



Cydweithio · Dysgu · Llwyddo  
Collaborating · Learning · Succeeding

# ANNUAL REPORT

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## 1. 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. This year's GwE Annual Report outlines how GwE staff have re-purposed their work appropriately over the last two years to continue to deliver effective services and support for all their communities of schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. During this difficult period, GwE has stayed true to its vision and values as an institution that is still learning. At the heart of the work with schools and partners were the OECD's transversal themes of Trust, Thinking Together, Time and Technology.

The regional service, in its entirety, has redirected several times during the Covid-19 period in an attempt to meet the needs of the range of stakeholders. Flexibility and adaptability and effective collaboration in different teams, often across sectors, have had a significant impact on institutional behaviour. At the core of the redirection, the need to ensure the well-being of school leaders, staff and learners was of utmost importance in any decision-making, ensuring that the service can accurately direct the appropriate level of support, be that operational support or professional dialogue. This involved operational discussions on the safe opening of schools, and professional discussions regarding distance and blended learning.

The report also describes how GwE has continued to support schools in their preparations for The Reform Journey and Curriculum for Wales, and in improving the quality of teaching and leadership.

Section 9 outlines GwE governance and accountability arrangements. The Management Board monitors matters of governance continuously and GwE has procedures in place to ensure the Joint Committee meetings are conducted effectively and that decision making is effective. A series of reports have been produced and shared with the Management Board and the Joint Committee during the year. These reports include the views of schools, staff and local authorities on the effectiveness of regional practice. Each report describes the quality of the provision and identifies areas for improvement to drive the learning agenda forward.

The report also identifies strategic and regional priorities for 2022-23. GwE's overall vision is reflected in the 3 year business plan and is further strengthened in the annual business plan.

## 2. GwE WORK PROGRAMME AND SUPPORT TO SCHOOL DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Appendix 1 outlines how the whole service has been re-purposed several times to meet the revised requirements of our stakeholders during the covid pandemic. Our different roles since the end of March 2020 has consisted of:

- Supporting the wellbeing and development of leaders
- Leading from the middle and lateral leadership
- Meaningful Professional Learning
- Collaborative leadership
- Modelling
- Managing stakeholder expectations

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 supported their resilience during this difficult period. GwE staff also conducted face to face pastoral visits on behalf of the Local Authorities and also when schools reopened in spring 2021 after the second lockdown period.

GwE sees itself as a partnership organisation, especially with the Local Authorities and even more so during the pandemic and in moving forward. GwE worked effectively with Welsh Government on policy and continuity of learning. It also worked consistently with the other regions and with Estyn in preparing guidance and resources for distance 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.

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.

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 or a forum where they can come together to discuss operational issues as well as sharing best practice regarding distance 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 worked on the strengths of individuals within the team and redeployed them where they 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 the pandemic 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 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 was put in place to contact international experts and to research international practice to learn and establish the principles of effective distance and blended learning. GwE provided practical support for leaders to enable them to consider their whole school strategic planning of provision for remote and blended learning, refine and evaluate their evolving provision and planning for various scenarios where pupils may be in school and / or at home during the academic year. This has supported schools to have a better strategic overview of their provision.

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



Many schools also acknowledge that there were operational challenges that changed on a day-to-day basis, where a range of scenarios had 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 managed these complex situations well, having clear whole school strategies. GwE and the Local Authorities continued to support schools, using clusters and networks of schools to support each other and share resources and strategies. Schools in the GwE region have a significant collection of resources for each age group and these resources can be accessed through the GwE Support Centre: <http://cefnogaeth.gwegogledd.cymru/?lang=en>

GwE also adopted a regional approach to accelerating learning, working on a tri-level approach which included 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 was 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.

### 3. EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK

It is important that schools and all partners are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Without such an understanding, the system is unlikely to function efficiently or effectively. There is also a greater likelihood of conflict between the different bodies, drawing energy and focus from the underlying goal of continuous improvement for the benefit of learners. It is ultimately by working in partnerships, based on trust, that GwE, local authorities, governing bodies, headteachers and school staff will have the biggest impact in continuously improving schools.

The learning organisation research indicates that in order for school improvement to make a difference everyone within the organisation has a part to play to bring about positive change in individuals, organisations and learner progress. Impact is seen to be attributable to an intervention, piece of support, or professional learning activity that influences improvement and makes a difference when the conditions are right. This might include changes in the knowledge skills and behaviours of individuals or groups. These changes may occur in the short medium or longer term and should impact on organisational change and outcomes. Impact can be defined as changes that happen to individuals, to defined groups e.g. leaders, practitioners and organisations as a whole, the ultimate impact will be how these changes impact on learner progress.

GwE use a range of models and surveys to consider impact, based on national and international research, e.g., Kirkpatrick model, etc, as well as working collaboratively with our strategic HEI partners. GwE is working closely with Bangor University on the 'Collaborative Institute for Education Research, Evidence and Impact' (CIEREI) Project to establish more effective systems to evaluate the impact of our work.

This evaluative process informs future planning and allows GwE to develop and improve current support for schools and future delivery of professional learning programmes across the region. Measuring impact is an area we are continually strengthening to improve our evaluation and planning processes.

#### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Effective collegiate relationships and a collective regional leadership approach between the six local authorities and GwE has ensured:

- Effective co-constructed strategic thinking and direction.
- Strong governance, regional consistency in support, messaging and guidance given to schools.
- Strengthened collaboration between school peers at a cluster/forum level
- 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 professional learning, regular and clear communication.
- Schools provided with coherent guidance and resources to effectively support vulnerable learners with their wellbeing, engagement and learning.
- Best practice being shared between and across schools and clusters, i.e. engaging with reluctant learners and families, digital platforms and communication systems, blended learning models, etc.

In North Wales, we define impact as the difference that we make to:

- Delivering our values and behaviours
- Developing a culture of collaboration and sharing
- Promoting a self-improving system
- Influencing the wellbeing and achievement of learners
- Developing greater resilience and improved Headteacher wellbeing
- Empowering schools to have greater ownership over their direction of travel
- Increasing practical understanding of curriculum design, planning, assessment and progression
- Developing greater understanding and engagement with the 12 pedagogical principles
- Developing greater ability to innovate and deliver teaching practice that is evidence based
- Improving digital skills within the workforce to enhance the pedagogy

The main impact of GwE work during the pandemic is outlined below:

- Joint working has ensured strong governance and regional consistency in support, messaging and guidance given to schools.
- Strengthened collaboration between peers at a cluster/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 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.
- Schools and settings have built upon several growth points in preparation for the new curriculum and generally have:
  - a more adaptable and skilled teaching profession;
  - greater focus and emphasise on both learner and staff wellbeing;
  - improved digital competency amongst staff, pupils and parents;
  - a more blended approach to teaching and learning;
  - improved partnerships with parents.

Other outcomes and impact include:

- Effective communication provided via single point of contact (Supporting Improvement Adviser) 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 and Blended Learning.
- Schools having access to a wealth of quality resources for reference as they plan for and deliver distance and blended learning.
- Comprehensive distance 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 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.

The impact of our work streams can be seen in Appendix 2.

## 4. SUPPORTING SCHOOLS IN THEIR PREPARATION FOR THE REFORM JOURNEY AND CURRICULUM FOR WALES

### THE REFORM JOURNEY

GwE has continued to support schools in their preparations for The Reform Journey and Curriculum for Wales and has been flexible in its provision in order to meet schools' various needs during the pandemic.

Wales is committed to an ambitious reform agenda to realising a transformational curriculum. The education reform programme in Wales, built around the new Curriculum for Wales (CfW), provides a positive way forward as we emerge from the restrictions of the pandemic. It has at its heart a number of guiding ideas:

- That the curriculum and associated teaching, learning and assessment should flow from four clear purposes agreed nationally and pursued locally.
- That those purposes should encompass helping all of our young people to become: ambitious and capable learners; enterprising and creative contributors; ethical and informed citizens; and healthy and confident individuals.
- That young people's learning should build progressively towards those four purposes across their time in school education.
- That teachers and schools should have greater freedom to realise those purposes in ways that can meet the needs and characteristics of the young people and the communities that they serve.

