
Improving teaching

June 2018



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Introduction

This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Cabinet Secretary's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2017-2018. The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools, local authorities and regional consortia. It may also be of interest to those working with teacher education and training institutions.

The first part of this report summarises first-hand evidence from inspections and from visits to the case study schools described in part two, as well as findings from educational research, to explore what makes effective pedagogy and teaching. The report outlines the strategic approaches schools have taken to improve the quality of teaching and to build teaching capacity for the future.

The second part of this report presents 24 case studies that show how leaders and teachers have built their capacity to bring about sustainable improvement in the quality of teaching in their schools. The case studies explore pedagogical improvement journeys of fourteen primary schools, nine secondary schools, and one all-age school. The schools face a range of challenges and have different starting points, from schools placed in a statutory category, to schools maintaining high levels of performance over time. The case studies are grouped as follows, to illustrate the different starting points of the schools:

- Moving on from a statutory category
- Coming out of Estyn monitoring
- Building on existing good practice in teaching
- Sustaining excellence in teaching

1: Summary of inspection findings and education research

Education research strongly suggests that, of all education factors, classroom teaching has the greatest influence on pupils' learning. In his book, *Leadership for Teacher Learning*, Wiliam (2016) summarises the findings of many longitudinal studies of teacher effectiveness. He states, 'there is considerable evidence that there are substantial differences in the relative effectiveness of different teachers' and it is likely that, 'the most effective teachers are five times more effective than the least effective' (Wiliam, 2016, p.35). Wiliam (2016, p.35) concludes, 'the magnitude of the differences between teachers in their effects on student learning means that it is hard to envisage any effective way of improving the quality of educational outcomes for young people that does not involve a sustained effort to improve the quality of teaching'.

New professional standards for teachers in Wales (Welsh Government, 2017a) put effective pedagogy at the heart of school improvement and say that this must be the driving focus for school leaders. The OECD report (*The Welsh Educational Reform Journey: A rapid policy assessment*, 2017) states that developing a high-quality teaching profession is the key to the future success of schools in Wales. This advice builds on the OECD's 2014 report, *Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective*, where building professional capital among teachers and leaders was a central recommendation.

The thematic section of the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2015-2016 focused on the strengths and areas for development in teachers' professional learning (Estyn, 2017). Evidence gained through inspection activity and thematic survey findings shows that the key areas that contribute to successful professional learning and pedagogy are:

- creating the right culture and conditions for professional learning
- building collaborative and supportive professional relationships within and between schools
- engaging with research evidence and carrying out research
- using data and new technologies as catalysts for improvement and innovation
- learning how to lead professional learning and staff development

The report concluded that good schools place a high premium on learning, for staff as well as for pupils, and that improving teaching was the key process that contributed to improving pupils' standards.

The 2016 OECD report 'What makes a school a learning organisation?' states that organisation-wide practices and culture are the key to a successful learning organisation. The report says that the school's vision must centre on the learning of all pupils, creating a culture of supporting the continuous learning of all staff, and promoting team learning and collaboration among staff. The report suggests that the components vital for staff collaboration are: trust, time, technology and thinking together.

Leaders in all the schools visited as part of this survey are building a culture of trust and collaboration within their schools. Many are fostering a non-threatening and supportive culture around lesson observations and are moving away from routinely making judgements of individual lessons. Instead, they are encouraging staff to evaluate their own practice by using video technology or peer observations. Many want to promote an open classroom culture where teachers learn from each other and willingly discuss strengths and areas for development in their own practice and that of their colleagues. Team learning and collaboration are central to the school as a learning organisation and to the pedagogical development of teachers and support staff. The research of Hattie, Masters and Birch (2016) supports this finding. They conclude that co-operative learning is effective and that the effect of peer learning and feedback is particularly powerful in helping teachers (and pupils) to refine their practice.

Hattie (2009) synthesised the findings from over 800 meta-analyses spanning a 15-year period. The balance of evidence suggested that the classroom practices with the biggest effect on pupil learning were:

- reciprocal teaching – teachers enabling pupils to learn and use self-learning
- feedback – specific responses to pupils' work
- teaching pupils self-verbalisation or self-questioning
- meta-cognition strategies – awareness and knowledge of one's own thinking
- problem-solving techniques

Hattie concluded that, 'these top methods rely on the influence of peers, transparent learning, intentions and success criteria, using various strategies attending to both surface and deep knowing' (Hattie, 2012, p.52).

In the schools visited, leaders and teachers are moving away from a closed classroom culture where teachers do not discuss their teaching. Leaders want teachers to feel comfortable to admit that they are challenged by teaching a particular topic or finding a class difficult. They do not want staff to feel that this is an admission of failure, but rather that it is one professional looking for constructive advice from trusted colleagues. Many schools use a coaching or mentoring approach to help teachers discuss and improve their practice. For example, many schools structure coaching conversations using the GROW model developed by Whitmore (1999). GROW stands for:

- Goal – what do you want to achieve?
- Reality – where are you now?
- Options – how could you achieve your goal?
- Will or Way Forward – what are you going to do?

These approaches have proved beneficial in facilitating professional learning conversations and in helping staff to reflect on and share their practice. In these schools, teachers do not see lesson observations as a part of an external validation process, but as a way to improve practice and pedagogy in their organisation.

In a few weaker schools, leaders use lesson observations as something they 'do' to teachers. They rely heavily on a tick-box approach and make graded judgements

that do not reflect the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. In these schools, leaders tend to make over-inflated judgements about the quality of teaching. They often struggle to identify strengths and areas for development in teaching at a whole-school and individual practitioner level.

In schools where there is effective pedagogy and teaching, leaders know their staff well. They understand individual teachers' current level of practice and the steps needed to reach the teacher's and the school's pedagogical improvement goals. Leaders understand that just gaining more experience does not necessarily improve teacher performance.

Wiliam (2016) uses a range of research findings to conclude that a teacher's initial performance on entry to the profession is not an indicator of their performance in five years' time. Improving teaching requires deliberate practice within a structured framework of activities that have the explicit goal of improving performance. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest that teachers will not improve their ability, for example in giving effective feedback, only because leaders advocate that it is a good approach. Teachers, whatever their level of experience, will need to observe, experience, inquire into, and try out techniques to develop effective feedback. Leaders in effective schools understand that changing what teachers do in their classrooms will take time and effort. Wiliam (2016, p.163) states that, 'Sustaining changes in what teachers do in their classrooms involves changing highly automated routines, changing practice is essentially a process of habit change'. Lally et al. (2010) researched how long it took adults to form a habit and found that it took on average more than two months. How long it took varied depending on the behaviour, the person, and the circumstances. This suggests that changing practices in teaching will not happen quickly and will take teachers differing amounts of time to embed the desired improvements.

In the past, too many schools and school improvement services have implemented strategies that are not backed by evidence-based research. For example, Pashler, et al. (2008, p.117), concluded that, 'the contrast between the enormous popularity of the learning styles approach within education and the lack of credible evidence for its utility is in our opinion, striking and disturbing, if classification of students' learning styles has practical utility, it remains to be demonstrated'. There is also no evidence that activities such as brain training and brain gym are effective in improving standards. Wiliam (2016, p.177) states that, 'Frankly it is self-indulgent to spend time on things (neuroscience, brain gym, lesson study, learning styles) which may or may not help students when there is solid evidence about what does help students'.

Schools that are effective in improving and sustaining teaching performance do not always follow the most recent trends, particularly those that are unproven. Leaders are strong enough to say 'no' to initiatives that do not align with key priorities at their school. In these schools, leaders look for evidence that proposed innovations are likely to have benefits for teachers and pupils. They use research evidence and action research to inform their decisions.

The most effective schools in this survey were those that used evidence well to inform their practice. They were external facing, regularly discussed research, and learnt from best practice in their own and in other organisations. In these schools,

teachers were curious about what worked best for their pupils. They thought critically about pedagogy, read broadly about teaching and learning, and discussed their work with other teachers. Staff strove to understand the “why” and the “how” of teaching as well as the “what”.

