secondary schools in special measures the opportunity to be involved in multi-agency working. This approach has initially concentrated on discussions around wellbeing and the quality of remote and blended learning provision. More formal monitoring and scrutiny will commence in the autumn term 2021.

Developing new approaches to Quality Assurance has been a focus of the work of some of the secondary alliances where leaders have shared practice and developed new processes. For example in a couple of schools, staff have completed an audit of digital skills and school leaders have planned INSET and Professional Learning opportunities for staff based on the findings. Progress against the audit has been reviewed during the year to measure the impact.

### **What have the schools identified as the key strengths of their provision for teaching and learning during lockdown?**

The upskilling in digital technologies has been identified across all schools as a key strength during the pandemic. Leaders and teachers have demonstrated great professional agility in



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acquiring new knowledge and skills to deliver learning online. This has been supported by innovative approaches to professional learning and sharing effective practice both within and across schools. Collaborative working within schools and between schools has been a notable strength. Key approaches within GwE-facilitated Alliances included collaboration on policies, resources and communication as well as joint standardisation and moderation. All schools have shared resources and effective practice through their alliances and the GwE Support Centre.

Many schools have reported that there has been greater creativity in teaching and learning. Leaders at schools, at all levels, have made timely and purposeful use of regional and national guidance to steer and modify their approaches and have provided detailed guidance and expectations for staff. The guidance and approaches used are also based on national and international research of identified effective practice.

The focus on wellbeing has been strong across all secondary schools and PRUs. Most schools have implemented weekly, sometimes daily contact with vulnerable learners and parents/carers; this has usually involved an organised network of leaders/pastoral staff/admin staff and others. Where concerns have been raised, the schools have worked in collaboration with the local authority and external agencies to support those learners and their families, and many have attended the Hub provision to receive face-to-face support.

Most schools kept a strong focus on a 'blended' learning approach during lockdown and have managed to ensure that a proportion of their lessons were taught 'live'. The live streaming of lessons increased during the second lockdown following changes to the Welsh Government guidance. Some lessons were more effectively delivered through asynchronous means, allowing learners to access lessons and resources at different and more convenient times. There are examples where morning registration sessions and school assemblies have also been effectively delivered live online.

Guidance and communication with parents/carers has been a consistently strong feature of provision across the secondary schools. Many schools noted that the communication with parents and other stakeholders over teaching and learning provision has altered and improved significantly during this period. Communication has had to be adaptive and frequent and schools have developed virtual approaches, such as using Teams meetings and on-line parents' evening apps to develop their communication systems. Many schools reported that they made purposeful use of questionnaires to gather the views of stakeholders, which has led to adapting and improving provision in many cases. Sharing protocols and expectations regarding remote learning with parents/carers is an aspect that had improved significantly by the second lockdown. For example, one school has developed a website for parents to share information and guidance on how to support their child with 'how to videos'. However, this is an aspect that can be further developed in many schools to help parents and carers support their child's learning.

### **How are the schools planning to build on its successes to develop the new curriculum?**

Collaboration and sharing of effective practice has developed well across the schools. Learning in new technologies, digital pedagogies and adaptations to the school day structures can be further developed to support learning within the new curriculum. The progress made in digital competency will also help establish growth points for ensuring there is curriculum innovation and confidence in use of new technologies amongst staff and pupils. Schools are currently identifying growth points to take advantage of the advancements seen in digital learning, independent working and creative learning. Online learning will provide important and innovative ways to deliver the new curriculum and to further develop independent learning. The new technology will also support 3-16 collaboration and improved communication with stakeholders. Many schools have experimented with new approaches to planning which have

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involved some integration across subjects and some longer units of work, with more pupil independence and choice built in. Close evaluation of such changes will be useful for schools and PRUs when developing their curriculum plan.

Schools have further strengthened home-school relationships as parents have been more involved in understanding and supporting the curriculum offer to learners during this time. Learner voice has also increased as learners have been able to have greater choice and input to their work and schools have responded to feedback to adapt provision where appropriate. Learner voice has also been especially important during the pandemic for measuring impact on engagement and wellbeing and this is seen by many schools as a vital aspect of their planning in moving forward.