These basic ideas give rise to a number of important implications:

- That the national curriculum framework should establish necessary national consistency of purpose and



- approach but leave wide scope for local decision making about key aspects of learning and teaching.
- That curriculum making is a process that should involve collaboration amongst teachers, schools and wider interests.
- That accountability should not inhibit the quality or narrow the scope of learning. Wherever possible it should pursue quality enhancement rather than narrow quality assurance.
- The success of the reform programme should be judged against the extent to which it leads to better and more relevant learning for young people and to higher standards of achievement. Both the quality of the learning and the nature of standards should relate to the extent to which the agreed purposes are being realised in practice for all young people.

The impact of the pandemic has naturally influenced how schools and settings can move forward with the reform. They need to re-establish the relevance of its four guiding purposes for Wales's young people. In many ways the pandemic has made those four purposes more relevant than ever as schools seek to build the confidence of their young people and rekindle their desire to learn. Schools have had to think deeply about what matters in learning during periods of interrupted schooling and the four purposes of the new Curriculum for Wales stand up well to that examination. The pandemic has also required changes to the nature of the teaching and learning process, not least in the ways in which digital technologies can enhance possibilities for more independent learning.

GwE have worked with fellow regional consortia, Estyn and Welsh Government to set out the expectations on schools and settings in respect of reform as we move towards implementation of Curriculum for Wales in [Curriculum for Wales: The journey to Curriculum Roll-out](#). This document also acknowledges the challenge that Covid-19 continues to present to all schools within the renew and reform strategy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that even in the most challenging of circumstances positive change is possible. In North Wales, GwE, the Local Authorities, Schools and PRUs have seized opportunities to explore innovative ways of working. Schools have delivered meaningful teaching and learning experiences through a creative blended learning approach. These experiences need to be built upon to avoid a 'snap back,' keeping the positive learning that has been developed during this time and preparing for the future.

The four transversal themes of the learning organisation of time, trust, thinking together and technology have developed as strong foundations of a collaborative way of working as we move forward with the renew and reform agenda.

The response to COVID-19 has of course had a significant impact on schools and is likely to have disrupted some of their plans for preparation and implementing the new curriculum. The report in Appendix 3 – 'Progress Report on the Reform Journey' outlines where schools and PRUs were during the autumn term 2021 as they addressed the renew and reform agenda and is based on evidence gathered by GwE Supporting Improvement Advisers as part of their work in supporting schools.

As we undertake national reform, it's clear that we are in a different place to the one that we imagined when the guidance for the Curriculum for Wales was published. We recognise that some of the preparation time for the curriculum will have been devoted to managing the impact of the pandemic over the past year. On the other hand, with an even stronger focus on well-being and significant investment in teaching and learning, the values underpinning the curriculum have been at the heart of how schools have been working. GwE is fully committed to supporting schools and PRUs to maintain this momentum to ensure that every learner in north Wales is offered provision of the highest standard.

Attached (Appendix 4) is our 'Regional strategy - Renew and reform: supporting learners' wellbeing and progression', which sets out the strategic direction of our work during the next stage. Through working with partners and key stakeholders and listening to them, we have identified themes to support our aim of ensuring that every pupil in north Wales benefits from provision of the highest possible standard. These themes are noted in our Business Plans and implemented through partnership programmes and an offer of generic and differentiated



bespoke support to our schools and PRUs.

## THE NEW CURRICULUM FOR WALES (CfW)

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 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 with that. 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 have encouraged secondary and special schools who are able to proceed with their current plans to implement the new curriculum with Year 7 from September 2022. We also realise that some secondary schools will 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.

Beyond 2023, the Curriculum for Wales will be rolled out on a year-by-year basis, and the first qualifications designed specifically for the Curriculum for Wales will be awarded in the 2026-27 academic year, as planned. The reform of qualifications will play a fundamental role in the success of the curriculum and GwE will support the work of Qualifications Wales over the coming year to help shape a set of qualifications of the highest quality that are aligned with the philosophy of the new curriculum.

As part of the support to schools for the new Curriculum for Wales, GwE has worked with the other regional consortia to develop a national professional learning offer that integrates all aspects of the wider reform including Schools as Learning Organisations, Y Gymraeg (towards a million Welsh speakers by 2050) and the Additional Learning Needs Transformational Bill. This cross regional offer is aimed at supporting all school practitioners, and focuses initially on Senior Leaders with the following themes:

- Leading Change
- Leadership for the new curriculum
- Developing a Shared Vision
- Planning for Curriculum Change – to include curriculum design, progression and assessment
- Leading Pedagogy
- Time and Space for Professional Learning

This professional learning offer was originally scheduled to begin in spring term 2020, however was naturally paused due to the priorities of the Covid-19 pandemic. In discussions with Head teachers across GwE, the professional learning resumed virtually in January 2021 with the Leading Change session. These sessions across the region are cluster-based and enable smaller groups of primary schools and their local secondary school to discuss the new Curriculum for Wales across the 3-16 learning continuum. Across the region, 832 Senior Leaders attended these Leading Change sessions. In recognition of the re-opening of schools to all learners in March and April, the Professional Learning sessions were again paused in March 2021.

Following discussions with the Directors of Education through the GwE Management Board, a series of consultative workshops were held in April 2021 in each Local Authority to listen to feedback from Head teachers on the professional learning offer and how best to re-engage. Over 300 Head teachers attended the consultations.

Feedback indicated:

- Head teachers of both primary and secondary sectors recognise the importance of continuing to collaborate across the sectors to support the 3-16 continuum;



- All leaders recognise the importance of maintaining the momentum of the professional learning but acknowledge the challenge of timing given current pressures and challenges;
- Leaders are keen to work with GwE and to draw on the input of external experts where appropriate;
- Leaders recognise that flexibility in engaging with the professional learning offer is key to ensuring effective engagement.

To support re-engaging with the Curriculum for Wales work, a further leadership planning session was held for each individual cluster across the region to build capacity of clusters to collaborate across the requirements of the reform journey as a whole and form an agreed action plan for each cluster. As part of this, Supporting Improvement Advisers facilitated sessions where schools within a cluster had the opportunity to work collaboratively to strategically plan for the implementation of the curriculum. Adopting a flexible and sensitive approach to the timings of these sessions has been a key aspect of the discussions between GwE, the local authority and schools. Activities to support preparations for the new curriculum at school and cluster level have been identified within School Development Plans.

The use of technology to collaboratively develop cluster plans and websites ensure that the dialogue is ongoing and Senior Leaders are able to continue this work, following discussions back at individual school level.

Further support available to schools also includes a series of 'Think-Pieces' which have been written by the GwE team as part of the weekly reform sessions with Professor Graham Donaldson. These papers, which cover key aspects of the curriculum reform journey including leadership, vision, pedagogy, assessment and curriculum design, have been shared and refined through consultation with wider partners in Local Authorities, Estyn and Bangor University.

In addition to the Professional Learning offer, additional support from GwE is available to schools as they prepare for Curriculum for Wales. This support will be accessed at both cluster and individual school level, including tailored bespoke support where needed.

To ensure schools are ready for first teaching in September, all schools should:

- have completed a high-level curriculum design to meet statutory requirements
- developed a shared understanding of what is important in progression of skills and knowledge
- developed whole school shared understanding of progression & assessment
- have examples of planning for trialling to include assessing learners
- have identified increasing opportunities for professional dialogue across the 3-16 continuum

To enable schools to meet expectations, the GwE offer over the Spring and Summer term will include supporting all schools in developing:

- whole school curriculum design and high-level curriculum statement
- effective AOLE planning
- whole school assessment policy and practice

In preparation for the professional learning offer, GwE staff have developed guidance and exemplar models for whole-school curriculum design, curriculum planning and assessment to aid leaders and teachers as they prepare for roll-out. The resources, models and exemplars have been fully endorsed by Professor Graham Donaldson.

Guidance and resources are utilised by both the Regional and Local Curriculum Networks as they continue to promote and instigate partnership working across the system. This will allow all schools access to a rich library of resources and support as they design and plan their own unique local curriculum. Underpinning the work of the networks will be continued input from GwE staff, thus ensuring that this is a truly collaborative venture.