Leaders in these schools encouraged extensive networking across phases, departments and schools. They had a clear and explicit focus on whole-school pedagogical strategies linked to pupil progress and measured the impact of professional learning on pupil outcomes regularly. In less effective schools, staff waited until the end of an academic year to reflect on how well improvement strategies had affected pupil outcomes.

The most effective schools had clear policies to support teachers in delivering lessons. The policies identified teachers’ responsibilities unambiguously in terms of their classroom practice, including planning, assessment and feedback. The policies also made strong links between curriculum, pedagogy, teaching and learning. This led to high levels of consistency and accountability.

Inspection suggests that excellence in teaching combines highly effective pedagogical strategies with contextualising these strategies within different subjects and areas of learning. The most effective teachers and departments have deep subject knowledge and choose the best approach for the activity and subject. Leaders often place similar emphasis on staff learning about recent developments in their phase or subject alongside effective and evidenced pedagogical improvement strategies. This means that the schools are in a good position to deliver the 12 pedagogical principles and address the fundamental interdependency between the purposes of the curriculum and pedagogy as cited in *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015).

In many of the schools involved in this thematic survey, senior leaders focus well on improving teaching and pedagogy. Generally, they:

- engender a culture of enquiry and engagement
- trust their staff to make professional choices
- have an open classroom policy
- create opportunities for professional dialogue around teaching
- regularly place teaching and pedagogy as agenda items on senior leader and staff meetings
- use professional development days as strategic opportunities to explore further initiatives in teaching and learning
- create dedicated time for teachers to take part in peer observations and action research
- use research to inform the decisions and strategy for their school
- have clear policies for teaching, feedback and curriculum that all staff understand and adhere to
- establish professional relationships within and beyond their region
- seek and act on expert advice

Over the last few years, the Welsh Government has introduced various strategies with the intention of improving the quality of teaching and learning, and of helping

practitioners to develop their practice throughout their careers. The aim is to build capacity and to drive out variations within and between schools. Current education reforms are based on a model of a self-improving system and of school-to-school working. This means that, in the most effective schools, leaders and teachers take responsibility for their own development and that of their peers. This self-improvement approach is school-led, and balanced by support from local authorities, regional consortia and the Welsh Government. Many of the schools visited as part of this survey are well placed to deliver these strategies successfully and to achieve enabling objective 1: developing a high quality education profession as cited in the plan, Education in Wales: our national mission 2017-21 (Welsh Government, 2017b).

Good teaching and learning:



2: Pen portraits of schools that have improved their teaching

Moving on from a statutory category

Rogerstone Primary School was inspected in December 2013 and judged to be in need of significant improvement. The school had several recommendations relating to improving the quality of teaching, as well as the need to improve planning and assessment. The most significant issue around this area of the school's work was the need to stabilise teaching and leadership so that the school could provide continuity for pupils, who could then benefit more effectively from teachers' skills and expertise.

When Estyn monitored the school in February 2015, progress against nearly all of the recommendations was very good. Establishing effective curriculum teams had brought about a consistent whole-school approach to curriculum planning. Improved assessment processes meant that teachers had an accurate picture of pupils' capabilities. Stable leadership and clear roles and responsibilities enabled all staff to carry out their jobs more effectively. The creation of cross-phase teams enabled teaching and support staff to share the responsibility for school improvement. A close focus in meetings on improving provision and standards provided good opportunities for staff at all stages of their careers to develop and refine their leadership skills. Moreover, working in teams with supportive colleagues had helped to raise staff morale considerably.

Sketty Primary School was inspected in February 2015. Inspectors judged both the school's current performance and prospects for improvement as adequate. They placed the school in the statutory follow-up category of significant improvement. Inspectors judged that the quality of teaching was unsatisfactory. They identified additional areas for improvement in foundation phase provision, teachers' planning and assessment and in the school's leadership. In May 2016, inspectors undertook a follow-up visit. They judged that the school had made sufficient progress in addressing the recommendations from the core inspection and removed the school from any further follow-up activity.

Solva Community Primary School was inspected in January 2015 and judged as needing special measures. The inspection team left the school with eight recommendations, one of which was to improve teachers' marking to ensure that their comments help pupils to understand how to make their work better. The report stated that teachers' expectations of what pupils could achieve were often too low. Inspectors undertook three follow-up visits and removed the school from the list of schools requiring special measures in March 2016. The school had made strong or very good progress in addressing all eight recommendations. The headteacher provides a good example of a long serving headteacher who remained in post after the judgement of special measures and worked successfully with her staff and the local and regional support services to bring about the improvements necessary.

King Henry VIII Comprehensive School was inspected in December 2014. Inspectors judged that pupils' performance at key stage 4 did not compare well with that of similar schools and that there was too much variation in self-evaluation and improvement planning processes across the school. The inspection team judged the school to be in need of significant improvement and left the school with five recommendations. Estyn removed the school from the list of schools requiring significant improvement in June 2016 as it had made strong progress in addressing the majority of the recommendations. Leaders have put in place effective systems to improve the quality of teaching and share good practice across the school.

Tonypandy Community College was inspected in November 2014. Inspectors judged that the school was in need of special measures. Inspectors left the school with six recommendations, one of which was to improve the quality of teaching and assessment. Estyn removed the school from the list of schools requiring special measures in November 2016 after six follow up visits because it had made strong progress in addressing all of the recommendations. The school provides beneficial professional learning opportunities and support for its staff that has improved the quality of teaching successfully.

Coming out of Estyn monitoring

Neyland Community School was inspected in September 2014 and judged to require monitoring by Estyn. The inspection team left the school with six recommendations. Two of the recommendations were around improving aspects of teaching, firstly by adapting work to meet the needs and abilities of all pupils and secondly by improving the quality of feedback to pupils. The report also stated that leaders did not check the consistent implementation of agreed initiatives across the school or take enough note of outcomes from evaluation activities, such as lesson observations. In December 2015, inspectors undertook a follow-up visit. They judged that the school had made strong or very good progress in relation to all six recommendations.

Leaders now take note of a wide range of evidence to improve the quality of teaching and have achieved a consistent approach to classroom practice.

St George Church in Wales Primary School was inspected in April 2012 and again in May 2015. On both occasions, inspectors judged the quality of teaching and leadership as adequate and placed the school in Estyn monitoring. Both inspection reports contained recommendations to improve the quality of teaching. In 2015, inspectors also recommended that the school improved provision to meet the requirements and ethos of the foundation phase. In November 2016, inspectors undertook a follow-up visit. They judged that the school had made strong progress in relation to these recommendations.

The school now uses a suitable range of approaches to improve and quality assure its standard of teaching.

Lliswerry High School was inspected in April 2013 and judged to be in need of monitoring by Estyn. The inspection team reported that there were shortcomings in teaching across the school. They recommended that the school improve the quality

and consistency of teaching. Estyn reviewed the school's progress against the recommendations in October 2015 and judged that no further monitoring in relation to the inspection was required.

Llisswerry High School has sustained its focus on improving teaching and pedagogical practices.

Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen was inspected in March 2016. The outcome of the inspection was that the school would be monitored by Estyn. The inspection team judged the school as having adequate current performance and good prospects for improvement. Inspectors left the school with four recommendations, one of which was to, 'strengthen and ensure consistency in the quality of teaching across the school by sharing best practice'. In October 2016, inspectors removed it from the list of schools requiring monitoring by Estyn.

Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen made rapid progress in addressing the recommendations from the core inspection and inspectors noted a strong spirit of cooperation among leaders at all levels.

Ysgol Uwchradd Aberteifi was inspected in January 2015. Inspectors judged the school's current performance as adequate and its prospects for improvement as good. The inspection team noted that the school would be monitored by Estyn. Inspectors judged that teaching was good overall but that there was a lack of consistency. For example, only half of teachers selected and prepared resources carefully to extend pupils' understanding. The inspection team left the school with a recommendation to improve teaching by ensuring that all teachers made effective use of questions to probe and extend pupils' understanding. In November 2016, Estyn judged that the school had made good progress and removed the school from the list of schools requiring Estyn monitoring.