During the lockdown, schools and PRUs have had the opportunities to work as a learning organisation, strengthening and developing the 4 transversal themes of Time, Thinking Together, Trust and Technology. More than ever, schools have had to ensure continuous learning opportunities for all staff to deliver effective distance learning and to make appropriate use of technology.

An increasing number of secondary schools have developed their relationship with the primary schools in their catchment area and have started to meet to discuss Curriculum for Wales developments. Many senior leaders have attended GwE training sessions on change management, creating a shared vision and joint planning and SIAs are following up this initial engagement with more bespoke support at school and cluster level.

The COVID period has demonstrated that the schools can be resilient in the face of frequent, disruptive and sudden change. The focus on well-being and resilience of pupils is an area that has also developed well during the pandemic. Many staff have begun to consider the implications of health and wellbeing on learning opportunities and experiences for their learners. During this time of national curriculum suspension, staff have had the opportunity to identify the learning priorities for their school and as a result, design learning and experiences to meet the needs of their learners and in line with the four purposes of Curriculum for Wales.

The Minister for Education, has confirmed that the Curriculum for Wales will continue to be implemented in primary schools, maintained nursery schools and non-maintained nursery PRUs from September 2022. The Minister has also confirmed that some additional flexibility will be given to secondary schools. In 2022, schools that are ready to roll out the curriculum to year 7 will be able to press ahead. However, formal implementation of the new curriculum will not be mandatory until 2023, with roll-out in that year to years 7 and 8 together. This will also be the case in special schools and all-through schools for 3 to 16-year-olds.

GwE will encourage secondary and special schools who are able to proceed to implement the new curriculum with Year 7 from September 2022. We also realise that some secondary schools may choose to continue their path towards curriculum reform from September 2022, and will implement the new curriculum from September 2023 when it will become mandatory for years 7 and 8. However, it is important that the work of reforming the curriculum, and particularly direct engagement between secondary and primary schools, continues in order to support learner transition irrespective of the timeline for implementation adopted by the secondary school.

### **What improvements in provision and standards have the schools identified as a result of targeting their grant spend?**

Overall, many secondary schools have prioritised funding for cohorts of specific pupils such as pupils who are preparing for 'examinations' (Years 11, 12 and 13), vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, Year 7 and any specific groups or individuals who require additional

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support. Targeted areas of support include literacy, numeracy and digital competency, developing independent learning skills and engagement through training.

Schools have been creative in the solutions adopted, for example:

- employing mentors to drive interventions with specific pupils
- employing learning coaches to address the barriers to learning and improve inclusion
- providing additional lessons for pupils
- releasing members of staff to lead on literacy and numeracy or appointing an additional teacher to undertake literacy and numeracy sessions with specific groups of pupils who needed additional support during lockdown
- appointing a leader for a whole school Accelerated Learning Programme in order to plan additional support for pupils

Other examples include either appointing additional teaching assistants / coaches or increasing the time of existing teaching assistants and coaches to undertake catch up and coaching sessions. Many have focused funding to ensure appropriate support for pupils who were disengaged from education during lockdown.

Through the Professional Learning grant, secondary schools report that staff have engaged well in relevant and timely professional learning during the lockdown period in order to ensure that they have a firm understanding of effective remote and blended learning. This has without doubt impacted positively on the quality of provision offered.

Schools have used the PDG grants to support disadvantaged pupils. For example, the grant has been effectively used to support pupils who are eFSM to access music lessons, access digital devices where needed and to ensure continuation of learning. Most schools have used the grant to ensure that eFSM learners have additional support in smaller groups or are supported by mentors and counsellors.

### **Impact of GwE support/involvement and identification of additional support in going forward**

Nearly all secondary schools and PRUs have been positive and grateful for the frequent and adaptive support of SIAs during the COVID period. This has included frequent pastoral and wellbeing calls and visits as well as SIA meetings with other SLT and middle leaders at the Headteachers request.

Schools have been very positive about the contributions of GwE to the local Secondary Heads forums that have regularly met since March 2020. Heads have also expressed their gratitude for the regional Heads meeting and especially the support for the Centre Determined Grade awarding process. Schools also note their appreciation of the support offered by SIAs to the awarding process (including additional support from the core subject advisers).

