
Best practice in leadership development in schools

June 2015



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Contents	Page
Introduction	1
Background	1
Main findings	4
Recommendations	6
1 Establishing a professional learning culture	7
2 Identifying leadership potential, distributed leadership and succession planning	12
Identifying and developing potential leaders	12
Succession planning	15
3 Using performance management and the leadership standards to identify professional learning opportunities	18
Performance management	18
Use of the leadership standards	18
4 Professional development and leadership opportunities for staff at all levels	24
Senior leaders	26
Middle leaders	27
Class teachers	29
Learning support assistants and other support staff	30
5 The changing pattern of support for professional learning	33
Appendix 1: The importance of strong strategic leadership	37
Appendix 2: Checklist of possible opportunities to demonstrate leadership potential	39
Appendix 3: Evidence base	40
The remit author and survey team	42

Introduction

This thematic survey report is published in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Ministerial remit letter to Estyn for 2014-2015. It reports on effective leadership development within schools and focuses on how effective school leaders try to create a leadership development culture and build leadership capacity. Case studies of best practice are included.

The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools, local authorities and educational consortia. The report is based on evidence from school inspections and from visits to a representative sample of schools that demonstrate elements of good or excellent leadership. See Appendices for further details of the evidence base.

Background

The Chief Inspector's Annual Report for 2013-2014 reports that 'Inspection findings have shown, time and again over the past five years, that there is a link between the quality of leadership and the quality of outcomes for learners' (Estyn, 2015, p.15). Almost 90% of the schools inspected within that period that gained an excellent judgement for standards also gained an excellent judgement for leadership.

Excellent schools are led by headteachers who provide strong strategic leadership. Less successful schools improve when leaders introduce more effective leadership strategies.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report 'Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective' published in 2014 and 'The Future Delivery of Education Services in Wales' (Hill, 2013) highlighted concerns about the quality of leadership and management in a significant number of schools in Wales. The concerns raised in these reports included:

- lack of succession planning
- the limited number of well-tailored professional development opportunities for senior and middle leaders, and teachers
- the low number of schools identified through Estyn inspections as having excellent practice in leadership and planning for improvement

Welsh Government policies

'Qualified for Life – an educational improvement plan for 3-19 year-olds in Wales' (Welsh Government, 2014) describes strategic objectives for education in Wales to 2020, including:

Leaders of education at every level working together in a self-improving system providing mutual support and challenge to raise standards in all schools (p.5)

'Improving Schools' (Welsh Government, 2012) describes an ambition to implement a national structure for education (3 – 16 year olds) and highlights the importance of good leadership:

The most effective school systems emphasise the importance of good leadership at all levels and the best leaders have a very strong focus on leading improvements in learning and teaching and supporting their staff to improve their own skills (p.26).

The plan sets out three key priorities to build leadership capacity:

- supporting leadership development
 - providing a more coherent and stretching programme of professional development for school leaders
- strengthening school governance
 - ensuring that governing bodies have the skills they need to be effective
 - enabling local authorities and school governing bodies to take forward structural options such as federation where this would strengthen schools and support good governance
- improving the performance management of headteachers
 - setting high expectations for leadership roles through new standards

The plan states that, following consultation with stakeholders, the Welsh Government has developed a 'practice, review and development' process, which is an 'integrated system of professional standards, continuing professional development and performance management' (p.19). The aim is to develop a robust approach to professional development with all practitioners (teachers and support staff), regularly participating in collaborative activities such as coaching and mentoring, and professional learning communities to focus on improving their learning and teaching in partnership with colleagues.

In 2011, the Welsh Government published 'Revised professional standards for education practitioners in Wales'. This document explains the purpose of the professional standards to set clear expectations at each stage of a practitioner's career and to help them identify how they need to develop professionally to progress in their career.

The overall purpose of the professional standards is to raise standards of teaching and to improve learner outcomes throughout Wales. The professional standards articulate the understandings, knowledge and values that our teachers, leaders and Higher Level Teaching Assistants must demonstrate. They provide a framework to enable practitioners to identify their performance management objectives and to choose the most appropriate professional development activities, (p.1).

A key feature of the current professional standards is that all practitioners are able to use the leadership standards to help them identify and develop leadership skills relevant to their stage of development in their career and to their roles and responsibilities.

There are six key themes for the Leadership Standards. These are:

- creating strategic direction
- leading learning and teaching
- developing and working with others
- managing the school
- securing accountability
- strengthening the community focus

The themes are underpinned by 66 indicators in total.

Following the publication of the Hill report, 'The future of education services in Wales' in 2013, the Welsh Government formed the National Leadership Development Board (NLDB). The NLDB is made up of education professionals who focus on creating a co-ordinated national strategy to develop leadership in Wales. The work of the NLDB is in its early stages.

Main findings

- 1 In successful schools, staff at different levels show strong leadership behaviours as classroom practitioners, departmental leaders, leaders of whole-school initiatives, and as senior managers ('distributed leadership'). These schools develop the leadership skills of all their staff as part of their professional and career development.
- 2 In schools where there is a strong culture of professional learning, staff work as a team to ensure that pupils achieve well. An important part of this culture is clear communication between leaders and all members of staff to ensure that there is a common understanding and an agreed language about learning and professional development.
- 3 Succession planning at all levels is often a significant strength in schools with a strong professional learning culture. In these schools, senior leaders evaluate the school's staffing situation and try to predict potential future vacancies. This is particularly important at senior and middle leadership level and allows posts to be filled internally if necessary when vacancies arise. One effective strategy is to arrange for experienced staff to transfer their knowledge to less experienced staff before they retire or change jobs, for example through shadowing and mentoring.
- 4 The most successful school leaders employ strategies for identifying and nurturing the leadership potential of all their staff, particularly early in their careers, and for supporting them to develop the skills they need to become the school leaders of the future. These leaders undertake detailed analyses of the knowledge, skills and attributes required for each leadership role within their school. They use this information to identify staff with leadership potential.
- 5 Where schools are not successful in developing a strong leadership culture, headteachers do not focus well enough on improving the quality of teaching and do not provide appropriate professional development activities to help staff build on their existing skills and knowledge. Many local authorities and regional consortia have often been too slow in identifying this as a weakness in schools and have not provided effective guidance to headteachers to help them improve in these important areas.
- 6 The more effective schools have performance management procedures in place where senior leaders have objectives that relate specifically to developing staff as potential leaders. In these schools, the governors challenge leaders and hold them to account on leadership development.
- 7 Almost all the senior leaders in the schools visited know about and understand the leadership standards. However, less than half use the standards regularly to evaluate their own leadership skills or as a focus for the leadership development of others. Only a very few senior leaders use the individual leadership review to evaluate their own leadership skills. In the few schools that use them, the leadership standards form the basis for effective leadership development and performance management.

- 8 The revised standards clarify the expectations for higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) and teachers, but they do not explicitly identify the steps that teachers and HLTAs need to take to develop professionally, make good progress in their career and become the potential leaders of the future.
- 9 Successful senior leaders ensure that they provide staff with appropriate learning opportunities and training to support their career development. Many provide a package of professional learning activities that includes specific activities to develop leadership skills. This works well when the package is planned carefully to meet individuals' developmental needs. The training package usually consists of a menu of in-school professional development opportunities and some external training.
- 10 Leaders in the effective schools visited use expertise from both within their schools and from other schools to enhance professional learning for staff. They encourage their staff to take advantage of internal acting or temporary leadership posts and to take up secondments elsewhere to enhance their leadership experience.
- 11 There has not been enough support at a national and local level to develop the leadership skills of aspiring and experienced senior leaders. There are too few opportunities for aspiring and experienced school leaders to develop their skills in key areas such as improving teaching, implementing new initiatives, challenging underperformance, and understanding human resources issues.
- 12 In a very few schools, headteachers new to post have been mentored well by an experienced, effective headteacher within the local authority. However, this is not always the case nationally. In a few local authorities, headteachers, often in challenging schools are not supported well enough.
- 13 There is a particular shortage of training provision for leaders through the medium of Welsh.