Building on existing good practice

Deighton Primary School was inspected in October 2011, inspectors judged it to be in need of significant improvement. Inspectors removed the school from this level of follow-up in June 2013 as its new leaders had made good progress in addressing all of the recommendations from the core inspection. When Estyn inspected the school again in June 2015, the headteacher and senior leaders had maintained its rapid improvement and inspectors judged the school to be good across all quality indicators.

The school is continuing on its improvement journey by sharing good practice in teaching across the school to ensure a consistently high standard.

Hafod Primary School was inspected in September 2014. Inspectors judged the overall quality of teaching as good and the school's prospects for improvement as excellent.

The school has a strong ethos of developing teaching to meet the needs and interests of pupils. The overall ethos of providing a rich curriculum underpins the style of delivery of lessons. This supports pupils from an extremely diverse range of backgrounds to do very well at school.

Maes-Y-Coed Primary School was inspected in July 2010 and placed in the category of significant improvement. The inspection recommended that the school improve the quality of teaching. When Estyn inspected the school in March 2015, inspectors judged both the school's current performance and prospects for improvement as good. They judged teaching as good, with nearly all teaching being effective. The inspection team left the school with four recommendations, one of which was around sharing the effective teaching practices within the school to ensure consistency in all classes.

The school has been on a journey of improvement in developing the quality and consistency of teaching. One of the key features of this school's journey is that most of the teachers employed during the inspection in 2010 continue to work at the school. The headteacher, who was the deputy headteacher in 2010, is successful in challenging and supporting all staff to improve their practice to a high standard. As a result, the quality of teaching continues to improve and the school is now aiming for excellence.

Leaders at the school have chosen their current approach to improving teaching as they see it as a means to maximise the opportunities for staff to work together, to reflect on their practice and take part in action research projects.

Oldcastle Primary School was inspected in June 2017. The inspection team judged teaching as good with most lessons being interesting and exciting. The inspection report states that, 'nearly all teachers share many aspects of effective classroom practice between themselves and with other schools'. The school leads on collaborative work with 28 other schools across Wales to mentor new entrants into the profession. This successful partnership work develops leadership capacity and challenges the school to continue to develop, improve and refine the quality of its own teaching and learning. The inspection team recommended that to improve teaching further teachers should ensure that they match classroom activities to pupils' learning needs more specifically, especially for pupils who need support with basic skills.

The school shares practice in teaching and learning effectively, both within the school and beyond.

Ysgol Cynwyd Sant was inspected in October 2016 and judged to have excellent leadership and management, learning experiences and prospects for improvement. The headteacher believes that ensuring excellent professional learning for all her staff is key to the success of the school. Consequently, the school devotes considerable resources to developing skilful leaders at all levels in the school. Senior leaders make an excellent contribution to ensuring high quality teaching and very good pupil progress and standards across the school.

The school has a proven track-record of strong leadership and leading innovation.

Ysgol Pencae was inspected in January 2017. Inspectors judged the school's current performance as good and prospects for improvement and leadership and management as excellent. Teams of middle leaders and teachers across the school are responsible for developing specific aspects of teaching and learning. This means that staff at all stages of their careers have excellent opportunities to improve as teachers and develop leadership skills. The inspection report identifies significant strengths in teaching across the school and judged teaching as good overall.

The school develops teachers to be effective classroom practitioners and leaders of the future.

Dŵr y Felin Comprehensive School was inspected in March 2017. The inspection team judged the school as having excellent prospects for improvement and the overall quality of teaching as good. The inspection team left the school with three recommendations, two of which related to the quality of teaching. The first recommendation around teaching was to 'improve the quality of teaching, especially the level of challenge for the more able'. The second teaching related recommendation was to 'improve teachers' written feedback to pupils and the quality of pupils' responses'. The inspection report also noted that a few lessons did not have enough opportunities for pupils to contribute towards their learning. The school had already identified these areas for development through their very thorough scrutiny of first-hand evidence and had begun to work on improving these aspects.

Dŵr y Felin is working strategically to strength its teaching and pedagogy.

Tredegar Comprehensive School was inspected in November 2009. Inspectors identified significant shortcomings in standards of attainment and attendance at key stage 3 and key stage 4. By the time the current headteacher joined the school in September 2012, results had continued to decline, with performance in most indicators placing the school in the bottom 25% of similar schools based on free-school-meal eligibility, and in the bottom 50% of schools for attendance. In addition, the school was facing significant budget pressures made worse by falling rolls and the loss of the school's sixth form.

In its most recent Estyn inspection in October 2016, the school achieved overall judgements of good for its outcomes and prospects for improvement. The report stated that the school has been successful in establishing consistently strong teaching and noted the positive impact of this on the standards pupils achieve. Estyn also judged the school as having excellent partnership working, identifying the notable work with partner primary schools to secure consistent learning and teaching practices across the cluster.

The school has improved significantly its quality of teaching and pupil outcomes since it was identified as a Pathways to Success School as part of the Welsh Government's Schools Challenge Cymru programme in 2014.

Ysgol Bro Pedr was inspected in October 2016. The inspection team judged the school's current performance, prospects for improvement and the standard of teaching as good. The headteacher has high expectations and a clear vision for developing the school, which is based on ensuring pupils' high standards and wellbeing. The school is included in this thematic report because of the strengths identified in teaching during the core inspection and how well the school has further developed this area of its work.

Sustaining excellence in teaching

Gladestry Church in Wales Primary School was inspected in March 2009 and inspectors judged teaching as good with outstanding features. The report stated that

the outstanding features included high expectations, very good provision for differentiation, a brisk pace to learning, a strong emphasis on independent learning and collaborative group work and the empowerment of pupils to make their own decisions. In March 2015, the school had another inspection. The school again received the highest possible judgement for the quality and effectiveness of teaching. This report commented that teachers have effective working relationships with and high expectations of pupils. The report notes that the way in which teachers encourage and involve pupils in planning their own learning results in nearly all pupils working highly effectively, both independently and co-operatively.

Herbert Thompson Primary School was inspected in March 2014. The school received judgements of excellent for all quality indicators and its current performance and prospects for improvement. The consistent high standards of teaching across the school are a significant factor in the excellent standards and wellbeing pupils achieve. The school has very specific and effective arrangements for the performance management and professional development of teachers. There is open discussion about effective teaching and learning among staff and a willingness to learn from each other. These processes have supported the development of sustained high quality teaching across the school.

The school continues to improve its already high standards in learning and teaching.

Pontarddulais Comprehensive School was inspected in March 2016 and inspectors judged its current performance and prospects for improvement as excellent. The quality of teaching was also excellent. Inspectors commented that the consistently high quality of teaching was a major strength of the school and that it made a significant contribution to outstanding pupil outcomes. The school's robust approach to self-evaluation and its strong commitment to professional learning and leadership development as a driver for school improvement have helped to ensure that the school has maintained excellence over time and further developed its culture of collaboration and innovation.

Pontarddulais Comprehensive School focuses relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching.

Ysgol Gynradd Parcyrhun was inspected in December 2016. Inspectors judged the school's current performance and prospects for improvement as excellent. They also judged the quality of teaching as excellent.

On appointment, the headteacher established priorities to develop the school as an organised learning unit, in which pupils behave well and make strong progress. Over the years, there has been great improvement in the staff's commitment towards their work and accountability in ensuring that they fulfil their roles successfully.

As a result of the headteacher's vision and the continuous commitment of all teachers, the standard of teaching has improved gradually and continues to improve, ensuring that pupils now receive excellent learning experiences and teaching.

The school continuously strives to improve its teaching and pedagogical practices.

Y Pant Comprehensive School was inspected in October 2011 and again in January 2017, when it was a pilot school for the new inspection framework. In 2011, the school received excellent judgements for current performance and prospects for improvement, as well as for standards and teaching. In its most recent inspection, Estyn judged the school as excellent in all five inspection areas.