The initial series of workshops have taken place during February and March to support schools through the process of curriculum design. The workshops focused on creating a high-level curriculum statement where the

rationale is based on local context.

The workshops guide school leaders through different models of design and provide a variety of curriculum statement examples. These models will be further built upon by the regional and local curriculum design networks, providing all schools with a wide variety of examples to consider when approaching their high-level curriculum design and statements. Once a school's rationale and statement is in place, a school will be able to start planning the new curriculum.

Once the curriculum design workshops have been delivered, practitioners from across the region will be able to access professional learning on effective Area of Learning Experience (AOLE) planning. These sessions will prepare leaders and teachers for first teaching of the new curriculum in September. The offer will continue throughout 2022/23 building on learning from first teaching.

The workshops will provide an overview of planning principles followed by working through various models of planning. Workshops will look at:

- Inquiry-based statements or questions as a basis to the planning.
- Planning considerations for the teacher
- Activity ideas
- Progression steps and assessment considerations
- Different planning models i.e. disciplinary, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, integrated models

Various examples of planning models have been created for all sectors and for all six AOLEs. These models will be shared with schools and will be utilised by the regional and local networks as a basis in ensuring additional models are created. This will add further capacity to the system.

The third area of support that will be provided over the next two terms is for whole school assessment policy and practice. Learner progress is a key aspect that runs through both the design and planning of the new curriculum. A series of workshops will take place providing schools with an overview of the national guidance and exploring the principles of assessment and learner progress. As part of these sessions, schools will have access to models and examples of assessment, including a progress tracker designed and created by GwE staff. The Regional and Local Assessment Network will again build upon this work and provide schools with many reference points to explore while considering assessment policies and practices.

A matrix of GwE support will be provided to all schools, detailing the professional learning offer available to support them in ensuring the new curriculum is realized in their schools. Schools will be able to choose which areas of support are appropriate to them and have access to a wide variety of resources, models and examples.

## CURRICULUM FOR WALES NETWORKS

GwE continues to facilitate Curriculum for Wales networks at both regional and local levels. The Networks work in partnership with Professor Graham Donaldson, GwE and the six North Wales LAs in developing effective AOLE practice which will help schools on the Reform Journey.

In June 2021, schools were invited to express an interest to be part of the regional Curriculum for Wales networks to contribute to GwE's ongoing support programme for schools in the following areas:

- Whole school Curriculum Design
- Progression and Assessment
- Unpacking the potential of one of the AOLEs
- Language, Literacy and Communication (both Welsh and English)
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- Science & Technology
- Humanities



- Health and Wellbeing
- Expressive Arts

During the Summer term 2021, 300 teachers initially expressed an interest in being part of the networks. During September and October 2021, many more schools requested to be part of the local networks and there are now over 700 practitioners from school settings across the region committed to being part of this work.

Through the networks, practitioners are accessing:

- networking opportunities with school colleagues locally and regionally
- a deepening of understanding of the curriculum design process
- co-construction opportunities and the sharing of examples of local curriculum planning
- development and sharing of examples of assessment within Curriculum for Wales

All materials and recordings of regional meetings are available for all schools to access on the GwE support centre along with resources and examples of design and planning work. In addition to this, link Supporting Improvement Officers are available to offer bespoke support at school and cluster/alliance level.

## 5. SUPPORTING AND IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP

GwE and the Local Authorities know their schools very well, and provides a robust and appropriate challenge as well as effective support and intervention for them. There are very clear strategies, policies and processes in place for school improvement that are understood by all stakeholders. There are robust procedures in place both regionally and locally for setting a direction and holding the regional service to account. The specific role of the service in school improvement is explicit and clear to all stakeholders.

GwE evaluates its work regularly and uses qualitative data and information effectively to ensure that areas for improvement are identified swiftly and are firmly addressed via detailed business planning. There is a clear and effective process to ensure that the regional service meets Local Authorities corporate priorities and targets.

### LEADERSHIP

GwE provide a rich array of professional learning to develop leadership at every level, together with targeted focused support for schools as required. In addition, there are robust arrangements in place where school leaders collaborate to support one another in primary clusters and secondary alliances and take ownership and increasing accountability for each other's improvement journey.

During 2021, in response to the national pilot to support schools causing concern through the multi-agency model, procedures and structures for supporting, monitoring and challenging schools were reviewed. The aim was to ensure that all schools could access good-quality support in a timely manner in order to move along the 'desired' pathway at the required pace. A regional Task and Finish Group was established consisting of officers from each authority, together with GwE advisers, to drive the work.

For schools whose performance is consistently strong or strong overall, improvements are addressed through peer collaboration, LA/GwE's generic Professional Learning Programme, courses of action and professional learning programmes noted in the School Development Plan and via GwE's bespoke support plans for the school. This is the approach taken with the secondary schools in 2021-22. However, when Authority/GwE procedures highlight a concern, more intense support is targeted through the multi-agency approach.

Within the revised structure, a multi-agency group of senior officers, lead officers from the relevant services and GwE staff meets regularly to share information and evidence so that concerns are identified at an early stage. Thresholds and triggers have been adopted to ensure consistency in identifying concerns in relation to standards, teaching and learning, assessment, leadership, inclusion or managerial matters. In order to ensure an agreed



understanding and consistency of approach, training was organised for all officers and advisers. Once a school is identified as causing concern, the lead officer, Core Lead and Link Improvement Support Adviser work with the school's leadership team to develop a holistic 360 support plan. The multi-agency group takes responsibility for ensuring that the holistic plan and monitoring are undertaken effectively. There are arrangements in place to review plans on a regular basis and, where appropriate, to amend them. Where concerns arise about lack or pace of progress, these are escalated to the Head of Education through meetings of the Quality Standards Board so that an appropriate decision is taken regarding whether or not to execute statutory powers.

The regular flow of information between officers and GwE advisers has ensured effective implementation within the structures. Regular meetings are held between relevant departments and agencies in order to take into account any other schools approaching the threshold and to consider early intervention.

GwE and Local Authorities have an effective procedure to support schools with their self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Schools are firmly challenged on the quality of their self-evaluation processes, and through their visits the Supporting Improvement Advisers support schools effectively to strengthen their evaluation processes such as scrutiny of work, lesson observations and learning trails.

Almost all schools have managed to continue to evaluate the quality of their provision throughout the Covid-19 period using a variety of useful sources of information and evidence, including regular discussions with other schools and GwE link officer. Most schools have gathered the views of stakeholders effectively via questionnaires for pupils and parents, telephone calls or conversations with individuals. Based on these findings, most adapted and improved their provision considerably.

Effective collaboration takes place between the Local Authorities and GwE to support the development of leaders across the 'Leadership Pathway'. Information regarding their progress is regularly communicated via Regional Leadership Group meetings. This thorough collaboration and communication ensure that Local Authorities can identify developmental needs and target further support if necessary.

All leadership programmes have been adapted for virtual delivery. Teachers have shown a very noble commitment to develop their practice and leadership skills during the Covid-19 period.

Effective collaboration takes place to support new head teachers and acting head teachers. The programme consists of a rich array of regular training throughout the educational year in order to equip head teachers to be able to successfully undertake their work as head teachers, including briefing sessions on finance management, safeguarding, site safety amongst other managerial elements (heads and experienced leaders are also invited to attend). All new heads have access to a mentor who is an experienced and successful head to provide firm support on local managerial matters in relation to their work as head teachers. This means that new heads are provided with timely and punctual support and that they have access to several sources of support, as required, as well as good opportunities to develop their knowledge and deepen their skills in the role.

A rich array of professional development is provided for teaching assistants through the national programmes, i.e. the Teaching Assistants Learning Pathway. TALP includes 'Induction', 'Practicing Assistants' and the 'Aspiring HLTAs' programme, leading up to HLTA status assessment. In the same manner as the Leadership programme for teachers, these programmes encourage individuals to become reflective practitioners who evaluate their practice against the 'Professional standards for assisting teaching'.