Recommendations

School leaders should:

- R1 develop a strong culture of professional learning for all staff at all levels in their school
- R2 improve succession planning and the transfer of corporate knowledge
- R3 identify the leadership potential of staff early and support their career development
- R4 ensure that performance management structures pay proper attention to developing potential future leaders
- R5 use the leadership standards as the basis for evaluating their own leadership skills and for developing staff as future leaders

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

- R6 provide guidance for experienced school leaders on developing their staff as future leaders
- R7 provide opportunities for senior leaders to develop their skills in key areas such as challenging underperformance, deploying strategies to improve teaching, and implementing new initiatives
- R8 provide or source effective Welsh and English medium training for leaders at all levels
- R9 promote the use of the leadership standards and the individual leadership review to all school leaders

Welsh Government should:

- R10 implement a strategy for the development of leadership skills for aspiring and experienced senior leaders
- R11 include the development of leadership skills as a strand in the professional standards for Higher Level Teaching Assistants, teachers and middle leaders

1 Establishing a professional learning culture

- 14 Nearly all of the schools visited have confident senior leaders who have established a culture where professional learning is valued. In these schools, senior leaders value professional learning and have a clear vision for developing the potential of all staff. There are appropriate job descriptions, which ensure that staff understand fully their role and their contribution to securing high standards of achievement for pupils. Staff at all levels are clear about to whom they are accountable and to which members of staff they are accountable. Leaders communicate high expectations and provide appropriate opportunities for all members of staff to receive suitable training to fulfil their responsibilities. This has a positive effect on standards at all levels.
- 15 In the schools where there is a strong culture of professional learning, nearly all members of staff work collaboratively as a team to ensure that pupils achieve well. Clear communication between leaders and all members of staff ensures that there is a common language about learning. Nearly all hold a range of regular meetings involving senior leaders, middle leaders and other members of staff and have professional dialogue about successful teaching and learning, improving standards and the quality and effect of leadership at all levels. Many hold daily briefing meetings and confirm arrangements using emails and staff bulletins. This ensures that staff are well informed, share a common understanding about important matters and work well as a team.
- 16 Many schools make suitable use of in-service training (INSET) days to encourage staff to engage in professional dialogue and learn more about teaching and learning. This enables these schools to promote consistency in high quality teaching and learning throughout the school.
- 17 School leaders at Herbert Thompson Primary School in Cardiff have adopted a collaborative, open and inclusive approach to leadership that has contributed to high standards of pupil achievement.

Case study 1: Herbert Thompson Primary

Context

Herbert Thompson Primary School serves the Ely area of Cardiff. The majority of pupils are of white ethnic backgrounds. Seventeen per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language and no pupils speak Welsh as a first language. Around 51% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is significantly higher than the average for the local authority and Wales.

The school identifies around 44% of pupils as having additional learning needs, including a few who have statements of special educational needs.

Strategy

Respecting staff, and developing their skills as leaders, to ensure successful distributed leadership and appropriate succession planning.

Action

A wider management structure has been established with a clear focus on improving the skills of all staff to develop their capacity as leaders of learning through:

- taking the time to establish a close whole school community with high levels of trust and motivation

Ensuring a clear focus on skills, aspiration and positive values through:

- investing in staff wellbeing through daily leadership contact in morning briefing sessions and access to counselling, weekly exercise classes and a healthy eating staffroom
- investing in pupil wellbeing through regular morning sessions, which include circle time and sharing breakfast and family news

Each leader has clear responsibilities for specific areas of learning and they contribute to strategic improvement planning through:

- weekly senior leadership meetings, which focus improving on outcomes for pupils, provision and leadership using first hand evidence, for example through scrutiny of pupils' work
- communicating decisions and action points to all staff
- providing a wide range of training opportunities to develop staff leadership potential, including opportunities to share their skills with others in school and beyond
- analysing pupil progress at specific points of the year to assess progress, plan ways forward and set targets to ensure that all pupils achieve their potential
- holding mini learning reviews with learning support assistants that track the data from interventions to ensure that no pupil is left behind

Ensuring an open and honest culture, where staff are keen to develop and learn from each other, including:

- the 'Coaching Triplets' initiative, where a teacher takes their turn to teach while another two observe, before discussing how successful the lesson was, allows teachers to work closely with their peers to improve leadership and teaching skills
- providing all teachers with training on effective lesson observations and filming learning and teaching in classrooms in order to reflect on this both independently and within groups
- ensuring planned training sessions to focus on developing excellence in the classroom
- using both in-house expertise and external providers to ensure up-to-date staff skills

Impact

Nearly all pupils make very good progress from low starting points. Standards are consistently high and are above local and national averages when compared with

those of similar schools. The quality of teaching is consistently high across the school and all members of staff are motivated to work effectively as a team. Pupils and staff have high levels of wellbeing and there is a very caring, inclusive and happy ethos. Staff feel valued, are highly skilled and develop well professionally.

Sharing best practice

The school has shared this best practice through an on-site 'Leading Learning and Teaching Conference', attended by colleagues from across the consortium. The conference included a welcoming address about the vision of the school, a school tour and a range of workshops to share school practice. Delegates also had the opportunity to question school staff about their leadership roles and the difference these make to the life and work of the school.

- 18 Cardiff High School has been successful in developing leadership at all levels by establishing a strong culture for staff and pupils.

Case study 2: Cardiff High School

Context

Cardiff High School is an 11-18, mixed comprehensive school in the north of Cardiff with 1,525 pupils on roll. Around 6% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is much lower than the national average of 17.5%. The majority of pupils speak English as their first language. Around 11% of pupils are categorised as pupils with English as an additional language and 39% of pupils come from a minority ethnic background.

Strategy

Providing a well-planned and effective programme for developing leaders at all levels and establishing a systematic and very strong learning culture for staff and pupils.

Action

Senior leaders actively promote wider collaborative leadership for many of the school's development initiatives. The school has a creative system for supporting, challenging and managing performance in order to help staff improve their practice. This includes a well-structured performance management system for all teaching and support staff and a coaching and mentoring scheme, which is also a powerful tool for succession and career planning. Through this system, senior and middle leaders agree and set challenging objectives and meet frequently to monitor progress towards improvement. This supports staff at different stages of their careers, from newly-qualified teachers to those gaining positions/roles on the wider senior leadership team. There are middle leader courses run biannually and attended by middle leaders or those who aspire to promotion and occasional master classes open to all staff.

All staff contribute to the future direction of the school by taking a lead role or

participating in an extensive range of professional development activities. The comprehensive programme includes working groups focusing on key strategic priorities, such as the curriculum design forum and advanced thinking skills group, and on innovation in order to explore new approaches to teaching and learning. This helps staff to have a strong sense of ownership of these developments in order to bring about successful improvements.

The school encourages teachers to introduce and trial new practices, methodologies and technologies to engage and inspire pupils. Good and excellent practice is shared and disseminated well through the learning forum. Pupils have also been involved in developing and evaluating different lesson models. This innovative ongoing research and development of teaching and learning has culminated in the school's lesson 'refinery' and has had a very positive impact on improving classroom practice and standards. This is an outstanding feature of the school.

Impact

Standards achieved by pupils are consistently very high and well above expectations. Pupils, including boys, the more able and those with English as an additional language, make very good progress. The quality of teaching is consistently high and has a significant impact on developing pupils' thinking skills and raising standards; there is a strong culture of accountability and a high level of dialogue, interaction and teamwork between teachers, middle managers and senior staff.

Out of 15 teachers, coached during an academic year, thirteen achieved promotion by the end of that year. All of the new Curriculum Leaders were enthusiastic about the support given and thought that it had been invaluable. The innovative ongoing research and development of teaching and learning has culminated in the school's lesson 'refinery' and has had a very positive impact on improving classroom practice and standards the school has a very strong track record in securing improvement, and particularly in involving pupils in evaluating teaching and learning.

Sharing best practice

The school shares best practice through the Cardiff learning forum and regularly delivers workshops sharing its practice through the iNet organisation in Wales. The school shares practices with other schools through twilight middle leaders' courses, organised by the school as well as frequently hosting staff from other schools in response to requests to share good practice.

- 19 Leaders at Bryngwyn Comprehensive School in Carmarthenshire have developed a strong leadership culture by using self-evaluation, school improvement planning, robust performance management procedures and continuous professional development of staff rigorously to secure consistently high standards.

Case study 3: Bryngwyn Comprehensive School

Context

Bryngwyn School is an 11-16, mixed, community school in Llanelli, Carmarthenshire with 936 pupils on roll. In September 2014, it federated with another secondary school, Glan-y-Mor School in Burry Port, on two independent sites. This meant that the headteacher and governing body became responsible for the two schools.

Strategy

Develop effective leadership by dovetailing its self-evaluation processes, school development planning, performance management arrangements and continuous professional development opportunities.

Action

The school is eager to ensure that it can sustain its appropriate leadership capacity as and when its present leaders gain promotion to other schools. The school has established rigorous self-evaluation procedures, which provide leaders at all levels with a very clear and accurate understanding of strengths and areas requiring improvement. This well-organised and tightly focused process has had a significant impact on improving the quality of provision and raising standards.

All middle leaders have a key role in the schools self-evaluation processes. They all complete a report following an agreed common school template. Middle leaders submit their reports to the senior leadership team for scrutiny. The process involves an open and honest sharing of content and a collaborative approach to evaluating and judging findings.

The senior leadership team identify key areas for development in devising the strategy for the coming academic year(s) and this information is compiled in the school's self-evaluation report and the development plan. The governing body and local authority challenge adviser scrutinise and discuss both these documents diligently providing robust challenge at all levels.

As part of this process, leaders identify key objectives and whole-school objectives to support the school's performance management process. The school ensures that performance management objectives reflect the Welsh Government's Professional Standards for Teachers and the Leadership Standards. This gives mentors a clear focus during discussion about expectations, roles and responsibilities and highlights the need for accountability. This also offers a framework for planning appropriate and effective continuous professional development activities.

All members of staff have three performance management objectives:

- individual/departmental targets based on pupil data that are both achievable and

aspirational

- a whole-school target normally based on developing national priorities
- an individual continuous professional development target, which must meet both the needs of the individual and have an impact on school practice or outcomes

As coaches and mentors, middle leaders develop important skills through observing lessons and providing useful feedback within the performance management process. This leads to the setting of identified and agreed future objectives. They report strengths and areas for improvement identified during the performance management process to senior leaders. These findings feed directly into the next evidence base for self-evaluation, and further support the school's distributed leadership model within the school.