The school has developed and sustained a strong ethos of improving teachers' practice and having high expectations of staff and pupils. It places a very strong emphasis on professional learning that results in highly consistent and effective classroom practice.

Case studies of schools that have improved their teaching and moved on from a statutory category

Rogerstone Primary School

Context

Rogerstone Primary School is in Newport. There are 609 pupils between 3 and 11 years of age on roll, including 76 part-time nursery pupils. The school has two learning resource bases with places for around 20 pupils from across the local authority.

Around 7% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are of white British ethnicity and come from homes where English is the first language. A very few have English as an additional language and only 1% of pupils speak Welsh at home. The school identifies approximately 25% of its pupils as having additional learning needs. A very few pupils are looked after by the local authority.

The headteacher was seconded from another school at the time of the inspection. He became the substantive headteacher in September 2014.

Strategy and action

The school's focus is always firmly on improving pupil progress and raising standards and wellbeing. The aim is for all professional learning to have a purpose that links to a school priority and is clear to all staff. Senior leaders encourage all staff to reflect on their practice and to take responsibility for improving teaching and learning in their classrooms.

As the school moved out of significant improvement, senior leaders had to work hard to improve professional trust throughout the school. Now, the mutual respect and agreed understanding of high quality teaching that exists in the school is central to the school's culture. This ethos encourages teachers and support staff to develop very positive attitudes to their own professional learning. Leaders, all of whom are effective teachers, model and share their own practice. Teachers welcome and benefit from these opportunities. The headteacher maintains that you cannot underestimate how important it is to know your staff and take them with you, particularly in challenging times. An example of this is taking care to allocate tasks to the most appropriate people, taking into account their strengths and particular skills as well as their aspirations.

The school now uses a published framework to support all teacher observations. There are three levels of classroom observations: formal lesson observations, informal 'drop-in' sessions, and collaborative, reflective observations between groups of three teachers. All teachers take part in observations at one or more levels,

depending on their role and the school's focus at the time. All senior leaders work together to quality assure the outcomes of classroom observations. They personalise any follow-up to lesson observations so that they can address teachers' individual developmental needs effectively.

When leaders carry out formal classroom observations, for example for performance management purposes, they consider all aspects of the published framework, always keeping pupil progress and standards as the main driver. When senior leaders or subject co-ordinators carry out brief 'drop-ins', they focus on specific areas of the framework, relevant to school priorities or the needs of individual staff. In a recent example, the mathematics co-ordinator looked at the pace of mathematical warm-up activities, and considered how successfully teachers pitched the session to meet the needs of different groups of pupils.

To support teachers to work in triads, the school invested resources in video equipment and time for teachers to film themselves working. Initially, teachers carried this out individually. When teachers saw themselves teaching their own classes, many felt that this was a major turning point for them. They could identify their own strengths and areas for development, without fear of criticism from others. They had the time and space to reflect on their own teaching and the learning of the pupils in their classes. Once teachers were comfortable with this practice, senior leaders organised teachers into phase coaching groups. The groups planned a series of lessons together and then observed and filmed one another teaching. After these observations, they reflected on a specific focus or on a general teaching point, using small extracts of the films as examples of good practice or to illustrate an area to improve. This systematic approach meant that teachers became used to working in this way gradually. It enabled them to discuss teaching more confidently and openly with supportive colleagues and develop a culture of genuine collaboration and self-evaluation.

A relatively new development is the use of pupils' contributions to improve aspects of teaching. A designated group of key stage 2 pupils observe teaching and learning alongside a member of staff. They agree a focus and prepare a list of questions to ask pupils as they carry out a learning walk or a lesson observation. The main focus for the group is to consider the experience of pupils, for example the usefulness of resources and displays and how well pupils engage in their learning. However, this means that they also note aspects of teaching, such as teachers' relationships with their pupils and look at how well teachers encourage their pupils to practise the skills they have learnt before. Recently, for example, the pupil group carried out a learning walk through the school during early morning activities to see how well pupils were practising their spelling.

Leaders encourage teachers to be innovative in their approach to teaching and to place all learning into real-life contexts. The school does not use a scheme for literacy and numeracy, but uses the literacy and numeracy framework as a spine for teachers' planning. This means that teachers have to be creative and flexible in their approach. They design rich tasks to do this, focusing each term on a cross-school subject driver, such as geography, history, creative arts or science. Teachers and pupils build their projects around this – they call it their 'topic takeover'. Each topic aims to cover a set of skills, but how they do this is up to the classes.

Outcomes

The school has moved forward considerably and is now has a good reputation within its community and across the local authority and consortium. As a result of successful professional learning and the development of skilled leaders in the school, several teachers have moved on to senior posts in other schools. Others have been appointed to the senior leadership team within the school, for example to become head of foundation phase and head of key stage 2.

The quality of teaching is a strong feature of the school. Only a very few teachers currently receive support to improve and, because of the very clear and supportive framework and strategies the school uses, they are fully engaged in this process. One of the key features of success noted by teaching staff at the school is the professional trust that has developed over the past few years between the head teacher, senior leaders and other staff. Results of staff questionnaires say that a climate of trust and honesty exists in the school. Staff feel valued. They know their roles and responsibilities, they feel free to give honest feedback, and they are happy in their work.

Teachers say that the subtle changes that take place because of the school's work to improve teaching are sometimes the most effective. For example, after observing themselves at work, teachers began to think more carefully about how they used their support staff during lessons. When discussing elements of particular lessons, teachers remind one another of elements of training they may have forgotten, or agreed strategies that might be missing. Most importantly perhaps, teams of teachers build one another's confidence by reflecting on what they do well, then sensitively, but honestly, talk candidly about what could be better.

Professional dialogue between staff is of a very high standard. There is a culture of exploration as they embrace the purposes of Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015) into their current curriculum and prepare for the challenges of a new curriculum. Teachers and support staff embrace new ideas, are willing to try new approaches, and are confident that they have senior leaders' support to do so. For example, teachers felt that they were not doing enough to build on pupils' oracy skills to engage them in learning. To address this, one teacher set a group of disengaged, but able Year 3 boys the task of planning, writing, creating and filming a television magazine programme. Senior leaders supported this approach by engaging specialist outside providers to help pupils to do the filming and recording and to work alongside teachers to develop their skills to make activities like this a sustainable feature of the school's work. Similarly, support staff know that senior leaders value their opinions and listen to requests for specific support. For example, a recent survey of support staff revealed some gaps in their digital competency, so the ICT co-ordinators tailored sessions for support staff that met their needs precisely.

Pupils recognise that their voice matters in the work and life of the school. They contribute effectively to school self-evaluation, collaborate with teachers to set their own targets and have opportunities to make suggestions about how and what they learn.

Next steps as identified by the school

The headteacher and deputy headteacher feel that the school has now reached a strong point in its improvement journey. There are no current plans to introduce new strategies, but improvement planning focuses on consolidating and sharing the good practice that exists across the school to ensure consistency.

Sketty Primary School

Context

Sketty Primary School is in Swansea. There are currently 472 pupils on roll from 3 to 11 years old, taught in 15 classes. Of these, 54 attend part-time in the nursery.

Around 5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Many pupils are white British. A few pupils speak English as an additional language and no pupil speaks Welsh at home.

The school identifies around 8% of its pupils as having additional learning needs. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Very few pupils are looked after by the local authority.

Since 2012, the school has had three different substantive headteachers as well as brief periods when an acting headteacher was responsible for the school's leadership. The school's current headteacher took up the post in September 2017.

Strategy and action

Following the core inspection of 2015, the school needed to work strategically to address all recommendations. Leaders realised that the unsatisfactory judgement for teaching made this the key priority for improvement. In particular, leaders were acutely aware of the need to address issues of inconsistency in the quality of teaching across the school. These issues included ineffective planning in a minority of classes. This meant that in too many instances, pupils did not build on their prior learning effectively because they were receiving lessons that did not contain activities with the right level of challenge. There was also too much variability in the quality of feedback to pupils, which meant that they did not understand well enough how to improve their work. Processes for ensuring the accuracy of teachers' assessments were not rigorous. Leaders set out a plan for improvement.