All TALP programmes have been adapted for virtual delivery, a change that has been very well-received by teaching assistants. The 'Induction' programme was put in the form of a playlist The 'Practicing Assistants' programme was adapted during 2021-22 for virtual delivery.

A new national Aspiring HLTA programme was created in 2020 which has now been running over four cycles. Upon completion of the new Aspiring HLTA programme, and meeting literacy and numeracy qualification requirements,



teaching assistants can apply for HLTA status assessment.

Focused collaboration between the Local Authorities and GwE saw very inclusive support being provided to school leaders in order to ensure that their settings were safe for return after the first lockdown. A strategic approach was adopted across the region to create a fit for purpose tool in the form of a very manageable dashboard. This dashboard provides leaders with firm guidance on identifying specific risks in their planning for children, staff and other stakeholders upon return to school. In addition to this, this tool provides very thorough guidance to schools on how to minimise identified risks - by collating all relevant guidance documents in one place under headings such as Safety, Site and Facilities, Staffing amongst other headings.

Effective collaboration at a cluster level in the primary and in the secondary alliance is a strength in the region. All Supporting Improvement Advisers working as Link Advisers with the primary schools are experienced and have been supporting specific clusters for an extended period. This means that the regional service and local authorities now have a thorough knowledge of the strengths and needs of specific schools and clusters/groups of schools. There are numerous examples across the primary catchment areas that show that systems and processes for collaboration are maturing amongst schools in order to share expertise and reduce workload in response to the Reform Journey. At best, collaboration involves leaders from all tiers meeting regularly to discuss and share good practice, collaborating in a structured and directed manner and successfully developing a wide variety of areas such as Curriculum for Wales, pedagogy, Additional Learning Needs, digital and primary-secondary transition. This collaboration has resulted in improving learner experiences and outcomes.

Head teachers and staff engaged in the programme all agree that this process has been a firm foundation upon which they have been able to collaborate and share resources over the lockdowns. They also noted that it is a good foundation upon which to develop future leaders amongst the improvement facilitators.

## TEACHING

The quality of teaching is generally robust across the sectors and purposeful action is taken to improve and align where there are anomalies. GwE has been taking positive steps to support leaders and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning during and prior to the Covid-19 period. Since the beginning of lockdown, the region has been proactive in their support for schools. A wide range of quality materials and models for distance and blended learning have been provided through digital platforms such as 'Google Classroom' and [GwE Support Centre Canolfan Cefnogaeth GwE](#). The work has drawn on the findings of research into effective international practices.

Collaboration in clusters and alliances to jointly develop and share resources and successful practices in this regard has been a strength and testifies to the strong working relationship between stakeholders. Head teachers have appreciated the input of the Link Supporting Improvement Advisers and Authority officers in terms of providing guidance and support for schools and clusters to develop their provisions. Facilitating cluster and alliance meetings has been instrumental in sharing ideas and good practice for developing their distance and blended learning provision. It was also noted that these meetings have had a positive impact on their mental health and well-being.

We have also provided a range of high-quality guidance and resources to support schools to improve parental engagement, and have also worked with Mike Gershon to facilitate parental access to quality materials so that they also can support their children. 'Helping your Child to Learn' (HYCTL) and 'Helping your Teen to Learn' (HYTTL) materials, and the 'Revise with Mike' resource have been very well-received. The range of revision strategies has also impacted on teachers' classroom floor practices as they prepare KS4 and 5 learners for this year's examinations.

Over the last two and a half years, most schools have made very effective use of guidelines and guidance on delivering distance and blended learning including planning successful recall and learning practices as learners return to face-to-face learning. There has also been an appropriate focus across schools on identifying a baseline upon learners' return and implementing purposeful plans in response to any gaps in learning.



Over the period, GwE has supported schools to evaluate the quality of their blended and distance learning provision, and has shared examples and local case studies of effective provisions to minimise variations. Regular discussions with leaders and teachers over the period, scrutiny of learners' work (both on-site and virtually) and in some instances, learning trails, have all resulted in valuable and focused experiences being provided to the ability range, under very difficult and challenging circumstances. There is also explicit evidence that a higher number of practitioners are now able to use the technology more confidently to support learning. This is one of the key growth points.

The support of the Accelerated Learning Programme had a positive impact on basic skills and well-being once children returned to formal education after lockdown. All schools had ensured that they carried out an internal assessment procedure, whether qualitative or quantitative, in order to identify the impact of lockdown on children's well-being and learning. Although only a small minority of parents and families did not engage in tasks and activities during lockdown, this contributed to a situation where pupils required accelerated support upon returning to the classroom. Teachers' deemed that lockdown affected the confidence and well-being of the majority of pupils, with the behaviour of a few pupils having worsened. The accelerated support work was successfully driven by school leaders once baseline standards had been identified.

All schools have made purposeful use of the various grants and most have employed or extended teachers' or assistants' hours in order to target groups and individuals in literacy, numeracy and well-being. GwE provided guidance and guidelines, with a good number of schools accessing specific training such as Trauma Informed Schools well-being sessions, SAFMEDS, Headsprout and Elklan training.

Overall, schools have risen well to the challenge and can testify to clear improvements and progress in the basic skills of many of the pupils targeted through these accelerated programmes.

Schools are continuing to deliver effective intervention strategies for pupils, e.g. through daily precision teaching sessions, SAMEDS sessions to develop Welsh and English reading/spelling skills, Tric a Chlic sessions to develop literacy skills in the Foundation Phase, specific Trauma Informed Schools activities, conducting Nurture groups, Talkabout, or Mind Mechanics. Schools acknowledge that this precise targeting has a positive impact on pupils' standards, well-being and confidence and a good number note they have seen vulnerable pupils being able to cope well with mainstream classroom challenges and various social challenges.

Schools have been provided with detailed guidance to support their preparations for delivering the new curriculum. The focus on pedagogy and the 12 principles are central to this work. Since September 2021, the service and school representatives have been working effectively with Professor Graham Donaldson in an attempt to deepen understanding of the Curriculum for Wales Framework. This work has involved promoting successful collaboration meaning that schools have been able to jointly-plan examples and models to share across the region.

GwE and Shirley Clarke's Formative Assessment Action Research project has been one of the pillars of the professional learning programme since November 2017 with schools engaging with the project in 3 tiers, over a 4-year period (Tier 3 over 2 years due to Covid-19 complications). According to a direct impact evaluation on the region's schools:

- there has been a positive impact on the quality of teaching in classes, standards of attainment, pupil well-being, attitudes to learning and development as independent learners.
- teachers have deepened understanding of effective pedagogy on the basis of wide and current research, both on a local and international level. They have also become leaders of teaching in their schools and beyond.
- teachers have undertaken action research in their schools, and have taken part in professional collaboration and become confident pioneers. Consequently, schools that are a part of the project are developing well as learning organisations.
- there has been a sharper focus on effective pedagogy in cluster collaborations.
- there have been explicit inputs to improving schools' readiness and preparations for delivering the new



curriculum e.g. increasing focus on the four purposes, 12 pedagogical principles, schools as learning organisations, professional standards for leaders and teachers, assessment purposes and planning principles.

- schools have made good and effective use of formative assessment principles and strategies for distance and blended learning.
- parents have come to understand more about formative assessment in their efforts to support their children at home e.g. learning powers, learning outcomes, success criteria and verbal feedback.

There has also been a consistent focus on supporting schools to improve the quality of differentiated support across the ability range. Establishing the secondary MAT Coordinators' Network is one specific example of this work. Specific guidance and support have been issued to develop better understanding and confidence amongst coordinators to lead on this across schools and to develop their processes and systems for identifying, tracking and supporting this particular group of learners. There was also input to ensure that they were aware of the national developments in this regard. As a group, they have collaborated to ensure a shared understanding and how to ensure an appropriate level of challenge and how to promote recall and revision strategies. Feedback from the schools involved has been extremely positive and work is ongoing to evaluate the impact on the quality of provision and standards of achievement.