Impact

There is increased capacity for leadership roles and a strong culture of coaching, mentoring, support and challenge that supports the development of a sustained leadership culture at all levels. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating standards and setting priorities to bring about further improvement. There are consistent and sensible approaches to linking all aspects of school improvement work and over the last five years, there has been a considerable and sustainable improvement in pupils' performance across the school.

Sharing best practice

All feeder schools in the cluster use Bryngwyn's lesson observation templates to ensure a consistent and effective approach to evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders are implementing the same processes in the newly federated school. The school shares best practice as part of the 'Lead Practitioner and Emerging Schools' project and at national and regional events.

2 Identifying leadership potential, distributed leadership and succession planning

Identifying and developing potential leaders

- 20 Her Majesty's Chief inspector for Education and Training in Wales' Annual Report for 2013-2014, states that:

Everyone involved in delivering and facilitating education and training in Wales should have opportunities to exercise leadership. The distribution of leadership roles helps to improve leadership skills in more practitioners, (Estyn, 2015, p. 15).

- 21 In a majority of schools visited, senior leaders have a clear vision and strategy for identifying the leadership potential of others. These senior leaders use the outcomes

of performance management, self-evaluation and more informal strategies to identify effectively potential leaders. These informal strategies include knowing their staff well, understanding their attributes and areas of interest, and observing their professional demeanour, commitment and enthusiasm for their work. Leaders support staff in developing their leadership skills early in their career as 'leaders of learning', and also identifying and nurturing leadership potential of staff at the earliest opportunity and supporting them in developing the skills needed to become leaders of the future.

- 22 The headteacher at Bryngwyn Comprehensive School in Carmarthenshire has been successful in developing leadership capacity throughout the school to achieve excellent outcomes for pupils.

Case study 4: Bryngwyn Comprehensive School

Context

Bryngwyn Comprehensive School is an 11-16, mixed community school in Llanelli, Carmarthenshire with 936 pupils on roll. In September 2014, it federated with another secondary school on two independent sites, when it partnered with Glan-y-Môr-School, Burry Port. This meant that the headteacher and governing body became responsible for the two schools.

Strategy

Providing potential leaders with the appropriate skills to enable them to undertake leadership roles successfully. Developing leaders at all levels ensures the sustained improvement of the school and its success in the future.

Action

The school has a highly effective staffing structure where all members of staff understand and fulfil their responsibilities well. The school defines leadership roles effectively drawing extensively on the national standards for school leadership. All senior leaders set high expectations and model the behaviours expected by other leaders in the school. They act as high quality role models for all staff, in particular middle leaders and those aspiring to senior leadership. This modelling of best practice is an outstanding feature of the school's work because it ensures that members of staff at all levels understand fully their own role and plays an important part in developing a distributed leadership model.

The school has adopted very good arrangements for mentoring and coaching leaders on a range of issues, in particular, prioritising and developing skills such as data analysis and classroom observation techniques. As a result, many staff are fully prepared to move to the next stage of leadership in the school or in other schools when opportunities arise.

Leaders have communicated a vision where all staff are accountable for outcomes and participate in rigorous self-evaluation processes. These processes involve a detailed analysis of performance data, scrutiny of pupils' work based on specific and

challenging criteria, the direct observation of teaching through the school's 'triad' development approach and robust performance management systems. The 'triad' development approach involves two out of the three members of staff observing a session with the third teaching. They focus on a specific aspect of teaching or learning, or on specific groups of pupils. They then rotate, with a second member of the group teaching and the other two observing, and so on. At the end of the sessions, they reflect and discuss their observations in order to learn from the experience and evaluate its impact on them as teachers and potential leaders.

Each teacher presents a detailed account of the outcomes for the groups of pupils that they have taught that year. This also includes a detailed overview of the strengths and areas for development for the coming year. This information is shared with their head of department. Middle leaders collate this information before attending 'honest' interviews with a panel of senior colleagues. These interviews identify, through detailed analysis of data and scrutiny of departmental evaluation reports, the successes and any areas for further improvement. While this process is formal, rigorous and data-driven, the school provides a very supportive culture aimed at optimising the performance of individual teachers, engaging them in useful dialogue and developing higher level leadership skills.

This dialogue is fundamental to success because:

- It has successfully broadened the leadership base at the school
- It supports high expectations for all staff
- It supports high standards of teaching and learning very well through creating clear lines of challenge and accountability
- It reduces variation in performance across departments
- It identifies specific aspects of professional development to further raise standards at the school
- It informs school improvement planning and supports the school's performance management systems effectively

Staff in leadership roles regularly lead a range of whole-school training events. In addition, the school offers further opportunities for leadership development through internal professional networks with clear roles for facilitators and a responsibility to develop specific aspects of whole-school practice, such as developing the provision for literacy or numeracy.

Impact

Since 2009, performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has been above the median for similar schools, despite the fact that Bryngwyn School is one of the most challenged in this benchmarking group. At Glan-Y-Mor School, performance in the level 2 threshold improved by over 11 percentage points in 2014, building on a ten percentage point improvement the year before.

There is a highly effective leadership culture that secures high standards of teaching and learning. Standards of teaching and learning are consistently high across all departments within the school and show continuous improvement over the last five years. Senior leaders understand and implement the national standards for school

leaders effectively and a few have achieved the national professional qualification for headship in readiness to lead other schools. The school's leadership model has been introduced effectively to the other school in the federation and is having in a very short time, a positive impact on standards of leadership, teaching and learning.

Sharing best practice

The school shares best practice as part of the 'Lead Practitioner and Emerging Schools' project. Close joint working with Glan-y-Mor for the last eight months as a part of the federation process has provided an excellent opportunity to share the school's best leadership practice and to learn new skills from its partner school.

- 23 Many school leaders carry out detailed analyses of the knowledge, skills and attributes required for each leadership role within the school. They also constantly seek to identify staff with the potential to lead at the next level, whether as excellent classroom practitioners, leading departments or leading on whole school issues. This becomes particularly useful when a shadowing vacancy arises as it enables the school to match the most appropriate practitioner with a proven success record in that particular field to the leadership role as a professional learning opportunity. They motivate, challenge and empower staff and devise appropriate opportunities for them to gain varied experiences as leaders of low-risk projects initially, to improve their confidence and the effectiveness of their leadership skills. For example, the senior leader in one primary school identified a teacher who displayed excellent practice in information and communication technology (ICT). The senior leader gave him the responsibility for developing ICT, firstly within a key stage and then across the school. This improved his confidence and developed his leadership skills. Many members of staff welcome this type of opportunity and feel more valued because leaders trust them to lead on particular projects or initiatives. In the best schools, leaders develop staff in this way to manage the transfer of knowledge in anticipation of staffing changes. This is a useful strategy for succession planning.
- 24 Many headteachers have successfully developed a system of distributed leadership across the school. This concept provides all teachers with opportunities to lead specific aspects of school work.

Succession planning

- 25 Succession planning is a significant strength in many of the schools visited. In these schools senior leaders evaluate regularly the school's staffing and forecast potential vacancies. This allows them to plan strategically to fill these posts with appropriate staff and manage the transfer of knowledge well. This is particularly important at senior and middle leadership level.

- 26 Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni is a large and growing Welsh-medium secondary school in Caerphilly. Leaders endeavour to address the school's future leadership capacity needs as early as possible in order to ensure that there will be enough good leaders as the school grows and senior staff retire or move to other posts.

Case study 5: Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni

Context

Ysgol Cwm Rhymni is a Welsh-medium secondary school in south-east Wales. There are around 1,439 children at the school and about 130 members of staff, including teachers and support staff. Pupil numbers are growing rapidly. Forecasts suggest that there will be around 2,000 pupils at the school by 2020.

The growth in the school's size has led to the opening a second site seven miles away, which had staffing and leadership implications for both sites. Performance management needed to challenge and support growing numbers of staff at every level, in order to identify and resolve any underperformance quickly, and to develop talents and aspirations to benefit all pupils.

Strategy

To foster leaders of the future through careful succession planning using the school's 'Realising Potential Strategy'. This means that leaders identify the leadership potential of others early in their career and support them in gaining appropriate skills to enable them to undertake those roles in the future.

Action

As performance management principles were well established, the school decided to build on these through the introduction of a 'Realising Potential Plan' for all staff, including graduate teaching assistants.

Leaders established:

- a creative staffing structure that could evolve to include more leaders with responsibility for raising standards, pedagogy leaders and senior pedagogy leaders, in addition to heads of department and co-ordinators for specific educational aspects
- a strong team of middle managers and senior middle managers to work closely with the experienced senior leadership team that would challenge and support them
- a powerful team of experienced members of staff to co-operate on setting and checking suitable and constructive objectives for staff at all levels
- effective processes linking evaluators with teachers not necessarily in the same department
- a core curriculum panel of middle and senior leaders to set the performance management plan, discuss teachers' standards and leadership standards, in the context of the school's vision of aiming to realise everyone's potential; respond to local and national developments; and suggest specific examples of relevant objectives for staff at all levels

Each teacher sets three objectives with a sharp focus on improving aspects of teaching and learning.