The school amended its staffing structure and redefined the responsibilities of leaders. It made sure that these roles supported the school in achieving its strategic aims, which at this stage were the inspection recommendations. For example, leaders became responsible for carrying out lesson observations, scrutinising pupils' work and giving professional feedback to teachers under their direct line management.

Initially, senior leaders worked with members of staff who needed support as part of a buddy system. This enabled colleagues to start to visit each other's classrooms to share practice. At this point, it was important for the school to develop a shared understanding of what good teaching looked like. They began to use the regional consortium's teaching toolkit. Senior leaders worked in pairs to observe lessons. This was helpful in supporting senior leaders to have professional dialogue about aspects of teaching practice and to arrive at agreed judgements about the quality of teaching. This practice was also effective in laying the foundations for teachers to become reflective practitioners.

During the follow-up visit in May 2016, inspectors noted that, ‘School leaders have used regular, systematic monitoring of lessons, undertaken internally and by the regional consortium, to identify strengths and areas for development in the work of individual teachers. They have used guidance and training from the local authority and regional consortium well to increase the range of teaching approaches and to develop the capacity of staff to reflect critically on their own teaching.’ However, for a few staff, the constant pressure of judgements and the very wide range of expectations within the teaching framework proved daunting. They saw this more as an affirmation of what they were not good at doing. More recently, leaders have acknowledged this, for example by using non-judgmental lesson observations that focus on identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

To develop consistency of expectation and practice, senior leaders undertook shared book scrutiny work with their ‘buddies’. This was helpful, for example in addressing inconsistencies in written feedback to pupils. It enabled staff to evaluate whether they were working in accordance with the school’s policy. Over time, the school has developed this practice further by using additional strategies, such as marking in different coloured pens to identify strengths and areas for improvement and by leaving a blank page alongside an initial draft for pupils to respond to marking. The challenge presented by teachers’ marking and the target setting arrangements now helps pupils to make progress in line with their needs and stage of development. Across the school, pupils understand and respond well to these systems.

The school re-launched the use of other assessment for learning strategies that had faded over time. These included regular opportunities for pupils to talk with partners, for example to discuss prior learning.

At the same time as introducing the teaching framework, the school identified the need to visit high performing schools to observe effective practice. Teachers went to schools for focused visits. They worked on effective strategies to use assessment information to plan next steps for learning that meet pupils’ needs successfully. They introduced this practice well in classes. For example, when planning to teach pupils to write for different purposes, teachers use books from the previous year as a starting point. This enables teachers and pupils to pick up from the appropriate starting point by identifying what they did well, for example in their last piece of recount writing and what they needed to improve upon next time. Over time, teachers have taken this approach further by introducing a useful child-friendly target setting process to support continuity and progression in learning. This practice gives pupils a voice in assessing their own work against specific criteria and in identifying how they can improve further. All teachers now keep the impact of this work under review to continue to ensure consistency and to share practice, for instance in phase meetings where different departments meet to evaluate their work.

The school has developed a sound understanding of foundation phase pedagogy. Staff implement this consistently in their daily work. They ensure that in most sessions there is a suitable balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities. Teachers make effective use of direct teaching strategies, for example, to teach early writing skills. Staff now plan learning activities in areas of continuous provision well and generally enhance these areas appropriately with resources that capture pupils’ interests. The school has developed useful resources to teach pupils in the

outdoors. Worthwhile training opportunities for support staff have strengthened their questioning skills and improved their capacity to intervene in and enhance pupils' learning at appropriate points.

The school has developed the capacity of staff to use specific schemes well, for example to teach pupils early reading skills and to develop pupils' understanding of different genres of writing. Initially, the school used these as a tool to support consistency. However, it is beginning to make more discerning use of these resources. For example, teachers are starting to use them when needed rather than as a 'one size fits all' approach.

Outcomes

The school's internal monitoring arrangements identify that, in combination, this work has improved the quality of teaching so that many lessons are good or better. The school judges that now, there is no teaching of an unsatisfactory standard.

There is a shared understanding of what constitutes good teaching and staff respond well to high expectations.

Strategic decisions, such as staff working as buddies and the introduction of phase meetings, have supported the staff to develop a culture of reflection and sharing.

The school is building well on these foundations. The new headteacher has developed a strong team ethos in a very short time. Subtle strategies, such as the competition to produce a design for classroom doors, have helped generate a team ethos and healthy competition. She has changed the staffing structure to increase leadership capacity, for instance by introducing teaching and learning responsibility posts. She is empowering the senior leadership team and teachers to reflect on successes in improving teaching and to secure further improvements. For example, she has introduced a new system of video observations sensitively in a supportive and non-threatening way. Overall, staff are positive about this development. They are keen to reflect on their own professional practice against a published teaching toolkit to identify strengths and areas for development. There is a strong sense of ownership and optimism among leaders and teachers in relation to how the quality of teaching will improve further from this point.

The school has already begun to use the recently published national professional standards for teaching and leadership. It uses these appropriately to support wider curriculum reform, for instance to embed the 12 pedagogical principles from *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015) in its work. There are many instances of this, for example, the school collaborated with an external provider to improve foundation phase pedagogy. This led to bespoke on-site coaching for staff. Staff found this beneficial in developing their continuous and enhanced provision and in improving the skills of teaching assistants to use these areas with pupils. For instance, during numeracy activities, teaching assistants were finding it difficult to develop pupils' numeracy skills. Through coaching and support, they have developed a 'golden numeracy thread' of the week, which builds on skills that pupils have developed the previous week in direct teaching activities. Leaders have worked collaboratively with community partners to plan learning experiences in authentic contexts such as a

project to make, market and sell soap. These opportunities combine many areas of learning effectively and challenge pupils at the right level. The introduction of the *Dw i'n meddwl bod* (I think that) has helped develop pupils' Welsh and English language skills. It has also deepened pupils' capacity to think and articulate their feelings about issues and to develop creative skills, for example by responding to a challenge to develop a new chocolate bar for Willy Wonka and to describe the powers it may hold.

Next steps as identified by the school

- Develop the culture of reflective practice further through the use of video technology
- Strengthen the capacity of senior leaders as observers of teaching so that they can provide the right support to individual teachers with different professional needs to help them improve
- Build on the initial use of the professional standards for teaching and leadership to support improved teaching pedagogy and to enable effective curriculum reform
- Improve provision to develop pupils' digital skills

Solva Community Primary School

Context

Solva Community Primary School is in the village of Solva in Pembrokeshire. Around 70 full-time pupils attend the school, and a further six pupils attend nursery. Most pupils are white British and 4% of pupils speak Welsh at home.

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 4%. The school identifies that approximately 20% of pupils have additional learning needs.

The headteacher has been in post since April 2005. At the time of the inspection, the school had four-mixed age classes. Full-time teachers taught three of these classes. The headteacher and a part-time teacher shared responsibility for the other class. The headteacher had a teaching commitment of four days a week. The school is now organised into three mixed-age classes. Full time permanent teachers, two of whom have joined the school since the inspection, now teach all classes. The headteacher no longer has responsibility for teaching a class. Since September 2017, the headteacher has become the temporary executive headteacher of another local school as well as being the headteacher of Solva Community Primary School.

Solva Community Primary School will close on 31 August 2018. On 1 September 2018, the school will become part of a new Church in Wales school for pupils aged 3 to 16. Two other local schools, Ysgol Dewi Sant and Ysgol Bro Dewi will also be part of the all age school. The new school will operate on the three existing sites.

Strategy and action

After the core inspection, the headteacher offered to resign. However, both the governing body and local authority offered their full support and the headteacher remained in post. From the outset, the headteacher and staff were very honest with governors, parents and pupils about the improvements needed and their determination to turn the school around. This determination and the headteacher's willingness to seek out and listen to advice is the cornerstone of the school's improvement journey.