The guidance and support for remote and blended learning has been very well-received and some schools have altered their approaches to planning and provision based on their use of resources shared through the GwE Resource Centre. Schools have mostly been very positive about the alliances and GwEs facilitation of this opportunity to collaborate with other schools

The COVID Risk Assessment dashboard and the grant dashboard have also been very well received.

Many schools have expressed their appreciation of the Leadership Development Programmes that have been adapted to be delivered online.

There has been a positive response to the termly bespoke GwE Support Plans and especially the flexible approach adopted to allow for mitigating circumstances.

## **Evaluating Outcomes at KS4 and 5**

In his written statement (dated 21 June 2021) the Education Minister confirmed *'that the suspension of Key Stage 4 and legacy sixth form performance measures will be extended to the 2021/22 academic year. Qualification awards data will not be used to report on attainment outcomes at a school, local authority or regional consortium level and must not be used to hold schools to account for their learners' outcomes.'*

He also confirmed that *'all schools and post-16 providers will continue to be required to undertake effective self-evaluation to support continuous improvement. Our evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements require consideration of a broad range of information, relevant to a school's own context, when undertaking self-evaluation and identifying improvement priorities. This will involve schools, with support from local authorities and regional consortia, using the learner level information they have to reflect on and improve their existing arrangements.'*

Therefore in the autumn term 2021 GwE will support schools to evaluate their Centre Determined Grades and the lessons learnt during this year's process.

Below are aspects that schools should consider during their evaluation:

- what lessons were learnt about the robustness of in-school standardisation and moderation procedures? To what extent will processes be further honed?
- are you confident that all leaders across the school have robustly and purposefully identified their 2021-22 priorities for action? What plans have been adopted to support subject leaders with this work if some concerns have arisen?
- to what extent are you confident that all departments [where relevant] ensured effective guidance, support and feedback to maximise the contribution of 'course work'? What plans have been adopted to support departmental leaders where concerns have arisen?
- what was demonstrated as your areas of key strengths? What plans have been adopted to share these across the school?
- have you identified any areas/subjects where further veracity and accuracy of tracking and assessment need to be honed? What plans have been adopted to support subject leaders/teachers with this work so that in-school variance can be effectively targeted?
- to what extent will findings impact on current assessment, targeting, tracking and intervention processes and procedures?
- to what extent will findings impact on your Curriculum for Wales priorities for action for this year and beyond?
- to what extent will findings impact on your plans for further developing provision for literacy and numeracy at KS3?
- to what extent will findings impact on your plans for further developing wellbeing, attendance and inclusion?
- to what extent will findings impact on plans to further bolster support for vulnerable groups of pupils?
- what plans are in place to work collaboratively with other regional school to support and aid further improvements? To what extent will collaboration include the contribution of middle leaders and teaching staff?

## **AREAS THAT NEEDED FURTHER DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT**

School across all sectors have identified the following areas where they would like further support:

- Curriculum for Wales implementation - especially curriculum design and planning to deliver the Areas of Learning and Experience (AOLEs);
- Approaches to assessments and the concept of progression in preparation for the new curriculum;
- Tracking pupil progress;
- Links to the wider reform such as ALN and the Welsh Language;
- Embedding a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing;
- Re-engaging groups of learners in September 2021 that have not managed well during lockdown;
- Improving teaching and learning, differentiation, formative assessment and feedback to learners;
- Improving Welsh Language skills and especially oracy;
- Strengthening transition arrangements and provision between primary and secondary/ special and developing a 3-16 continuum;
- Implementing actions from multiagency 360 support plans (specifically in schools causing concern);
- Further hone quality assurance processes and evaluating the quality of provision and pupil progress;
- Developing quality enhancement in line with the four purposes of the new curriculum
- Use of reliable data as evidence for improvement;
- Enhance parental engagement to support the learning;
- Further establish and develop peer review through the School Partnership Programme
- Developing collaboration on a wider strategic level in order to move towards a self-improving system;
- Accelerated Learning Programmes to address impact of lockdown on basic skills;
- Preparation for examination in summer 2022;
- Evaluating the impact of grant expenditure.