The teacher chooses suitable objectives from a list suggested by the core curriculum panel, or sets his or her own objectives, on the basis of a discussion with the evaluator.

Leaders realise that it is necessary for:

- teachers aspiring to move up the pay scale to be clear about the need to set objectives that will enable them to demonstrate their skills, knowledge, understanding and impact on improving teaching and learning
- teachers who have teaching and learning responsibilities to set objectives that focus particularly on their role in leading and developing the teaching of others

The evaluator:

- agrees objectives and appropriate training
- takes steps in order to evidence achievement of objectives, for example through more challenging lesson observations paying particular attention to the requirements outlined in the 'Observing Cwm Rhymni' booklet
- evaluates and discusses the next cycle

The senior leadership team take an overview of the objectives in order to ensure consistency across the team of evaluators.

Impact

There is professional development for potential leaders which leads to good outcomes for pupils in terms of wellbeing, progress and skills. Leaders at all levels gain confidence and experience on the basis of their new responsibilities by leading pedagogy meetings, for example to promote positive behaviour, lead a global learning scheme, analyse the results of national reading and numeracy tests, planning tasks similar to PISA testing and leading strategies to improve the performance of boys and pupils eligible for free school meals. Talented teachers emerge to safeguard the leadership of Welsh-medium education for the future.

Sharing best practice

These ideas and the 'Realising Potential Strategy' were shared in a senior leadership meeting with the family of schools, consisting of six Welsh-medium schools within a small geographical area. They were also shared with the Welsh Government National Leadership Development Board.

3 Using performance management and the leadership standards to identify professional learning opportunities

Performance management

- 27 Purposeful performance management is a powerful process for developing the potential of all staff. In most schools visited, the performance management process enables leaders to capture the progress of staff and to identify and address performance issues where appropriate. The process provides important opportunities for staff to evaluate their performance against agreed objectives and engage in professional dialogue to identify priorities for their future development.
- 28 Most schools visited have appropriate performance management procedures in place. In these schools, procedures are robust and include regular performance review meetings, which contribute to reducing or even eliminating underperformance. There are clear lines of accountability and measureable targets for improvement, and individual objectives link closely to the outcomes of self-evaluation and whole school priorities. All staff are aware of the collective responsibility for improving standards. For example, in one school improving standards in mathematics is a priority. This becomes an objective for all those with responsibility for managing, teaching or supporting pupils in mathematics lessons. Objectives for staff are adapted to correlate closely with their specific responsibilities. These schools provide tailored support and training for staff in the areas identified and provide them with the necessary skills to meet their objectives.
- 29 In most of these schools, the governing body evaluates the extent which the headteacher has met the set performance management objectives for the previous year and holds them to account for the quality of standards in the school. However, in a few of the schools visited, governors do not do this thoroughly.
- 30 In the most successful schools, leaders monitor robustly the quality of teaching as a regular feature of the performance management cycle. Monitoring activities include focused classroom observations, listening to learners and scrutiny of teachers' planning and pupils' work. This enables leaders to identify areas of strengths or underperformance and implement appropriate action to disseminate or address these.
- 31 In a few of the more effective schools, senior leaders' performance management objectives relate specifically to developing their staff, for example by setting objectives aimed at building leadership capacity across the school. In these schools, leaders and governors recognise the importance of continual professional development for all staff.

Use of the leadership standards

- 32 In 2011, the Welsh Government revised the professional standards for school practitioners and produced:
- revised professional standards for Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) in Wales; these set out the standards that HLTAs are expected to meet throughout their career

- Practising Teacher Standards; these set out the standards that teachers are expected to meet at the end of the induction period and continue to meet them throughout their teaching career
 - Leadership Standards; these set out the leadership standards required of headteachers – for other practitioners, teachers and support staff these can be used as a tool to support ongoing leadership development
- 33 The revised standards clarify the expectations for higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) and teachers but they do not explicitly identify the steps that teachers and HLTAs need to take to develop professionally, make good progress in their career and become the potential leaders of the future. However, the Welsh Government has developed resources, such as the Individual Leadership Review, to assist a wider group of practitioners to engage with the standards.
- 34 Almost all the senior leaders in the schools visited have a working knowledge of the leadership standards. However, less than half use them regularly to evaluate their leadership skills or as a focus for staff development. School leaders involved in the National Professional Qualification for Headship programme have a greater awareness of the leadership standards than others.
- 35 Only a few of the schools visited use the leadership standards as the basis for leadership development and performance management. They provide a useful structure to set appropriate improvement objectives for staff, which can help to develop them as leaders. Almost all members of staff in these schools have a working knowledge of the standards and refer to them during professional discussions with their team leaders.
- 36 The headteachers who do not use the leadership standards, tend to evaluate their leadership skills more informally, often relying only on pupil outcome data as a measure for the success of the school. Effective leaders use data well. However, as there is no national moderation of teacher assessments in the Foundation Phase and in key stages 2 and 3, this data can often be unreliable and is not useful as a secure measure of the quality of the school's leadership.
- 37 Barry Island Primary School makes effective use of the leadership standards as an integral part of its performance management structure.

Case study 6: Barry Island Primary School

Context

Barry Island Primary School serves the community of Barry Island in the Vale of Glamorgan. Around 23% of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

Strategy

To use the national leadership standards in the performance management of all teaching and learning support staff.

Action

During a training day on self-evaluation, attended by all staff, governors and current

and former pupils, the school introduced the use of the leadership standards as a driver for performance management. Leaders explained the concept of 'everyone as a leader' and the use of the leadership standards by staff to evaluate their own performance.

As a result, staff agreed a whole school model whereby every individual took the responsibility for leading at least one aspect of school life, for example out-of-hours learning, community engagement, nurture provision, punctuality and developing the out-door environment. Support staff are an integral part of curriculum leadership teams and they work alongside subject leaders to improve standards. Each team has a link governor who supports and challenges the team members through visits and governor learning walks.

Members of the senior leadership team and experienced class teachers use the leadership standards as a basis for self-evaluation, performance management and continuing professional development. They assess themselves against the standards prior to the initial performance management meetings during the autumn term. This enables leaders to agree strengths and areas for development through whole school, team and individual priorities. These form the basis of performance management objectives. Each teacher has four objectives, which relate to their professional development, pupil performance, a whole school priority and an objective that links to the school's professional learning communities. Staff evaluate their progress against their agreed objectives in the summer term.

The school uses the leadership standards in a more informal way with less experienced class teachers and learning support assistants. The standards form the basis of discussions during performance management meetings to:

- raise staff awareness of the standards
- share the expectations for leadership and identify future leaders
- build capacity for staff to have greater ownership of their continued professional development
- match developmental opportunities to individual staff needs more effectively
- improve staff's understanding of the standards and accountability
- provide opportunities for senior leaders to coach other staff
- give the headteacher a strategic perspective on the school's leadership strengths, challenges and succession plans

The use of the leadership standards for school improvement is an integral part of staff meetings and these have a clear focus on meeting the school's agreed priorities.

Impact

There is an established culture of leadership at the school that goes beyond the senior leadership team. This ensures that everyone understands the opportunities and accountability required to ensure whole school improvement. The positive outcomes for staff and learners are outlined below:

Learners

Learners experience high quality and consistent support from teachers and learning

support assistants. Staff coach and support learners to develop as leaders themselves through programmes such as 'Digital Leaders', 'e-Cadets' and head boy/girl roles. Learners are enthusiastic and eager to work independently, using their own initiative with confidence and take on leadership roles and responsibilities as 'learning buddies' and 'reading buddies' for younger learners. They understand what is expected of them as leaders of the pupil voice as members of the school council, the eco-committee or as peer mediators.

Staff

The confidence of staff has increased in terms of their own and others' abilities greater ownership and involvement of all staff in the direction of their own professional development. Many have been successful in gaining promotion as senior leaders either within the school or in other schools. Learning support staff have become more effective in contributing to whole school improvement. There is a consistent application of the school's vision and leaders and governors have a clear succession plan.

Sharing best practice

The school has shared its good practice through the regional consortia school improvement group as part of a collaborative project focused upon developing coaching cultures in other schools. Staff who deliver professional development courses for teachers and learning support staff from within the cluster, and from across the region, take part in a regional 'Aspiring Senior Leadership' programme'

- 38 In 2013, the Welsh Government developed The Individual Leadership Review (ILR) to support school leaders in self-evaluating their leadership skills. The individual leadership review is a useful tool which is clearly and coherently linked to the Leadership Standards. It encourages reflective practice, and enables teachers and leaders at all levels of career progression to evaluate their knowledge, understanding and skills against the standards and identify areas for further development. The interactive review documents are understood easily and provide an appropriate system for maintaining a 'live' document, with which practitioners and their line managers can monitor progress towards agreed targets and plan future learning.
- 39 There is a suitable range of materials available to support the individual leadership review documentation, which provides useful guidance to practitioners in completing and maintaining the review.
- 40 Fewer than half of the practitioners in the schools visited use the leadership standards, and a very few use the individual leadership review to evaluate their leadership skills. When used effectively, the individual leadership review is a useful tool to help practitioners to consider the required standards and associated core attributes for key areas of the leadership standards. By reviewing their practice against the statements, they can indicate where they feel they can already demonstrate evidence, indicate the strength of that evidence and provide examples of the nature of evidence available. The individual leadership review activity can help individuals in their self-evaluation activity in preparation for performance

management reviews and also assist practitioners who are required to provide specific evidence for assessment purposes, such as the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). Of the schools that use the leadership standards well, many make good use of mentoring and coaching strategies.