The service has also worked effectively with an external expert to provide first-class professional development to develop effective styles of differentiation and effective use of discussion in classroom. This has equipped staff to make incisive use of various approaches such as taxonomy, effective questioning, modelling and scaffolding to plan effective differentiation in response to the universal needs of the range of learners in class. This programme has been delivered at three tiers - bespoke sessions for Additional Learning Needs co-ordinators so that they can successfully support teachers in their schools; sessions for assistants to empower them to deal with and support learners in class along with sessions for classroom teachers on developing a rich differentiated provision and to improve the use of discussion in support of that.

A range of networks and forums are up and running to support leaders, at every level, to be able to take the lead on pedagogy with increased confidence and effectiveness. At secondary, for example, a Teaching and Learning Network has been set up for senior leaders. There is evidence that this collaboration in the network has been a particular strength and mutual support has been key in order to ensure consistency of teaching and learning approach in the secondary schools. In order to support teaching and learning over lockdown, there was a specific focus on supporting leaders to respond to the impact of the pandemic on teaching and learning. The Network worked within general parameters and principles with the aim of ensuring that the experiences of every child are the best they can be. As part of GwE's support for the network, guidance was provided on Distance and Blended Learning and resources were shared in order to support schools in this regard.

The network was a vehicle to respond to professional learning needs in order to deliver on the principles and digital training was ensured. In addition, resources were developed and successful practices were shared. The impact of this training and collaboration was reflected in teachers' confidence to adapt their teaching to suit different scenarios, in the breadth of experiences available and in the quality and format of resources available for pupils.

The impact of actions taken during the pandemic was evaluated by ensuring leaders had access to Google Classroom to verify the quality of departmental provision; regular virtual meetings between SMT and staff to discuss and adapt any work programmes/lessons; responding to learner voice/questionnaires; pupil forums and councils. Regular phone calls to homes has also been a strong feature of the team approach that has been apparent in schools, and findings lead to subsequent action being taken or teaching and learning being adapted. Throughout the period, schools have invited Supporting Improvement Advisers to partake in scrutiny exercises and learning trails. During lockdowns and blended learning, they were given access to teaching documents and pupils' work. Reports by Supporting Improvement Advisers refer to the positive impact of action on provision.

The network's coverage of teaching and learning is ongoing and the current focus is on developing the 12 pedagogical principles as part of the preparations for the new curriculum.



The subject networks have also been active for the secondary core subjects. The work has focused on supporting middle leaders to take the lead on teaching and learning; on facilitating and supporting peer collaboration and on strengthening evaluation and improvement planning processes and procedures; on promoting a better understanding of planning and pedagogy in the context of the new curriculum; on improving literacy and numeracy interventions as well as supporting specific aspects of KS4 and KS5 preparations and assessments. The work of the networks is much appreciated by secondary leaders who make effective use of the quality resources that have been jointly-developed and hosted on GwE's Support Centre, Tanio websites [Science], MathsCymru [Maths], Y Pair [Welsh] and Herio [English].

The impact of the network's work is clear on several levels and across a range of aspects:

- middle leaders have been up-skilled in their knowledge and understanding of methodology and quality of planning e.g. recall strategies, strategies to improve oral and writing work, use of technical equipment to develop subject skills etc.
- middle leaders have improved their knowledge and understanding of the 12 pedagogical principles and preparations for the new curriculum.
- good practices have been disseminated and are being more widely adopted. A considerable number of leaders have noted their appreciation of the opportunities to share ideas and developments and to support one another professionally.
- increasing use of the digital library resources on GwE's Support Centre and of the subject websites to improve learner experiences, to prepare learners for examinations and to prepare purposeful intervention programmes.
- leaders and teachers are more confident in their digital skills.
- leaders are more confident with pupil predictions, assessment and grading.
- effective targeting to promote Welsh oracy skills e.g. 'Ein Llais Ni' project.

In addition to the networks and forums, specific support is available to all individual secondary schools and this targeting has resulted in clear improvements in several instances. The content of the Support Plan for individual schools is based on the school's specific needs arising from their self-evaluation and which is a priority in the School Development Plan. Support to improve aspects of teaching and learning underpins these plans. They are jointly produced with the senior management teams and Supporting Improvement Adviser. The relationship and collaboration between schools and GwE is very strong and the positive impact of the support is evident in several aspects of schools' work.

In the primary sector all link Supporting Improvement Advisers are very experienced in working with specific schools over an extended period of time. This has led to them having a sound knowledge of strengths and improvement needs - both at an individual school and cluster level. There are numerous examples of purposeful and effective support for schools on improving specific aspects of teaching and learning.

There is robust evidence that the toolkit for 3-8-year-olds at an individual school, cluster or authority level, is effective. In most schools, this has had a positive impact on provision and pupil outcomes as well as reducing variation within schools. The support has also ensured a deeper understanding of Foundation Phase principles and pedagogy, in line with the Curriculum for Wales 'Enabling Learning' and 'Pedagogy' guidance. The toolkit includes a professional offer for SMT, teachers and assistants of 3-8-year-olds in the form of termly networks, a regional training programme and bespoke cluster training. The focus is primarily on developing aspects of pedagogy, teaching and well-being within practical and holistic learning experiences, and training practitioners to develop as effective learning facilitators. All practitioners have access to the professional offer and resources to support learning via GwE's Support Centre. Many schools within the Authority use the webinars in staff meetings and INSET to up-skill the workforce. Evidence from schools note that this has a positive impact on the quality of provision (teaching and learning experiences) and on pupil outcomes.

Since 2019, the professional offer has involved Y3 practitioners in order to build on some of the Foundation Principles in KS2 in preparation for Curriculum for Wales. The professional offer continued throughout lockdown with the provision planned to target those aspects identified by schools as needing to be prioritised following



Covid-19, e.g. pupils' communication skills and health and well-being. The focus was upon developing these skills within appropriate developmental pedagogy. Evidence of the impact of this support programme includes:

- deepening practitioners' understanding of how the pedagogical principles (including 12 CfW principles) link with one another to create productive and effective learning experiences.
- practitioners using a range of developmentally appropriate pedagogical methods that meet the needs of learners (including emotional and social skills).
- practitioners creating effective cross-curricular links to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, drawing on learners' previous knowledge and experiences.
- practitioners not only considering the physical learning environment, but also the emotional climate that supports learners to reach their potential.
- practitioners' deepening their understanding of the importance of daily practice in order to improve their understanding of pupils' needs, skills and progress; allowing practitioners to find the preferred learning approaches of children and young people and how best to engage them in learning; identifying those pupils who might require extra support to help them reach their full potential.
- practitioners understanding that effective observations enable them to plan an appropriate provision that supports learner commitment and enjoyment within their learning activities, as well as planning to support them to move on to the next stage in their learning.
- practitioners understanding the need for assessment to be an ongoing process rooted in day-to-day practices, invisible within teaching and learning.

Overall, observations by Supporting Improvement Advisers and Estyn inspection findings where relevant, note that the support programme has a positive impact on the quality of provision and pupil outcomes with practitioners making better use of observations and Assessment for Learning strategies to plan the next stages of learning to allow for progress.

When concerns arise about a primary school, a bespoke and focused Support Plan is agreed with the school leaders and Authority. These plans are monitored on a regular basis and adapted accordingly. Historically, these schools make firm progress as a result of the specific intervention.

Across both sectors, quality support and guidance has been provided to improve the quality of planning and provision in literacy, numeracy and digital competence.

In addition to the professional learning menu, individual schools have received specific input and the impact of the interventions can be seen in the quality and standards of skills in several schools, in teachers' confidence levels and in the progress seen in collaboration between schools. The provision of guidance and support provided to schools includes planning guidance for Literacy/Numeracy coordinators/TA; support for NQTs on delivering effective lessons, specific support for developing oracy in order to improve mathematical and scientific skills; guidance to improve the level of challenge in planning; deepening mathematical skills and improving higher-order reading skills. The programme is further enhanced by termly meetings of the relevant networks. Over the Covid-19 period, there has been close collaboration with schools to develop materials and distance learning packs to support schools in developing learners' basic skills. The impact of the work has been captured in several evaluative reports and in the feedback received from school leaders.