The findings above are also relevant to both special schools and PRUs. However, the following aspects have also been identified as areas for further development and support:

- Embed the present collaboration projects and share the learning across the sector;
- Continue to offer lead opportunities to middle managers to provide them with opportunities to further develop their leadership skills;
- Work together to analyse the effectiveness of the joint work;
- Continue to design and plan rich learning experiences around the four purposes and identify the best ways to assess progress across the range of learner needs.

## **REGIONAL PRIORITIES**

The evaluation process has identified the following high level regional priorities:

- Establish a clear regional strategy to implement the Welsh Government COVID-19 recovery plan: Renew and reform to support learners' wellbeing and progression (first published 16 June 2021)
- Establish development networks for each Area of Learning and Experience (AOLE) at regional and a local level to enable school leaders and practitioners to collaborate to

## Appendix 1

unpack the potential of each AOLE through modelling, designing and sharing curriculum practice

- Ensure that direct engagement between secondary and primary schools, continues in order to support learner transition irrespective of the timeline for implementing the new curriculum adopted by the secondary school.
- Develop a regional qualitative framework for holistically capturing and evaluating progress in a school / cluster
- Revise processes for addressing schools causing concern and work with Local Authorities to establish and implement clear regional structures and protocols for identifying, supporting and challenging school causing concern
- Further strengthen the culture, behaviour, systems and processes so that leaders and teachers are incentivised to adopt a collegiate approach to school improvement.

Appendix 1

**School based evaluation.** There is no obligation for schools to use this, however, it can be:

- Used by the school to populate themselves
- Used by the school to check against their own self-evaluation processes
- Used by clusters or collaborations as a basis for their collaborative evaluations

<b>School</b>	<b>Link SIA</b>
<b>Covering the period of Spring / Summer Term 2021</b>	
<b>Main strengths</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
<b>Areas that need further development</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
<b>Action and Progress</b>	
<b>How has our school evaluated its provision and impact during lockdown?</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has our school summarised findings in order to note strengths, areas for improvement and planned for further improvements? Have we examples to evidence this?</li> <li>• If our school has not been able to maintain processes to date due to Covid restrictions, what are the intentions for the current term?</li> </ul>	
<b>What is the quality of our provision for teaching and learning during lockdown?</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does our evidence highlight about learner progress during lockdown? Does this include vulnerable learners?</li> <li>• How has provision for teaching and assessment evolved in our school during this period?</li> <li>• What are our main strengths in teaching and assessment, achievement and progress?</li> <li>• What aspects need to be further strengthened in terms of teaching, assessment, achievement and progress?</li> <li>• What challenges have we identified in terms of teaching and learning in moving forward and what are our intentions in response to these?</li> </ul>	
<b>How is the school planning to build on its successes to develop the new curriculum?</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have we measured progress in relation to the reform journey?</li> <li>• How have we contributed as a partner to cluster working?</li> <li>• How are our school developed the dimensions of Schools as Learning Organisations during this period?</li> <li>• How have we taken advantage of peer work to validate our evaluations and support us in our improvement journey? Do we play a corresponding role with our partner schools?</li> </ul>	
<b>How has the school monitored and evaluated the use and impact of the various grants available and what key messages have arisen to date?</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have we targeted grant expenditure and what impact has this had on provision and standards?</li> <li>• What are the messages for future grant expenditure?</li> </ul>	
<b>What is the quality of our provision for learner wellbeing during lockdown?</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does our evidence highlight about learner wellbeing during lockdown?</li> <li>• What are our main strengths in wellbeing provision?</li> <li>• What aspects need to be further strengthened in terms of wellbeing provision?</li> <li>• What challenges have we identified in terms of wellbeing in moving forward and what are our intentions in response to these?</li> </ul>	

**How has leadership across our school evolved during lockdown?**

- What have been the main challenges?
- Have we had opportunities to develop or innovate?
- Have we leadership practices that could be shared with other schools?
- Have we identified leadership aspects that need support?