- 41 Most of the schools visited have mentoring arrangements for staff, particularly newly-qualified teachers. In the best practice, inexperienced members of staff work closely with their mentor to develop their teaching and leadership skills. Short-term objectives are used well to measure progress and target specific training and support. This is supported by regular, thorough and focused dialogue. In a few schools, mentoring is used well to support new middle and senior leaders.
- 42 Many of the teachers interviewed benefited from coaching as part of their leadership training. Where used effectively, coaching is a non-threatening and supportive mechanism to encourage staff to ask questions about their practice and learn from each other, often in a specific field. Examples include learning new teaching approaches and strategies, where members of staff are able to observe good practice before implementing the practice in their own classrooms. Team-teaching is also a successful method of training staff.
- 43 Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen in Gwynedd makes effective use of learning 'triads' as a vehicle for coaching staff.

Case study 7: Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen

Context

Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen serves the town of Bethesda in Gwynedd, and the surrounding rural community. Eighty-three per cent of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. Around 15% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, and around 25% have additional learning needs. The school teaches most subjects predominantly through the medium of Welsh.

Three per cent of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. This is roughly in line with the national average. In addition, around 22% of pupils are on 'school action' and 'school action plus' measures, which is close to the national percentage.

The Estyn inspection noted that the quality and consistency of teaching was one of the school's strengths. A culture of lesson observations has been part of the school's self-evaluation system for many years. All teachers are part of this process. Other teachers observe them and they observe other teachers. Developing a system of learning 'triads' that included all teachers was therefore a natural step forward when trying to improve learning and when responding to one of the main priorities of the school development plan, to '*disseminate the excellent practices in teaching across the school*'.

Strategy

To implement the use of learning 'triads' to improve leadership skills. This involves

two out of the three members of staff observing a session with the third teaching. They focus on a specific aspect of teaching or learning, or on specific groups of pupils. They then rotate, with a second member of the group teaching and the other two observing, and so on. At the end of the sessions, they reflect and discuss their observations in order to learn from the experience and evaluate its impact on them as teachers and potential leaders.

Action

Leaders decided to create learning 'triads' as a way of sharing good practice in teaching and learning across the school. Leaders ensured that all 'triads' contained a mix in terms of teaching experience and responsibility, and placed one teacher with expertise in literacy in each 'triad'.

There were initial meetings to discuss what would be the focus of the observation in the three lessons. It was decided to adopt a plan that focused on three or four particular pupils during the lesson, for example underachieving boys, boys with weak literacy skills, more able and talented pupils, or those eligible for free school meals. Two of the teachers, in turn observed the third teacher and then met briefly to discuss the lesson. They repeated this three times to give each teacher an opportunity to observe and be observed. Each 'triad' chose a leader from among the least experienced teachers.

At the end of the cycle, the "triads" completed a simple questionnaire to identify the strengths of the process and areas they could improve for the future. Leaders then produced a whole-school report, which staff discussed at a staff meeting.

Impact

The report produced following the 'triads' project was unanimously positive and all staff saw the process as a developing and positive one. Staff gained a better insight into how pupils learn, and how different teaching strategies and techniques are successful in different circumstances. Many teachers indicated that the process was stimulating and that they would trial new teaching techniques after the observation. The process placed everyone at the same level, and members of the senior management team and heads of departments were a part of 'triads' with inexperienced teachers and those in their first year of teaching. This emphasised the principle of equality. The process improved teaching across the school and thereby improved pupils' levels of attainment, especially particular cohorts of pupils. It also provided teachers who would not normally have had that chance with leadership opportunities, hence developing their leadership skills.

4 Professional development and leadership opportunities for staff at all levels

- 44 There are currently more and more examples of schools sharing leadership roles amongst staff at all levels. This is a positive feature because effective leadership is not so much about the headteacher leading the school alone. It is more about involving everyone concerned in delivering and facilitating education and training having opportunities to exercise leadership. Distributing these leadership roles helps to improve leadership skills in more practitioners.
- 45 Over recent years, leaders have needed to develop new skills as they endeavour to respond to the increasing challenges they have faced. They require specific skills in self-evaluation and planning for improvement, and the ability to forge an inclusive vision for the future and the energy and conviction to realise that vision.
- 46 Senior leaders in Elfed High School have been successful in developing leadership for literacy and numeracy.

Case study 8: Elfed High School

Context

Elfed High School is an English-medium 11 to 16 mixed comprehensive school serving the town of Buckley in Flintshire, with 526 pupils on roll. Around 16% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is just below the average of 17.5% for secondary schools in Wales. The number of pupils who speak Welsh at home is very small. Around 97% of pupils are from a white British background. Around 37% of pupils are on the school's special educational needs register, which is above the Wales average of 25.2%, and 3% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. This figure is a little above the national average of 2.6%. The school has two additional learning needs resourced provisions and a very few pupils are dual registered with the local special school.

Strategy

Developing leadership for literacy and numeracy and the impact on improving provision and outcomes.

Action

Leadership at all levels has had a considerable impact upon standards and wellbeing, particularly during a period of significant challenge to the school. This includes falling rolls, local reorganisation of post-16 provision and reductions in staffing and budget. The leadership provided by the headteacher and deputy head is simultaneously understated and powerful resulting in a very high level of buy-in from all staff. This has allowed her and other leaders to hold staff to account through a period of considerable difficulty. There has been a very effective matching of individuals to various leadership posts that allow them to flourish while driving up standards – spotting the potential in people. All staff and pupils contribute to and aspire to the vision of becoming an outstanding learning community.

The provision and leadership for literacy and numeracy skills are very strong. Progress in implementing the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) has built on the already excellent practice at the school. The school is already trialling reporting against the LNF using comments on literacy and numeracy in all subject reports at key stage 3. The school development plan identifies skills as a priority and there is consistency across the school in their development. Target-setting, use of data and tracking are significant strengths across the school. These are used well to support literacy and numeracy development. Targeted interventions are timely, well managed and resourced, and delivered by well-trained staff. The learning directors for literacy and numeracy oversee these interventions and manage staff well to support the improvements. There is a willingness among staff to develop literacy and numeracy in their subject areas. Progress in developing extended writing across the curriculum is particularly strong and staff are more confident in applying numeracy in their lessons. Literacy and numeracy have both been identified in recent Estyn remits as good practice case studies. For numeracy, the good practice is in the way that interventions are organised to ensure that pupils develop good numeracy skills through key stage 3. For literacy, the good practice is in the consistent development of writing skills and extended writing using the skills progression ladders.

Impact

The school's performance at key stage 4 has been well above expectations for many key indicators for the past two years. Skilful leadership at all levels has resulted in exceptional performance in key stage 4 for qualifications that include English and mathematics; the co-ordination and progress in developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are outstanding and pupils make very good progress from previous key stages in most indicators. More able pupils, pupils with additional learning needs and pupils eligible for free school meals achieve very well.

The headteacher provides highly successful strategic direction and a powerful vision to develop the school as an outstanding learning community. There is a very strong culture of accountability at all levels, and a strong culture of reflection and collaboration in sharing best practice in teaching, assessment and skills through effective professional development opportunities.

Sharing best practice

The school shares best practice through extensive school-to-school support. The school has shared its good practice within literacy and numeracy as well as in English and mathematics with several schools, including schools in its family as well as schools from neighbouring local authorities and the consortium. The school has also shared its approaches to improving mathematics and English with several local authorities.

- 47 The best senior leaders provide staff with appropriate training to support their career development. Many provide an in-school menu of professional development that includes activities to develop leadership skills specifically. In many schools, well-planned shadowing experiences are used to prepare staff at all levels for specific leadership roles. For example, in one primary school, a class teacher

worked alongside the additional learning needs co-ordinator for a year before undertaking that role himself. During that year, he was able to observe an experienced colleague's work, support her and learn in detail the requirements of the role. In another example of shadowing, a secondary school teacher worked with the head of department in preparation for taking over the lead role during that person's maternity leave. As a result of her improved skills, the acting head of department secured a permanent head of department role at another school. In both these examples, a well-planned programme of support ensured that staff became clear about the skills necessary for the leadership role and what they needed to do to ensure that they carried out those roles successfully.

- 48 Many schools also include external training as part of a package of professional learning activities. This works well when the package of training is planned carefully to meet individual developmental objectives and the priorities for improving the school. It is least effective when leaders have not considered alternative means well enough to address the professional learning needs of staff, and its intended impact or outcomes.
- 49 These schools provide many examples of how staff develop as a result of targeted training and an in-depth knowledge of school issues. In schools with a strong culture of leadership development, leaders at all levels are clear about their roles, and there is a strong focus on professional development and leadership opportunities for staff at all levels.