In cooperation with Bangor University and research experts, resources, programmes and packs have been developed to support reading proficiency in both languages. Collaboration has also taken place on SAFMEDS materials to support numeracy skills. In several schools, these programmes have had a positive impact on learners' reading fluency and on the confidence of teachers and staff to deliver.

Live briefing sessions were delivered to heads and leaders on how to make effective use of the national assessments in reading and number which improved understanding and confidence when measuring individual learners progress over the period.



In the secondary, there was a specific focus on supporting accelerated learning programmes and providing intervention resources in KS3 and guidance on strategies to improve parental engagement. Moreover, a toolkit was developed for Literacy which supports planning and scaffolding opportunities for reading and writing and assisting with learning and developing vocabulary along with revision and recall materials. These have been shared with schools via the Tanio website and GwE's Support Centre. This has resulted in better quality intervention programmes and schools report improved fluency and confidence in learners and a better understanding amongst staff of how to approach scaffolding and planning.

In Digital Competence, the professional learning offer focuses on making effective use of the services available through Hwb to develop teaching and learning and to develop learners' digital competence. In light of training, there has been increase in the number of learners logging on to Hwb every month.

In response to the pandemic, a series of webinars and on-line training were provided focusing on making effective use of learning platforms to sustain teaching and learning during periods of distance and blended learning.

A Digital Facilitator Programme was recently delivered where every cluster nominated an individual, a Digital Champion, to work closely with the LAs and GwE to develop strategic leadership of the digital domain within the cluster. Clusters have started to re-engage with the programme by nominating a facilitator as representative. The majority of clusters have formed a working party to oversee digital developments and to fully incorporate digital competence as part of the Curriculum for Wales.

Specific support has been provided also to improve the quality of teaching and learning in STEM subjects. STEM Gogledd is an ESF European grant funded project, operational across Anglesey, Conwy and Gwynedd. The project began in 2019 with its main aim being to inspire, encourage and support young people to study STEM subjects at school, and encourage them to study and pursue a career in STEM. The project uses Careers Wales trained mentors to provide STEM guidance and support for students on a 1:1 and group basis, and runs alongside the STEM Gogledd Hub which is also a reference point for careers, apprenticeships and post-16 courses.

Groups of pupils are also engaged to challenge stereotypes and promote equal opportunity for girls in particular, encouraging them to partake in other STEM projects such as Technocamps. STEM Gogledd also works directly with teachers to support STEM in their preparations for Curriculum for Wales and also support them to integrate Careers and Work-Related Experiences in the curriculum. Miller Research Audit is carrying out a full evaluation of the project and the final report will be released later in 2022 after consultation with all stakeholders. Based on our involvement with schools over the period, there is firm evidence of the project's positive impact across a wide-range of aspects. Details have been captured in a comprehensive report.

## 6. Y GYMRAEG

### EIN LLAIS NI

This is a co-operative project (funded by Welsh Government) to develop Welsh oracy teaching and learning strategies between GwE schools, Bangor University and other partners. The aim of the project is to:

- Focus on developing learners' Welsh oracy in a modern context relevant to Wales.
- Integrate traditional strategies for teaching oracy with digital strategies.
- Place emphasis on offering 'real' experiences that are relevant to real life.
- Develop pedagogy that integrates naturally with the planning principles and vision of the Curriculum for Wales.
- Develop teachers as action researchers - reflecting on modern research, modelling strategies and evaluating success.
- Teachers sharing case studies of what has worked well.
- Produce an evaluation of the project and a reference for teachers by Bangor University researchers.
- Develop a supplementary pack for professional learning

All Welsh-medium or bilingual Regional schools were given the opportunity to be involved in the Project, and the



100 schools that applied were accepted. The Authorities and GwE encouraged schools through strategic forums and direct contacts to express an interest.

Teachers who have committed to the project are developing effectively as teachers who undertake action research, and are beginning to share their findings to date. They are all working towards submitting a case study by the end of the summer term 2022, elaborating on the success of strategies to promote oral skills through the medium of Welsh.

Schools that are part of the network have had opportunities to share their experiences, and there is positive feedback in terms of the early impact of trialling the strategies in their classrooms. They have appreciated hearing from other schools, including taking ideas and adapting them for their classes.

GwE and Bangor University have collaborated on developing very comprehensive supplementary resources for teachers to assist them with the research. These include:

- **Ein Llais Ni website** - all presentations from the initial launching conference, research papers and documents, examples of successful practice, suggestions for teaching and learning, access to 'Trysorfa Llais 21'(CSC), case studies, examples of digital programmes and apps to promote oral work etc.
- **Podcasts** - a series of conversations on oracy and bilingualism.
- **Newsletters** - to share updates on any developments with schools, including responding to questions and examples from schools.
- **Webinars** - series of sessions promoting the use of digital tools to support and enrich oral work.
- **Networks** - an opportunity to share information and experiences throughout the year.
- **On Demand sessions** - an informal session for any project school to attend, to discuss their work and receive updates.
- **Research** - input from experienced researchers on the associated research and any useful recommendations to support teachers' options when planning.

From the direct contact with project teachers either via telephone calls/Teams, during on-demand meetings or in breakout rooms in networks, it was noted that being involved in the project has allowed a specific and successful focus on developing speaking and listening skills in Welsh, in which there has been a deterioration following lockdown periods, and that purposeful planning for progress in those skills is beginning to come to fruition, especially in terms of enthusiasm and confidence to use the Welsh language. The project has also improved teachers' confidence to develop digital and more modern methods of developing oral skills, which ties in effectively to the formative assessment process, especially aspects such as reflecting on work and improving the quality of spoken language. Consequently, learners are enthusiastic to complete their tasks through the medium of Welsh.

There is a strong link between the project and preparing for the Curriculum for Wales, and the Welsh aspect, with schools encouraged to provide 'real' experiences, provides a purpose and context with learners seeing the language in use beyond the school gates and at work in their community. Digital webinars have effectively equipped teachers with ideas for planning the enrichment of oral skills using relevant programmes or apps, and have provided suggestions and ideas for improving the quality of speaking and listening.

## CLUSTER WORK

Funding for developing informal Welsh and the Welsh language skills of the workforce has been provided on an annual basis for 3 years, directly to clusters in order to support schools to hold Language Charter activities and support any member of staff to develop language skills on the appropriate level.

Regular and constructive meetings are held with local authority officers in order to collaborate on the support for schools. Consequently, there is agreement on the principles of the cluster co-ordinators' programme of work in order to plan for the grant funding for Welsh. This has successfully led to consistency of action across the north.



Co-ordinators plan purposefully and update a 'dashboard' spreadsheet for Welsh funding in consultation with Local Authority officers in order to collate planning information, costs and report on progress. As a result of close collaboration, the process is progressing smoothly and purposefully with funding allocated to the 54 clusters in 2021-22. Co-ordinators report on progress and impact in meetings during the year and formally at the end of the financial year in order to exemplify good practice and identify next steps for development.

## LANGUAGE CHARTER

In a few clusters planned activities have been adapted during the year due to staffing challenges, or it was not possible to take the intended action. Nevertheless, there are excellent examples where learners have had exciting experiences of planning and preparing for developing the use of the Welsh language e.g. collaborating with many artists to undertake various activities such as composing school anthems, composing new melodies, language games, creating podcasts to celebrate the local area. Consequently, this has led to deepening a sense of pride in Welsh identity and inspiring the use of spoken language. In addition, there are examples of successful collaboration between primary and secondary schools, with one Welsh department in a secondary school setting musical challenges for the primary schools in the cluster. Co-ordinators are in the process of updating the information on progress and impact in their cluster 'dashboard', taking into account next steps for planning for 2022-23 funding.

## DEVELOPING THE LANGUAGE SKILLS OF THE WORKFORCE

Data has been received by the National Language Centre regarding Croeso on-line training. Following discussions with Welsh Government, the Welsh in a Year course has been offered to schools for the next academic year. Monthly meetings are being held with Canolfan Bedwyr and Canolfan Dysgu Cymraeg (Bangor University) to promote courses that are already up-and-running and to collaborate on developing specific courses for Authorities or education practitioners e.g. course for teaching assistants.