The headteacher took time to reflect on the outcomes of the inspection and realised that she needed to make her high expectations more explicit, delegate more widely and hold teachers to account better in order to build a more professional and stronger team. Previously, many of the school's processes were quite informal and leaders did not always check well enough that staff carried out agreed action points. This meant that agreements reached about strategies to improve planning and the quality of teaching did not happen consistently in all classes.

With the advice of her challenge adviser, and support from Estyn during the post inspection action plan visit, the headteacher wrote a clear action plan of how she and her staff would address the recommendations. The plan delegated appropriate responsibilities across the teaching staff. The monthly schedule that ran alongside

the plan included relevant information on timescales for activities, such as training, monitoring, the focus of meetings and deadlines for reports on progress. This schedule provided staff with well-defined timescales for actions and clear lines of accountability for their areas of responsibility and those of their colleagues. After discussion, all staff signed the action plan and schedule and the headteacher amended job descriptions to reflect the new responsibilities and her higher level of expectation in terms of teachers fulfilling a wider role than just in their own classroom. The headteacher also produced a booklet about the role of the subject co-ordinator, making her expectations about the role explicit and providing teachers with useful guidance. This greater sharing of responsibility led to stronger collaborative working between teachers and a much sharper focus on pedagogy and learning. All meetings now follow a standard format and focus well on the school's core business of improving learning and teaching. All teachers engage in open and honest dialogue about what is working well and what needs to happen next. The governing body is involved fully in evaluating all aspects of the work of the school.

The local authority and regional consortium supported the school well in helping teachers to improve their practice. The local authority funded two teachers from other schools for five days each to work alongside the foundation phase teachers to improve their understanding of the principles of the phase. This support led to improvements in teachers' practice and developed the continuous and enhanced provision for pupils. Regional and local advisory teachers also provided valuable support. For example, the advisory teacher for numeracy helped teachers to plan for meaningful numeracy across the curriculum. She also provided twilight sessions for teachers to learn about effective strategies and methodologies for teaching mathematics. This has led to greater consistency in the way that teachers plan and teach mathematics and better continuity and progression for pupils. The wide range of development opportunities improved teacher confidence in delivering subject specific lessons and planning for literacy, numeracy and ICT across the curriculum. It has also given teachers the confidence to work together to plan exciting and creative learning experiences for pupils. For example, teachers plan jointly with the local amateur dramatic group and fire service to deliver the World War 2 day where an 'unexploded bomb' appeared on the school field. Experiences such as these engage pupils fully in their learning and encourage teachers to enjoy their teaching and to have fun too.

Over the last two years, the school has placed greater emphasis on improving teaching through sharing teaching practices both within and outside the school. Teachers now have two opportunities a year to observe each other on an agreed theme. One of the teachers teaches the lesson while the other two observe and make notes on the quality of learning and standards. The teachers use the lesson observation proformas provided by the regional consortium to inform their discussions after the lessons. However, using these proformas for peer observations may stifle fruitful discussion and there is a risk that the exercise becomes more of ticking boxes to congratulate colleagues rather than discussing the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Also, ticking all the required boxes does not necessarily mean the lesson is good or that the teaching has enough impact on pupils' learning. Teachers feel that the proformas have provided a useful starting point for peer observation. The headteacher in partnership with the challenge adviser carries out one formal lesson observation a year. Notes made alongside the lesson observation

proforma demonstrate that these observations provide clear feedback to teachers on strengths in teaching and the next steps they need to take to improve. Outcomes from lesson observations feed appropriately into individual performance management targets.

The recently qualified teacher at the school receives a good level of support from the school mentor and other colleagues. During her first year of teaching, she had the opportunity to attend many professional development events in addition to receiving 10% non-contact time. This meant that she had appropriate opportunities to reflect on her practice and to observe teaching in her own and other schools.

The two experienced teachers have both taken part in triads, working with teachers from two other schools. One triad explored ways of developing Welsh language skills through cross-curricular activities and the other considered how to develop numeracy across the curriculum. These triads took the format of a joint planning session for the three teachers involved where they agreed the focus of the lessons. Teachers then planned their own lessons based on the theme and the teachers from the other schools came to observe. They repeated this format in all three schools. Involvement in the triads gave the teachers time to reflect on their practice and to share ideas with and learn from other professionals.

The headteacher of the local secondary school, Ysgol Dewi Sant, has been appointed to lead the new all age school. He has devised a programme for the teachers in the three schools that will form the new school. This programme provides good opportunities for teachers in all three schools to engage in a ten-hour research project either working independently or with other teachers in any of the schools. The headteacher of Ysgol Dewi Sant consulted the headteachers in Solva Community Primary School and Ysgol Bro Dewi about the programme and its intended outcomes. Both have agreed to introduce the programme to their staff and link the independent research project to individual performance management targets. Staff will have to evidence the ten hours they have worked on their project. The aim of the programme is to involve all teachers in action research. The outcome is not the driving factor; it is more about teachers having the experience of undertaking an enquiry and having opportunities to work across schools and phases.

Solva Community Primary School's development priorities continue to focus on improving teachers' pedagogy. Targets for this academic year include aiming for excellence in teaching in all classes and preparing staff for the new curriculum by developing practice in line with the pedagogical principles.

Outcomes

The school has made very good progress since its core inspection. Leaders and teachers have high expectations about the quality of teaching. Meetings focus well on improving quality and all staff take responsibility for improving teaching across the school not just in their own classrooms. Teachers' confidence in their own practice and their willingness to try out new ideas and share their practice have grown considerably. The school is now more outward facing and acts readily on advice and practice seen in other schools. The local authority recognises that a few of aspects

of the school's practices are highly effective and has asked the school to share its approach with other schools.

Next steps as identified by the school

- Embed peer observation
- Explore and discuss the 12 pedagogical principles that underpin the new curriculum
- Give teachers the opportunity to take part in independent research projects
- Work closely with the other schools that will form the new school to ensure continuity and consistency of pedagogy and practice

King Henry VIII Comprehensive School

Context

King Henry VIII Comprehensive School is a mixed 11-19 school in Abergavenny, Monmouthshire with 950 pupils on roll, 155 of which are in sixth form. Around 11% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that around 27% of pupils have additional learning needs. Most pupils come from a white British background, and 1% of pupils speak Welsh at home.

The headteacher took up her post in September 2014, just a few months before the Estyn inspection and after a period of instability in the school at senior leadership level. Although the inspection team did not leave a specific recommendation on teaching, it was clear to the headteacher that the school would not make progress against its recommendations without a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum and other professional learning.

Strategy and action

On her first day at the school, the new headteacher communicated to all staff her vision for the school as one in which every pupil received the best possible education available, regardless of their background or gender. To achieve this, she was clear that teaching and learning needed to be at the heart of everything the school did. Improving teaching required a resolute focus on developing the capacity of leaders across the school to establish robust self-evaluation processes that linked well to improvement planning and informed a meaningful programme of effective professional learning for staff.

The headteacher also shared the draft school improvement plan with staff on that day, which identified a number of priorities to improve the quality of teaching in the school. These included:

- establishing a whole-school teaching and learning structure to share and develop best practice
- establishing consistent approaches to formative assessment across the school
- ensuring that all lessons provided appropriate challenge for pupils
- establishing networks of professional practice with a clear focus on improving pupil outcomes and reducing in-school variation

The school undertook a number of actions immediately to address these priorities. For example, leaders established networks of professional practice to address aspects of practice that they had identified as areas for development in the school's previous round of teaching and learning observations. In the first year, all teaching staff participated in networks of professional practice that focused on literacy,

numeracy, group and pair work, effective questioning, self and peer assessment, marking, assessment and feedback, or planning for differentiation and challenge. As part of this work, the school introduced teaching and learning briefings to enable the dissemination of the most effective strategies researched by members during the year.

The school also undertook a systematic review of its key policies to support the development of consistent practice across the school. For example, the marking, assessment and feedback network reviewed the school's assessment policy. Senior and middle leaders worked together to construct the school's teaching and learning policy. Out of these discussions, the school's key strategy to identify and develop good practice in teaching and learning across the school took shape, namely the development of a whole-school peer review programme.