Senior leaders

- 50 Senior leaders in most of the schools visited have a clear understanding of their strategic roles in securing high standards of wellbeing, teaching and learning, ensuring the effective day-to-day administration of the school and developing the potential of staff and pupils.
- 51 The best school leaders involve their senior leadership team in a range of activities in preparation for headship. They share a wide range of information about the school effectively with them. They communicate clearly and encourage these leaders to play an active strategic role in leading the school. They also provide appropriate opportunities for them to deputise for them on a regular basis. This ensures that they have a comprehensive understanding of the day-to-day work of the school, and prepares them well for future headship.
- 52 The best senior leaders have a clear understanding of their school's policies and procedures and use their experience and expertise to manage staff in implementing them.
- 53 Many senior leaders in the schools visited have followed the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers programme or taken part in senior leader training. In these instances, around a half use the leadership standards as a structure for their work. Many have taken advantage of a wide range of professional learning opportunities such as undertaking secondments and sitting on local authority and national panels to develop a range of initiatives to enhance literacy and numeracy.

- 54 Estyn has encouraged all schools to become involved in the peer inspector programme and currently a majority of secondary and a minority of primary schools have a trained peer inspector on the leadership team. The assessed training programme and involvement in school inspection helps leaders to develop a greater understanding of successful school improvement strategies.
- 55 A few senior leaders in the schools visited are trained Estyn peer-inspectors, and have valued the training and inspection experience greatly. In particular, it has been useful in helping them to develop:
- a better understanding of school performance data
 - analytical and evaluation skills
 - the ability to recognise excellence in learning and teaching
 - an understanding of the link between leadership and standards

Middle leaders

- 56 The NLDB has identified middle leadership development as an area requiring 'urgent attention' and has developed a specification setting out the key characteristics of effective middle leadership. This is to provide guidance to schools and consortia on activities, which practitioners can use to build the skills and experiences of middle leaders.
- 57 The quality of middle leadership in a majority of schools across Wales is inconsistent. However, this is not the case in most of the schools visited for the purpose of this thematic report. Middle leaders in most of these schools fulfil their role effectively.
- 58 Most of the middle leaders in the schools visited have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Where middle leaders are strongest, there are strong and purposeful relationships between middle and senior leaders, based on a common commitment to an ethos of high expectations.
- 59 Middle leaders in most of the schools visited receive appropriate support from senior leaders to undertake their work. A few middle leaders have benefited from school to school training and others have attended courses provided by the local authority, regional consortium and higher education institutions. However, there is too much variation in the availability and quality of middle leadership training across Wales.
- 60 Many are encouraged to work within networks across schools. This enables them to observe and share effective practice and work together on projects and plans such as schemes of work. The leadership of the network often rotates to allow all participants to develop their leadership, observation and teaching skills. This improves the confidence of the participants and enriches their experience as leaders. This is particularly useful in smaller schools.
- 61 Most middle leaders have received useful shadowing experiences before starting their current responsibilities. Examples include working alongside experienced senior leaders when undertaking data analyses and self-evaluation tasks for their department, and joint lesson observations to ensure consistency of judgements. A suitable example in a secondary school includes coaching by observing lessons in 'triads'.

- 62 In most of the schools visited senior leaders provide mentoring programmes for new middle leaders. This is particularly useful to ensure that they fulfil the role effectively and have a colleague they can turn to for support and advice when needed. Many agree and set challenging objectives and meet frequently with their mentor to monitor their progress. They structure these meetings to allow discussion about the work of the middle leaders and for senior leaders or mentors to provide a programme of support for them.
- 63 Middle leaders in the most successful departments develop a collaborative approach to creating and using resources and they ensure the consistent use of resources across classes. They focus on teaching and learning in team meetings and carry out systematic monitoring activities.
- 64 In a few schools where middle leaders are not as effective, they do not take on enough responsibility in ensuring high standards across their department. This results in too much variation in the quality of teaching experienced by pupils in different classes.
- 65 Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr has been successful in developing strong and confident middle leadership

Case study 9: Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr

Context

Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr is a Welsh-medium secondary school for pupils aged between 11 and 19 years. It is situated in Gowerton and serves the west of Swansea. There are 818 pupils on roll, including 159 pupils in the sixth form. Seven point three per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is much lower than the national average of 17.5%.

Strategy

Developing middle leadership

Action

The headteacher, supported by the senior leadership team, has established strong and robust systems to sustain high performance across a significant period of time. The consistency in the quality of leadership at all levels is a significant factor in establishing a high reputation for the school and this has attracted increasing numbers of pupils.

The school has established effective procedures for managing staff performance. As a result of the regular performance review meetings, all members of staff agree on and review their targets in line with whole school and departmental priorities. Targets focus specifically on teaching and learning and pupils' achievements. As a result, staff development needs are identified clearly and lead to a comprehensive professional development programme that is targeted specifically.

The headteacher has ensured that leaders are confident users of data and that this information is used effectively to tackle or challenge any underperformance. The roles and responsibilities of the senior management team and middle managers are defined in detail. Management and accountability systems are very robust. Regular meetings at all levels focus effectively on the school's strategic aims and managers record discussions in the meetings thoroughly. Departmental link managers have thorough knowledge of their link departments through these meetings. Departments are supported and monitored very effectively by senior leaders, as well as being challenged constantly in terms of the standards that pupils achieve. All staff are aware of their direct contribution to achieving the school's strategic aims and plans and share the vision very effectively.

Impact

Pupils' outcomes in the main indicators at the end of key stage 4 have often placed the school among the top 25% of similar schools over recent years. The achievements of groups of pupils show significant progress by the end of key stage 4. Nearly all pupils participate fully and work productively in lessons, and make consistent progress against lesson aims. Pupils' standards of behaviour are high. Attendance rates place the school among the top 25% of similar schools over the last five years. The provision for developing literacy and numeracy skills is a significant strength. The school promotes pupils' wellbeing very successfully

Class teachers

- 66 Class teachers or leaders of learning, in almost all the schools visited are aware of the practising teacher standards. This is particularly true of teachers in their first few years in the profession. The practising teacher standards provide a clear structure for developing teachers as effective practitioners. However, there is a distinct lack of connection between the standards and the Welsh Government's vision for a 'career-long leadership development pathway' for teachers as there is no explicit reference to leadership skills in the practising teacher standards.
- 67 Class teachers in nearly all the schools visited are clear about their roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability. In these schools, they feel that leaders support them well in their application to undertake further training. In a very few schools, newly-qualified teachers have been supported well on the Masters in Educational Practice (MEP) programme. The MEP is a practice-based Masters programme designed to enhance and support the teaching practice and professional development of newly-qualified teachers. It is based around the every-day experiences encountered by all teachers and will help those new to the profession to develop and apply current educational thinking to improve their own classroom practice and outcomes for learners. The programme provides participants with high quality resources, mentoring support, and opportunities to engage with other newly-qualified teachers and lead professionals to share good practice. All newly-qualified teachers have the opportunity to follow this programme alongside their induction and early professional development period.

- 68 Class teachers in one secondary school where leadership is a strong feature say that the guidance they receive within the staff handbook is particularly helpful. The handbook contains important information about the school's daily routines, its policies, including safeguarding and health and safety procedures, as well as other information that focuses on agreed approaches to teaching and learning. The school leader refers to the handbook during the first staff meeting of the new academic year to remind all members of staff about these important matters.
- 69 Newly-qualified teachers in most of the schools visited feel that they are supported well in their roles. Teachers new to the profession receive a formal mentoring programme with a mentor identified from both within the school and another appointed externally. This ensures that they are supported and are encouraged to reflect on their practice regularly. However, there is too much variation in the quality of support and mentoring for newly-qualified teachers across all schools. The formal mentoring programme in most of the better schools includes effective lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, review of planning and an appropriate allocation of time to reflect and discuss progress on a regular basis. Almost all newly-qualified teachers are aware of the practising teacher standards and use them appropriately, particularly when reflecting on their own practice and setting short-term objectives for development with their mentors
- 70 The best leaders value and appreciate the contribution of class teachers greatly and make sure that teachers feel appreciated for their contribution to the school and are motivated to improve their skills and take on new responsibilities in preparation for leadership roles in the future.
- 71 Almost all of the class teachers in the schools visited feel confident that if their performance fell short of expectations, their mentor or other senior leader would provide support to help them improve.

Learning support assistants and other support staff

- 72 Many learning support assistants in the schools visited have successfully completed training as higher-level teaching assistants and regularly supervise classes in specific areas of the curriculum, for example during teachers' planning, preparation and assessment time. These members of staff are aware of the professional standards for higher-level teaching assistants. Others have completed foundation degrees in teaching and learning, which further enhance their skills. Learning support assistants often manage other members of support staff and provide effective training in specific programmes and support strategies. These include specific intervention strategies and teaching programmes to meet the needs of individuals or groups of pupils, for example when using published programmes to improve reading or writing. Many lead on activities to do with wellbeing, such as first aid or restorative practice. Others lead a range of extra-curricular activities such as homework clubs, cookery sessions, or gardening.
- 73 In around a half of the schools visited, a representative of the support staff attends staff meetings and is responsible for sharing the views of this group and reporting back to them on meeting outcomes. This is important in ensuring that leaders consider carefully the views of all members of staff at all levels.