## 7. WELLBEING

Our main priority during this time of unprecedented change and disruption has been the safety and well-being of our children and our workforce, doing all we can to support the physical and mental well-being of our children, young people and workforce throughout this period. There has been a focus on a variety of aspects within the wellbeing agenda e.g. resilience, adapting to a changing environment, personal reflection, action learning etc.

All Supporting Improvement Advisers (SIAs) have ensured regular contact with the head teacher of their link schools, to check on their wellbeing and to ensure that they receive the required support. To support this further, a series of workshops was be offered to school leaders and education officers.

### PDG

The regional PDG strategy has been implemented across the region with all school's/settings accessing the digital Thinking Differently professional learning offer in addition to the SIA support. All schools / settings are accessing the PDG grant dashboard as evidence of funds.

There is evidence of effective use of the additional consortia led funding to support the accelerated learning additional projects in line with the research team at CIEREI / health and wellbeing whole school and targeted support. The PDG is aligned to supporting whole school approach to wellbeing and targeted support/interventions. Early Years PDG element of the regional strategy – a number of Talk Boost sessions has been delivered for targeted schools; 8 schools have received the training so far. We have also developed a LA annual monitoring form showing the proposed use of the grant in line with the regional priorities for non-maintained settings.

### LAC PDG & WELLBEING

The main developments are as follows:

- Most schools have started the process of change in school culture/ethos and mindsets via the whole school



framework of Trauma Informed Schools / Restorative Approach and Nurture.

- Nearly all schools have attended the TIS whole school approach PL across the region.
- Nearly all schools have attended at least 1 of our Wellbeing PL sessions.
- Clusters who have high number of LAC have all attended TIS or Observational Checklist PL.
- More Relationship based policies & strategies in schools as a result of the Trauma Informed Schools PL.
- Evidence of developing collaborative practice between schools/clusters/CAMHS and children services.
- More settings confident in using a range of impact and evaluation measures in regards to wellbeing.
- Stronger communication and collaboration in place with local authorities and Health in regards to the targeted and universal support.
- Regional and LA Wellbeing mapping completed.
- Increase in schools using a neuro-science based approach within teaching and learning, with
  - Staff more confident in their approaches
  - Learners more able to self-regulate / reflect on their behaviors and feelings.
  - Changes in Learners Behavior and Exclusions
  - Attitudes to learning changed –both learners/staff
  - Learners happier in school
- Practical TIS Toolkit for Schools to use via the universal approach
- Established Trauma Informed Community network / Mental Health First Aid that brings together education with mental health to support learners.
- Staff accessing Reflective Space and support sessions.
- LAC PDG has been aligned to whole school focus and CfW with nearly all clusters having completed the dashboard.
- All LA/Schools have had access to the Designated Lead PL offer.
- Increase in the schools who have LAC who have engaged with our PLO
- Supported schools/settings to implement the professional learning into the curriculum delivery and pedagogy in addition to additional interventions.
- Delivered 3 PL sessions to NQT's across the region to be trauma informed and embed practice into teaching and learning.
- 3 primary schools in the region have been awarded Trauma Informed Status.
- We have 2 trainers qualified to deliver TIS whole school training in Welsh.
- During the last months SIA's have achieved TIS practitioner status and incorporated their skills and knowledge into the supporting school's role.

## 8. PEER ENGAGEMENT

The support for individual schools from GwE is ongoing and is strengthened by the alliances between schools and the Partnership Programme that reflect their quality enhancement processes.

Prior to the COVID pandemic agreement was reached on a regional set of principles for peer engagement. For this purpose, a peer review model was distributed (the Schools Partnership Programme [SPP]) to stakeholders, approved by the Management Board and Joint Committee.

Continuous training and support were provided for all GwE SIAs on peer review, facilitation, mentoring and coaching. By March 2022, twenty-nine SIAs have been trained as peer reviewers and improvement facilitators as part of the SPP. All GwE staff members received SPP refresher training on 17 September, 2021. On 4 October 2021, thirteen SIAs were trained to deliver the Programme, and following a programme of observing training they can now deliver SPP training to schools and clusters. This means that by March 2022 twenty-one SIAs have the capacity to deliver the Programme successfully.

By March 2022, eighteen clusters/alliances (105 schools) have received SPP training, and they have already undertaken peer review, or are preparing to undertake peer review during the summer term / beginning of the



autumn term 2022. One hundred and sixty-one Headteachers / senior leaders have been trained as peer reviewers across the region. One hundred and fifty-four senior leaders / middle leaders and proficient teachers have been trained as 'improvement facilitators'. This enabled leaders and teachers to benefit from professional education of a high standard and it will contribute to improving leadership capacity across the region. The first tier of primary schools and clusters involved in the Programme received training at the beginning of the summer term 2021. Due to the impact of the pandemic additional training was offered for those schools to train additional staff and increase their capacity to complete the work in January 2022. The latest training for secondary schools / clusters involved in the Programme was delivered during March 2022. All special schools in the region completed the full training during the summer term 2021.

There is a programme in place to offer SPP training to all 407 regional schools and Referral Units. The intention is to train approximately 15 clusters every term during the 2021-22 academic year, and in 2022-23. The Programme will be aligned to developing a new curriculum in order to support schools and clusters to evaluate their progress towards the reform journey. To this end a series of reflection questions with a focus on the reform journey have been created in alignment with the peer process.

In September 2021, schools and clusters were asked to express an interest in participating in SPP training. A total of 33 clusters across the region expressed interest, which included 193 regional schools. During March 2022, thirty-three schools received training and it has now been arranged for the remaining clusters to receive training during the summer/autumn term 2022. Three clusters / alliances have been identified to be included in a case study on research into the impact of the Programme in 2022-23.

## 9. BUSINESS MATTERS

### STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The consistency and quality of challenge and support to schools is good. Regular training, support and discussions ensure that Supporting Improvement Advisers' knowledge and understanding of national and local developments, and the implications of this on their roles, is good.

Quality Assurance processes continue to develop and evolve in line with national developments and principles. Messages and information are communicated clearly and on a regular basis to all employees. Generic, purposeful and effective support programmes are offered. Full and sector team meetings offer regular opportunities for collaboration, consultation and contributing to discussions and decisions regarding GwE's direction of work during a period of considerable change.

### PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The clear and robust accountability framework is a key strength in GwE. Detailed business plans on all levels of planning address all aspects of the work of GwE, and clearly note the contribution of the service to the transformation agenda. Plans are fully costed, with clear success criteria and milestones for delivering objectives.

There are detailed self-evaluation arrangements. Plans are reviewed on a quarterly basis, evaluating progress and impact. Staff on all levels fully understand their responsibility for continued improvement and accountability.

Each Local Authority has a detailed business plan agreed upon by the head of service and the core adviser. Progress towards agreed outcomes on a local authority level is monitored on a quarterly basis and discussed regularly in meetings between the lead adviser and Local Authority. Ongoing issues are referred to GwE Senior leaders in a timely manner.

Self-evaluation is a strong feature in GwE and the self-evaluation process is cyclical and ongoing. Great emphasis is placed on accountability and continuous review, and there is consistent emphasis on progress in line with priorities. Consequently, GwE leaders accurately identify areas of good performance and areas for development, or areas



where there is an element of risk in terms of improving experiences and educational outcomes for learners.

### VALUE FOR MONEY

The consortium has effective financial management processes in place. Communication and consultation on financial arrangements is effective, and GwE staff, the host local authority and Joint Committee all review the core funding and grant expenditure on a regular basis.

A robust financial analysis supports the work of delivering the business plan. A medium term financial plan and workforce plan are both aligned with the business plan. Through increasingly effective use of data to identify key priorities, the link between the business planning process and decisions regarding financial planning is strengthened as the work streams that underpin the business plan clearly note the resources to be used.

A formal framework was produced to assess the wider value for money provided by GwE. The judgement is now consistent across all stakeholders on how to measure the value for money of GwE activities within the structure and objectives of the business plan.