The school introduced the first cycle of the whole-school peer review programme between September 2015 and June 2017. It has proved effective in improving the quality of self-evaluation at the school, raising the quality of teaching and driving sustained improvements in pupil outcomes.

The peer review programme aims to evaluate standards of teaching and learning across the school through a focus on the experience of a small group of selected pupils. Each peer review focuses on a sample of six pupils across the ability range from a particular year group. A further peer review samples a group of pupils with additional learning needs from across the school.

For each peer review, senior and middle leaders work together to evaluate the progress these pupils make based on evidence from a wide range of relevant sources. This includes a robust analysis of progress data, interviews with pupils, auditing schemes of learning, scrutiny of pupils' work and lesson observations. This joint working has enabled senior leaders to challenge and support middle leaders' evaluation of the quality of provision and standards achieved by pupils much more effectively. Over time, it has led to the development of much greater consistency in the work of senior and middle leaders across the school.

Senior leaders collate the outcomes from each peer review and share them with staff and governors. The peer review report provides a detailed evaluation of the strengths and areas for development in terms of pupils' progress and standards in each year group. Crucially, it also provides an analysis of how effectively teaching is supporting pupils' progress and how consistently teachers are addressing whole-school areas for development in their teaching. For example, in the first cycle, this included information about how well teachers had provided opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills or on the quality of assessment and feedback.

At the end of each year, senior leaders summarise evidence from all peer reviews in a final annual report, giving comprehensive information based on the observations of all staff and the experience of more than 13% of pupils across the school. As a result, leaders have rich information about the strengths and areas of development in teaching to inform the planning of professional learning activities. A further level of analysis is available for leaders of subject areas, enabling them to evaluate the performance of their own department against benchmarks for the whole school and to plan priorities for development within their own department.

Leaders use the information provided by the peer review programme effectively to plan purposeful professional learning opportunities for staff. As well as ensuring that these address whole-school training needs, the school uses the information from peer reviews to ensure they meet the individual needs of teachers at different stages of their careers. This includes coaching and mentoring for teachers who need to improve aspects of their practice, as well as facilitating opportunities for staff to improve skills relevant to the specialism they teach. A few teachers benefit from valuable opportunities to acquire higher-level qualifications in educational practice or leadership and management. In addition, the school's role as a pioneer school for the curriculum since January 2017 has ensured that teachers have increasing opportunities to develop their knowledge through their involvement in wider networks of professional practice.

A key feature of the school's approach to professional learning has been ensuring that staff have had suitable opportunities to work collaboratively across departments at all stages of the school's improvement journey. Leaders plan professional learning days well to enable teachers to lead or participate in professional learning communities, and to work together on whole-school work scrutiny activities. This has ensured valuable opportunities for staff across departments to work together, share best practice and reflect on subject-based approaches, as well as helping to build capacity for leadership through the school.

Outcomes

The school's peer review programme has enabled the school to strengthen significantly the skills and capacity of middle leaders through their involvement in a comprehensive range of self-evaluation activities that focus clearly on the relationship between effective teaching and pupil progress. It has provided school leaders with a clear sense of the school's strengths and areas for development, and allowed them to plan professional learning activities to address these.

In June 2016, the school was judged to have made sufficient progress against its recommendations and was removed from the category of schools in need of significant improvement. The inspection team noted in its report that the school has developed regular and systematic monitoring of teaching and assessment through focused book scrutiny and lesson observations.

It also noted that the school has implemented a comprehensive range of strategies to support the development of leaders. This includes targeted coaching and mentoring for individual leaders, and planned involvement in the school's professional learning communities. The improvements in the quality of leadership and management have contributed to suitable progress in most performance indicators at key stage 3 and key stage 4, and in improving provision for developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.

Since the core inspection, pupils' performance has improved considerably in comparison with similar schools. In 2017, performance in most indicators at key stage 4 placed the school in the upper half of similar schools based on pupils' eligibility for free school meals (Welsh Government, 2017c).

Next steps as identified by the school

As the school plans the next steps in its improvement journey, staff have also played a key role in reviewing the first round of the peer review programme and recommending changes to its focus and remit. For example, the second cycle of the programme will no longer consider year groups in isolation from each other, but look at two year groups together to focus on transition and progression between year groups and key stages. In addition, lesson observations will no longer give individual judgements for lessons or teachers, but will focus on the impact of teaching on learning to inform more precisely, the school's strategic planning to improve both these areas.

Tonypandy Community College

Context

Tonypandy Community College is a mixed 11 to 19 community school serving the town of Tonypandy and its surrounding area in Rhondda Cynon Taf. There are 619 pupils on roll, of which around 90 are in the sixth form. Since the last inspection, the overall number of pupils in the school has fallen by around 200 pupils. This is largely because the sixth form is being phased out as part of the local authority reorganisation. Tonypandy Community College is due to close and a new 3-16 school will replace it on the current site in September 2018.

Many of the school's pupils come from the nearby villages of Cwmclydach, Llwynypia and Penygraig. Around 28% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Most pupils come from a white British background, and a very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

The school identifies that around 21% of pupils have additional learning needs.

At the time of this thematic visit, an acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, both of whom were members of the school's senior leadership team during the core inspection, lead the school.

Strategy and action

Senior leaders in Tonypandy Community College consider that their improvement journey began shortly after Estyn placed the college in special measures. After the inspection, school leaders reviewed their self-evaluation activities and judgements. They reached a clearer understanding of strengths and areas for development across the college, which allowed them to set more sharply focused priorities for action. One of the most urgent priorities was to improve teaching across the college, and, in particular, to make more explicit the link between the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes.

The post inspection action plan prioritised teaching and learning, with a particular focus on a few key aspects such as questioning, setting objectives and success criteria.

In addition, leaders recognised that staff wellbeing was key to creating a culture in which to improve. They ensured that all staff had the training to underpin the improvements expected, and that they knew how to access additional support and guidance. For example, many staff took part in personal development activities, such as attending mindfulness courses.

To improve communication and distribute leadership more effectively senior leaders clarified and refined their own and middle leaders' roles and responsibilities. Over time, faculty leaders took more of a role in monitoring and evaluating the impact of the work, as well as supporting their colleagues.

Leaders reviewed the teaching and learning policy and staff handbook to ensure that their expectations around classroom practice were clear. They also produced a toolkit that outlined these expectations in detail, and gave guidelines on how to apply a range of teaching and assessment strategies. A few staff took part in a consortium led teaching programme. However, the college soon decided that it was gaining more from focusing on a few clearly articulated expectations for all teachers rather than having staff attend external events.

Leaders built up a clearer picture of strengths and areas for development across the college through more robust and accurate observations. This enabled them to arrange more relevant and, in some cases, bespoke professional learning activities.

One of the activities that the college considers to have had most impact is the use of video technology. This enabled individual teachers to consider and reflect on their own practice, and to have an opportunity to share and discuss their teaching with other colleagues. Each faculty had a trained 'champion' to support this activity, and to date most teachers have used the technology to reflect on their own practice. In a few cases, the senior leader with responsibility for teaching and learning used the facility very beneficially to provide direct coaching through an earpiece. All teachers that took part in the direct coaching activities improved aspects of their practice rapidly and have sustained these improvements.

Along with visits to other schools, and opportunities to observe each other, the culture in the college has become more collaborative. Teachers talk about an open door policy and value the learning culture that is now more prevalent.

In preparation for the move to a 3-16 school, the cluster has worked more closely together. Collaborative curriculum planning has been a rich opportunity for teachers to share practice in how teachers can best support pupil progress and to agree how best to develop pupils' knowledge and skills. Teachers are enthusiastic about these professional learning experiences as they have encouraged and supported cross phase work.

Outcomes

Nearly all staff participate in and engage well in the professional learning opportunities offered. Teachers are enthusiastic about the opportunities they have to innovate and develop their skills. Many now feel more able and confident to take risks and try new techniques.

Most pupils feel that teaching has improved. They know what to expect in lessons and feel they are more involved in their learning. They feel listened to through pupil forums, and think that the college responds to their feedback.