- 74 In many schools where the culture of developing leaders is strong, members of support staff are included in performance management and are set improvement objectives in the same way as teachers. However, in a very few schools the performance of support staff is not managed in a systematic way. In many schools, all members of staff have a sense of belonging and feel appreciated and respected. One member of the support staff at a secondary school visited stated:
- 'There is no difference between teachers and us here. We all feel appreciated and want to do our best for the pupils.'*
- 75 In most of the schools visited the roles and responsibilities of learning support assistants and other support staff are clear. However, many schools feel that it is important that these roles are flexible enough to meet the specific needs of the school and groups of pupils as necessary. In a few of these schools, this means that lines of accountability for classroom assistants and support staff are generally less clear, with many accountable to more than one line manager, due to the flexibility of their roles. This sometimes results in confusion in respect of the duties that these members of staff are expected to undertake.
- 76 Ysgol y Foryd Primary School has implemented an early parent partnership initiative led by a higher-level teaching assistant to create effective pre-school links.

Case study 10: Ysgol y Foryd

Context

Ysgol y Foryd is a primary school in Kinmel Bay in Conwy. The school currently has 233 pupils aged from three to seven on roll, including 57 part time nursery pupils.

School leaders identified that on entry most pupils had a significant developmental delay. This meant that ensuring that pupils attained the expected outcomes by the end of the Foundation Phase was a significant challenge for the school. Senior leaders agreed that pre-school intervention was a possible solution. They challenged the school's nursery team to identify barriers to parental engagement. The team talked to parents and found that parents were often reluctant to share information such as serious medical needs and family circumstances that were detrimental to pupils' development. This was because parents were nervous about talking to professionals due their own negative experiences in school or because they did not feel that the issues were important enough to share. The school's lack of knowledge on such matters was a barrier to pupils' progress.

Strategy

A higher-level teaching assistant was asked to develop a strategy to establish an early years parent partnership initiative and to plan home visits.

Action

Senior leaders gave the responsibility of researching appropriate strategies for

pre-school engagement to a higher level teaching assistant. This was an effective way to distribute leadership to achieve the school's improvement priorities. It was also a good opportunity for senior leaders to coach and mentor other staff to develop them as leaders. The higher level teaching assistant would work with the pupils when they started nursery and have a good understanding of their needs and interests. She would manage other staff involved in working with the pupils and share best practice with other providers through the school's forum. A higher level teaching assistant was a potentially less threatening figure for families than a senior leader at the school.

The higher-level teaching assistant planned home visits for the summer of 2013. Initially, parents volunteered to take part in the process. However, the school intends to make home visits an admissions requirement within three years. The higher level teaching assistant worked with the full governing body and senior leaders to create a home visit policy. This had clear protocols to support staff in making home visits.

The school shared these with parents at the new nursery intake meeting in the summer term prior to the September start. As a result, nearly all parents who attended made an appointment for a home visit, almost half of the intake of around 60 pupils.

Impact

Relationships with parents have improved significantly. Pupils benefit from a much more positive and purposeful start to their school lives. Links between the school and agencies such as health visitors and speech therapists ensure that assessment profiles and appropriate interventions for the new nursery pupils are in place before they begin school.

Since the introduction of home visits, nearly all pupils have made significant progress in a shorter period and the school tracks this carefully. By the end of the first term, nearly all pupils are achieving Outcome 1 or beyond in all areas of learning. In the last three years, nearly all pupils gained at least four outcomes of progress during their four years in school. This means that they achieve the expected outcomes at the end of the Foundation Phase in all areas of learning. In addition, the school has reduced notably the gap in attainment between pupils eligible to receive free school meals and other pupils.

Sharing best practice

After visits to the school, Foundation Phase advisers from four authorities intend to share this best practice with schools and early years settings across North Wales. The school has shared its practice with many visitors from other settings and professionals through its family liaison forum.

5 The changing pattern of support for professional learning

- 77 The pattern of professional learning in schools is changing. The reduction in local authority training has prompted most schools to consider carefully a different pattern of training provision. As a result, the most effective schools have a greater focus on the areas they need to develop and in addition, make better use of the five statutory in-service training (INSET) days as an integral part of a larger strategy for staff development. This involves other strands such as focused task groups, professional learning communities and the production of guidance for wider dissemination among teachers and cluster schools.
- 78 Many schools are successful in using commercial training providers, developing their own internal training modules or by working with a cluster of schools to provide appropriate professional learning opportunities for their staff.
- 79 Leaders in almost all the schools visited are making good use of expertise from both within their schools and from neighbouring schools to enhance professional learning for staff. Responsive school-to-school support is becoming an increasingly popular way of meeting the development needs of staff at all levels. A few schools have developed their internal training capacity by training their best staff as facilitators and have become hubs for the 'Outstanding Teacher Programme'. This has provided the facilitators with opportunities to develop many leadership skills. Leaders in these schools identify good practice among the staff and share that practice across the school and with other schools within the area. The regional consortium often helps to facilitate this practice.
- 80 Some schools are currently taking part in a 'Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project', where the 'lead' practitioner schools receive funding to share their expertise and good practice with paired 'emergent' practitioner schools. The midpoint evaluation of the project in July 2014 acknowledges that this way of working is effective in supporting and accelerating improvement activity in the 'lead and 'emerging' schools, but notes that it is too early to identify its impact on pupils' attainment and achievement, (NFER, 2014). Many others have innovative practice and regularly host training events and open days to disseminate that practice to other leaders within their own family of schools or local cluster of schools.
- 81 Many school senior leaders are trained challenge advisers and inspectors. The training has helped them to gain a clearer understanding of: what high standards and wellbeing look like; what constitutes effective curriculum planning; and how to identify good teaching, assessment, leadership and successful school development strategies.
- 82 Successful school leaders encourage their staff to take advantage of secondments and other temporary posts to enhance their experience in leading in their areas of excellence.

- 83 The school leader at Glan Usk Primary School in Newport has been successful in identifying potential leaders and developing them as leaders within the school. The school shares its expertise with other schools.

Case study 11: Glan Usk Primary School

Context

Glan Usk is a large primary school in the city of Newport. There are currently 667 pupils on roll, 18% of whom are eligible free school meals. Fifteen per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language and 25% have additional learning needs. The school has 30 teaching staff and 34 teaching assistants.

The management structure consists of the headteacher, two deputy headteachers, three phase leaders and five learning leaders. The innovative management structure succeeds in supporting and empowering all staff to make decisions and take responsibility.

Strategy

The school's work on increasing leadership capacity and ensuring appropriate succession planning was accelerated due to their involvement in school-to-school work both regionally and nationally. The headteacher and members of the leadership and support team identified personal and collective strengths and areas for development linked to the leadership standards. This revealed a need to develop key areas and distribute leadership capacity more widely.

A focused whole-school staff training and development day empowered leaders at all levels to take more ownership of their own development and the wider strategic direction of the school. The leadership team were instrumental in spotting talent and identifying staff who demonstrated leadership potential. They considered processes such as performance management, mentoring of newly-qualified teachers and new staff and their performance within their existing areas of responsibility. These members of staff entered the in-house leadership pathway programme. This was an area for development in the school improvement plan – *'To develop and support the role of leadership pathway candidates to ensure that they develop the skills to become leaders of the future'*.

Action

The leadership and support team developed a comprehensive leadership pathway programme. This programme provided staff with opportunities to be involved in the wider life of the school. This included, presenting to the governing body, leading staff training and development, taking whole school assemblies and attending fortnightly workshops.

Fortnightly leadership and management workshops focused on elements of the leadership standards. Workshops involved a blend of leadership theory and practical school-based examples. Leadership pathway teachers are encouraged to question, problem-solve and apply concepts to their own work in school. Topics covered

include writing a priority action plan, data analysis, using grant funding to improve school performance, writing a newsletter to parents, managing conflict, budget setting and child protection scenarios.

The concept of leadership pathways is a key element of a wider leadership and management development plan. This links to the leadership standards and focuses on needs identified by the leadership team. The school has developed a continuum of leadership aligned to the leadership standards to enable all staff to see clearly how to develop their leadership potential whatever the stage of their career.

Impact

The identification and development of future leaders has become part of the wider culture of professional development within the school and has been successful in developing the necessary expertise within its staff to undertake leadership roles as they arise within the school. Seventy per cent of the first cohort of leadership pathways teachers achieved success in gaining promotion to either seconded roles within the local consortia or leadership roles within the school or other schools.

Sharing good practice

The school has shared the leadership pathway programme with a number of leaders through school-to-school working. It has also been shared through consortia headteacher seminars and their 'Excellence in Teaching' programmes.