### RISK REGISTER

There are rigorous and comprehensive arrangements in place to accurately identify and manage risks on a local, regional and national level. The risk register is a live document, which is updated on a regular basis in order to identify increasing risks or risks which are no longer deemed as high level. It is reviewed every month in a senior leadership meeting and the Management Board and the Joint Committee review the register on a quarterly basis.

Through effective management of risks to the region, GwE is able to support the region's objectives, make effective use of resources and meet the outcomes as intended.

## 10. BUSINESS PLAN PRIORITIES 2022-2023

The regional priorities and areas for improvement are based firmly on the findings of our internal self-evaluation processes, external reviews on our current practice and direction of travel, and through consultation with headteachers and the Local Authorities. The Business Plan also addresses Welsh Government and the Local Authorities strategic priorities that fall within the remit of the work of GwE.

Additionally, GwE will work in partnership with Local Authorities to support additional local priorities, as appropriate. It also takes into consideration the views and priorities of other middle tier partners such as Estyn, Qualifications Wales, WJEC, National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL), Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Education Workforce Council (EWC).

Our priorities are a combination of improving school provision, leadership and outcomes, as well as delivering the reform journey. Our approach to the reform journey has been integrated in all aspects of our work from the beginning. Not one element of the reform journey can stand alone. It is viewed from the need of learners and the baseline of individual schools and clusters to deliver change according to agreed expectations.

GwE has encouraged schools to collaborate through sharing practice and co-constructing areas that need improving and the challenges of the reform journey. We have invested in various cluster models and encouraged schools to find a range of appropriate partners to deliver improvement and changes. The region has also looked outward for good practice in terms of identifying effective peer review models as well as encouraging our schools to develop and evolve their own practice. GwE believe that peer engagement should closely complement the dimensions identified within the OECD publication 'What Makes a School a Learning Organisation'.

Our focus is on support and on capacity-building for a self-improving system. Challenge Advisers have become 'Supporting Improvement Advisers' and this is more than a name change – it signals a determination to build trust

with key stakeholders and to move away from a top-down approach to school improvement, developing a more long-term, supportive and sustainable strategy.

In partnership with stakeholders, GwE has developed a long-term supportive and sustainable strategy which is successfully building capacity across the region to meet the challenges of the wider reform. The integrated approach has focused on developing collaborative opportunities across clusters of schools. To further support schools, GwE has developed the concept of creating termly milestones through the information management system G6. These offer all schools an opportunity to reflect and through continuous professional dialogue with SIAs, activity and its impact along with identification of next steps are shared.

Professional learning will be central to ensuring that all school staff have the professional knowledge and skills to deliver on the education reforms that are well underway in Wales. Taking into consideration the system expectations and working in collaboration with partners, a clear framework for themes for professional learning has been identified for practitioners within schools.

Our **strategic priorities** for improvement for 2022-2023 are:

## OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- 1. Curriculum & Assessment** - Supporting a national curriculum with equity & excellence at its core that sets high standards for all learners
- 2. Developing a high-quality education profession** - improving the teaching & learning in our schools
- 3. Leadership** - supporting inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards. Includes future leadership & professional networks
- 4. Strong & inclusive schools** committed to excellence, equity & well-being
- 5. Supporting a self improving system** - supporting a system in which the education profession have the skills, capacity & agency to continually learn & improve their practice
- 6. Business** - ensure that GwE has strong governance and effective business and operational support that provides value for money.

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

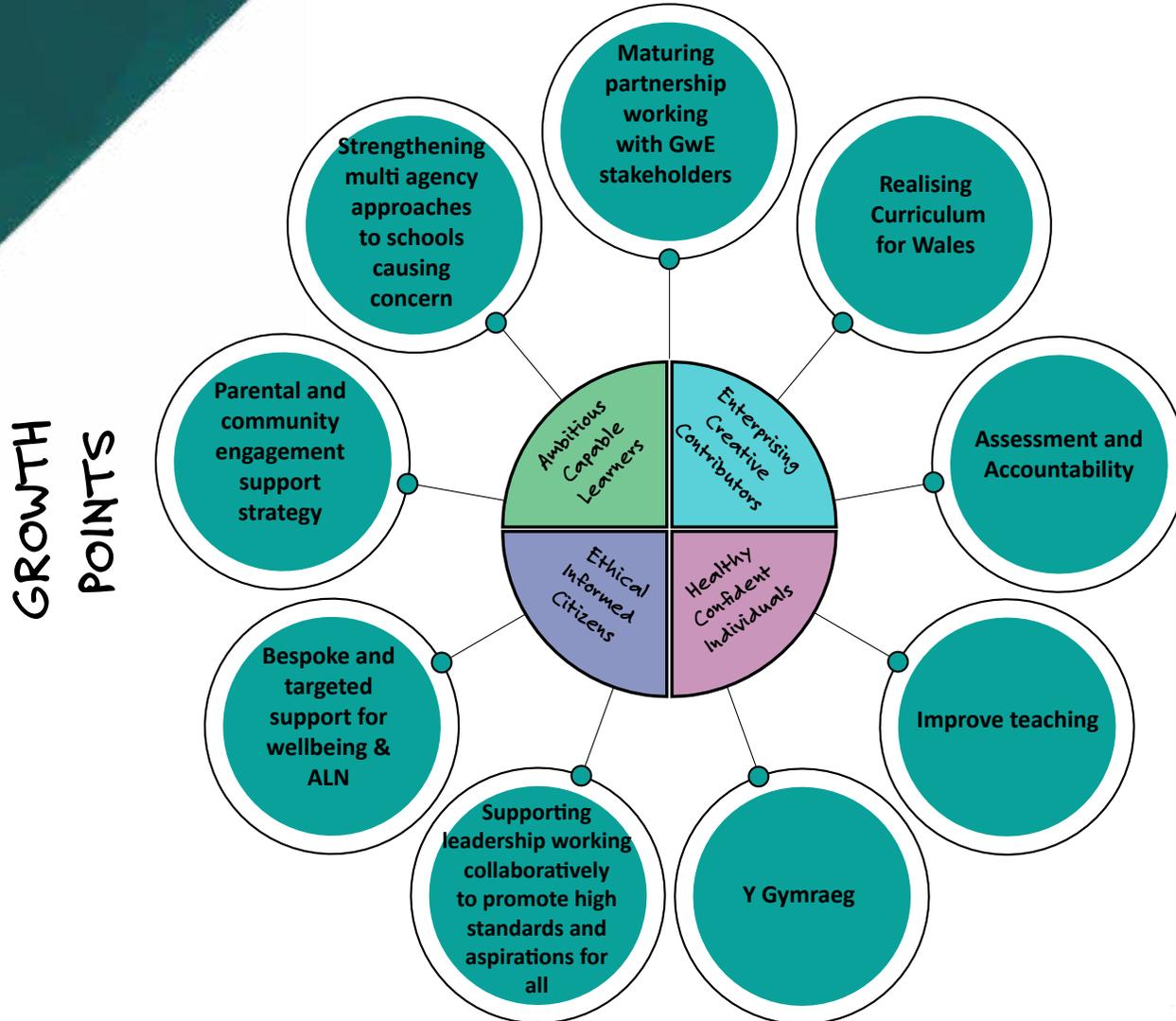
- Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
- Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
- Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world; and
- Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Our **regional priorities for 2022-23** are outlined below are aimed to support schools as they work towards those four purposes (Appendix 6 – GwE Regional Business Plan 2022-2023).

These priorities are supported by the service's detailed plans, outlining how and when the aspects of each priority will be delivered and setting expectations for the next steps in delivering the reform journey. Also, each Local Authority has a detailed business plan agreed upon by the head of service and the core adviser.

# OUR HIGH LEVEL PRIORITIES 2022-2023

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING



Collaboration

Learning Organisation

Quality Enhancement

Developing leadership and supporting workforce wellbeing





Collaborating • Learning • Succeeding

-  0300 500 8087
-  [post@gwegogledd.cymru](mailto:post@gwegogledd.cymru)
-  [www.GwEGogledd.Cymru](http://www.GwEGogledd.Cymru)
-  [@GwEGogleddCymru](https://twitter.com/GwEGogleddCymru)