- 84 There are too few opportunities, both nationally and locally, for aspiring and experienced school leaders to develop their skills in key areas including, challenging underperformance and understanding human resources issues, deploying strategies to improve teaching, developing future leaders, financial management, implementing new initiatives such as making relevant use of the pupil deprivation grant and partnership working. Many experienced school leaders have benefited from the discontinued Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers, which provided valuable opportunities for developing knowledge and understanding of the key areas of leadership and engage in professional dialogue with colleagues from all over Wales.
- 85 Many were well supported by the structured and funded induction they received in following the Professional Headteacher Induction Programme on their appointment to their first substantive headship. This provided them with an identified mentor, to whom they could turn for advice during their early days as a headteacher. This was supported by a structured network of colleagues within the local authority with whom they could discuss common concerns in an open and non-threatening way.
- 86 In a very few schools, headteachers new to post have been mentored well by an experienced, effective headteacher within the local authority. However, this is not always the case nationally. In a few local authorities, headteachers, often in challenging schools, are not supported well enough.

- 87 The focus on training by local authorities and regional consortia has changed in the last few years. The regional consortia acknowledge that support for numeracy is less well developed than that for literacy. There is also too little support for science and other areas of the curriculum such as the creative arts and Welsh as a second language.
- 88 Many schools have developed networks of professional practice both within their own establishment and across neighbouring schools. Where this has worked well, it has improved outcomes for pupils and developed the leadership skills of the staff involved. For example, teachers from one primary school worked with colleagues from other schools within its cluster to share good practice in assessment for learning strategies. They discussed which strategies work most effectively in improving pupils' ability to improve further their work, and later adopted these in their own lessons.
- 89 There is a particular shortage of training provision through the medium of Welsh. Welsh-medium schools generally overcome this by organising joint training events with other schools. Many of the Welsh-medium primary and secondary schools make effective use of 'Cymdeithas Ysgolion Dros Addysg Gymraeg', that is 'The Society of Schools Supporting Welsh-medium Education', which provides a range of national training events specifically through the medium of Welsh.
- 90 The pattern of support for professional learning development is changing. However, it is as evident as ever that staff at all stages of their career require support and learning opportunities to ensure that they succeed in their roles by continually developing in their professional learning so as to provide learners with the best education.

Appendix 1: The importance of strong strategic leadership

The Estyn thematic report: “Twelve secondary school improvement journeys” (December 2013) states that leaders need to adopt strategies that match the stage of development of their school, but there are also common tasks that all schools need to implement whatever their stage of development.

The strategies that leaders need to adopt often include:

- **Setting out a meaningful vision statement that encapsulates their values and strategic objectives.** Leaders communicate the vision statement well and provide a clear strategic direction. In these schools, the vision permeates all aspects of the school’s work and it is implicit in what the school does.
- **Having a clear focus on standards.** In setting their vision and strategic direction, leaders focus sharply on the core business of ensuring that all learners achieve the standards they are capable of. The schools’ ethos and culture reflects this core purpose.
- **Placing a strong emphasis on discussing effective pedagogy and on improving teaching.** In good or better schools, there is a high level of consistency in the quality of teaching, with nearly all lessons judged at least good. In these schools, a consistent and effective approach to assessment is a key feature. This usually involves the use of an agreed terminology about assessment which helps to reduce variation within the school. There is also a significant involvement of pupils in assessing their own work and that of their peers. Most staff provide high-quality oral and written feedback to pupils about what needs to be done to improve their work.
- **Ensuring that a consistent and sustained focus on literacy and numeracy is a priority.** Successful leaders ensure that staff understand the vital role that these two areas play in providing access to the wider curriculum and in promoting better standards across the curriculum. They are clear about how literacy and numeracy can be developed in English or Welsh and in mathematics, and extended through planned and progressive opportunities in the rest of the curriculum. A well-developed strategy and close co-ordination are the key ingredients for making this a success.
- **Ensuring that the school analyses performance data closely and in detail.** Leaders see data analysis as a means not only to assess the level of their performance, but to identify specific areas that need to be improved. The importance of analyses that compare the school’s performance with that of similar schools or pupils’ prior attainment is fully acknowledged by all staff.
- **Having high expectations of staff and pupils.** These expectations are made clear to all. Staff undertaking management roles know what their responsibilities are and what tasks they will be expected to undertake and to what standard. All other staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Leaders hold staff accountable for what they do, through effective performance management processes and line management arrangements.

- **Providing governors with clear, understandable and honest analyses of how well the school is performing.** This information is used appropriately by governors to identify strengths and areas for improvement and to challenge the school to do better.

In the few schools where pupils achieve excellent standards, leaders develop a collaborative, open and inclusive approach to leading the school. This is driven by high expectations, and a high degree of consistency in the way all aspects of the school's work is carried out. In these schools:

- **The focus on improving skills is sharp,** with good attention on developing pupils' higher-order literacy, numeracy and thinking skills. This is generally something that all staff are involved in and is based on a common understanding of what they are expected to do. Those who co-ordinate the work are clear about their responsibilities and all staff know what is required of them in their teaching and assessment.
- **The planning for developing the skills is sophisticated and specific.** It involves a well-understood distinction between teaching and applying the skills on the one hand and merely providing opportunities to 'cover' the skills on the other. Staff know when they provide pupils with challenging opportunities to expand their skills or to practise them in new contexts. Opportunities for skills development features in schemes of work and lesson plans, but will say more than merely indicating that a skill has featured in the lesson. Instead, it will show how specific aspects of skills can be developed and improved. The approach is strategic and a well-known priority for all staff, with proper procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work.
- **The culture of lesson observations is well established.** The focus is firmly on standards and on judging teaching and learning by the extent to which they are effective. Well-organised, routine scrutiny of pupils' books is in place and focuses on the quality of the work pupils are producing as well as compliance with whole-school practices.
- **The standard of assessment across the school is of a consistent high quality and all staff follow agreed procedures.** In particular, assessment ensures that pupils have a secure understanding of the criteria being used to assess their work and they receive high-quality oral and written feedback. Staff know what is expected of them when providing feedback and approaches show little variation across the school. It is well understood that the main purpose of assessment is to help pupils know what they need to do to improve. A key part of this process is asking pupils to assess their own work and that of their peers, in accordance with well-understood criteria.
- **Leaders ensure that many staff engage in enquiry and reflection and focus on collaborative activities to improve teaching and learning.** All staff can take part and outcomes are disseminated widely through professional learning communities and networking with teachers in other schools.

Appendix 2: Checklist of possible opportunities to demonstrate leadership potential

<p>Senior leaders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking part in a range of strategic activities • Sharing a wide range of information about the school • Gaining a comprehensive and effective understanding of the day-to-day work of the school • Having a clear understanding of the school's policies and procedures • Taking up opportunities to deputise for the headteacher • Following NPQH programme • Undertaking secondments • Training as Estyn Peer Inspectors
<p>Middle leaders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities • Strong and purposeful relationships between senior and middle leaders • Having a common commitment to an ethos of high expectations • Taking part in school to school training • Undertaking training by local authority, regional consortium or Higher Education Institutions • Taking part in networks across schools • Taking part in shadowing experiences • Taking part in coaching experiences • Having short term objectives • Holding regular discussions with line manager to discuss effectiveness • Taking up opportunities to focus on teaching and learning
<p>Class teachers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities • Taking up opportunities to lead learners • Taking up opportunities to lead support staff • Ensuring support to gain further training, for example MEP • Taking up opportunities to take part in a mentoring programme • Gaining support in observing lessons and book scrutiny etc. • Taking up opportunities to take on more responsibility • Taking up coaching opportunities • Having short term objectives • Holding regular discussions with line manager to discuss effectiveness • Taking up opportunities to focus on teaching and learning
<p>Learning support assistants and support staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking up opportunities for staff to receive appropriate training, for example on intervention strategies • Taking up opportunities for staff to lead other staff for example on intervention strategies, cookery, gardening • Support staff having a representative on senior management team • Support staff being part of performance management structure • Ensuring clear lines of accountability

Appendix 3: Evidence base

The findings and recommendations in this report draws on visits to a sample of 12 primary and six secondary schools across Wales, which includes examples of schools exemplifying good or excellent leadership. The school visits took place in the autumn term 2014. In these visits to schools, inspectors:

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

Additional evidence was drawn from:

- primary and secondary school inspection reports from 2010 to 2014
- Estyn thematic survey reports
- additional best practice case studies from the Estyn website and from other schools not visited

List of schools visited

Barry Island Primary School, Vale of Glamorgan
Bryngwyn Comprehensive School, Carmarthenshire
Cardiff High School, Cardiff
Cogan Primary School, Vale of Glamorgan
Comins Coch Primary School, Ceredigion
Glan Usk Primary School, Newport,
Llanishen Fach Primary School, Cardiff
Oystermouth Primary School, Swansea
Porthcawl Comprehensive School, Bridgend
Rhiw Syr Dafydd Primary School, Caerphilly
St. Mary's RC Primary School, Wrexham
Ysgol Dyffryn Ogwen, Gwynedd
Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, Caerphilly
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Gartholwg, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Ysgol Gynradd Pen Barras, Denbigh
Ysgol y Foryd, Conwy
Ysgol Y Moelwyn, Gwynedd
Woodlands Primary School, Torfaen

Explanation of words and phrases used to describe our evaluations

Nearly all	With very few exceptions
Most	90% or more
Many	70% or more
A majority	Over 60%
Around a half	Close to 50%
A minority	Below 40%
Few	Below 20%
Very few	Less than 10%

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