The college's greater emphasis on good classroom practice has led to improvements in teaching and pupil outcomes. For example, in 2017, around 45% of Year 11 pupils achieved the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics. This is around a 15 percentage point increase on the results at the time the core inspection (Welsh Government, 2017c).

Next steps as identified by the college

As the college is preparing for closure, it will continue to work on its existing priorities prior to becoming part of the new 3-16 school.

Case studies of schools that have improved their teaching and come out of Estyn monitoring

Neyland Community Primary School

Context

Neyland Community School is in Neyland in Pembrokeshire. Currently 333 pupils attend the school, 52 of whom attend the nursery. The school is organised into five mixed-age and six single-age classes. Nearly all pupils are of white British ethnicity.

Around 18% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that over 40% of pupils have additional learning needs. No pupils speak Welsh at home

The headteacher has been in post since September 2006. Two of the three other members of the leadership team and most teaching staff who were in post at the time of the inspection continue to work at the school.

Strategy and action

The senior leadership team agree that the findings of the inspection team came as a shock initially, but they were determined to make the improvements necessary. All agree that the recommendations helped the school to focus on the most important areas and enabled them to say no to initiatives that, although interesting, were not right for the school's stage of development. Leaders reflect that they had previously been trying to do too many things at once and this had led to a lack of consistency and embedding of agreed practices.

Leaders recognise that at the time of the inspection a lack of consistency across and between year groups was an issue. After the inspection, the leadership team constructed a list of non-negotiables for general classroom routines and for the six recommendations. These non-negotiables were what they expected to see in all classes. At staff meetings, teachers discussed the non-negotiables and had good opportunities to feed into the process. The non-negotiables have evolved as teachers have trialled new practices. For example, the school found that one of the original non-negotiables around feedback and marking was too complicated and cumbersome for teachers and pupils. In a few cases, teachers were spending more time writing comments than pupils had taken to complete the work. This led to teacher discussions about the purpose of marking and feedback and an agreement from all teachers to have meaningful conversations with pupils about how they can improve their work. Teachers also agreed a marking code that all classes use consistently and importantly, pupils understand. Through whole staff discussion, teachers reached a consensus that marking should always be meaningful and that the quality of the feedback to pupils was more important than the quantity. School leaders follow-up well on how marking helps to improve pupils' understanding by conducting work scrutiny with pupils and asking them how the comments of their teacher and peers help them to produce better work.

The non-negotiables have evolved into a learning charter that the school revisits each half term. Prior to the learning charter meetings, leaders carry out a range of self-evaluation activities linked to the priorities and agreements in the charter. These activities include work scrutiny with pupils, listening to learners, governor feedback and lesson observations. Minutes from staff meetings demonstrate clearly how leaders follow-up on all monitoring activities and provide staff with honest feedback and clear next steps. Leaders take the time to celebrate all that is going well and emphasise the progress that everyone has made.

Leaders observe every teacher every term against an agreed charter priority. The school uses the proforma from the regional consortium for assessing the quality of teaching and learning. When leaders first introduced regular formal lesson observations, teachers saw the observation more as a performance and felt they were under the spotlight. Leaders state that using the consortium proforma has helped teachers and themselves rethink the purpose of lesson observations. They now focus more clearly on the impact of teaching on pupil outcomes rather than on the teacher as an individual. After each observation, the teacher receives brief oral feedback. The senior leader writes up the observation notes and meets with the teacher for an in-depth professional dialogue about pupils' standards, the teacher's contribution to charter priorities, areas of strength in teaching and any further development or support needed. Senior leaders meet after the round of lesson observations to pull together whole school strengths and areas for development as well as progress toward the charter priorities. They report their findings honestly and openly to staff. For example, discussions around lesson observations identified pace as an area for development as pupils stated that they had to listen too much before doing anything. Teachers introduced the 'ten second rule' to try to ensure that they engage pupils actively throughout the lesson and do not become embroiled in lengthy explanations. Lesson observations also started a discussion about differentiation as leaders felt that although most teachers differentiated activities they were not always considering well enough the starting points of the pupils in the class. These discussions led to teacher agreement about how to differentiate activities and the importance of having frequent check-ins with pupils to understand how well they are coping with the demands of the lesson. Senior leaders undertake most lesson observations.

At the time of the inspection, the senior leadership team consisted of a headteacher, deputy headteacher and two senior teachers. After the secondment of one of the senior teachers, the headteacher extended an invitation to four members of the teaching staff to sit in on and participate in senior leader meetings. These middle leaders now take responsibility for projects such as lesson study, mastery maths, continuous and enhanced foundation phase provision and moderation. This has distributed leadership and responsibility well across the school and has improved the professional learning opportunities for these aspiring leaders.

Leaders know their staff well. They have moved at a pace that staff are comfortable with and have involved staff in many important decisions around what the school should do to achieve consistency and grow its professional practice. Three teachers explored and trialled the lesson study approach last year. They are building their experience of the approach during the autumn and spring terms of 2017/2018 with the plan of coaching Year 5 and Year 6 teachers in the methodology in the summer

term. Leaders check constantly that what they are doing is right for their school and are not afraid to stop doing something if it is not working for their teachers or pupils. The school is just beginning to introduce peer observations, as previously not all teachers were comfortable with this activity. Feedback from the first round of peer observations was positive with teachers mostly welcoming the opportunity to share their practice. Senior leaders and a few teachers have had the opportunity to observe practice in other schools.

The headteacher recently undertook an audit about perceptions of professional development in the school. She ranked the school as emerging, bronze, silver or gold against a range of statements and questions about the school's current approach to staff development. The questions focused on topics, such as whether there is a clear vision for effective professional development, the role of leaders in modelling good professional development, how comfortable are staff in sharing their practice and how well the school supports staff to grow and develop their professional practice. Leaders have used the outcomes from the audit to inform a priority in the school development plan. Targets against the priority include engaging teachers in longer-term professional learning activities rather than attending one off courses or events and for staff to participate in whole school or phase development activities. The school has already started this phase of its journey by buying in an external provider to lead a staff development day on what makes excellent teaching. This day encouraged staff to think about their practice and to share ideas and methodologies. After this day, and the ensuing professional discussions, staff amended the learning charter to reflect that their lessons would contain a series of mini plenaries to check pupils' understanding and offer more frequent opportunities for pupils to influence how and what they learn. Teachers in Year 3 and Year 4 have all attended the same four-day professional development course on how to engage pupils in co-operative learning. The course, joint fortnightly after-school planning sessions and co-operative learning as the focus of the lesson study trial have led to a consistent approach across these classes and a greater focus on pupils' social and communication skills and their emotional wellbeing. Teachers have worked together to think about, for example, how the organisation of their classrooms and their questioning leads to greater levels of co-operation and reduced anxiety for pupils.

Outcomes

The school now ensures that:

- Monitoring activities lead to clear actions
- Leaders have a much better understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in their school
- All staff now take responsibility for the practice in their classes
- There are greater levels of consistency, particularly in marking and feedback
- The whole school considers the impact of teaching on learning
- Staff are more confident to take part in peer observations
- The school distributes leadership more effectively
- Staff have greater opportunities to develop professionally and learn together

Next steps as identified by the school:

- Provide more opportunities for and embedding of peer observation
- Consider the financial implications of rolling out the lesson study approach across the school if it proves successful
- Make more use of research to inform practice, including staff taking part in action research projects
- Become more external facing and arrange for more staff to visit other providers to share and see other good practice
- Develop the capacity of staff to reflect on their practice and against the new professional standards

St. George Church in Wales Primary School

Context

St George Church in Wales Primary School is in the small village of St George, near Abergele in Conwy. Currently 61 pupils attend the school, six of whom attend nursery on a part-time basis. The school is organised into three mixed-age classes. Most pupils are of white British ethnicity. A few pupils speak English as an additional language.

Around 17% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that 22% of pupils have additional learning needs.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2010. He has a teaching commitment of at least two and a half days each week. The school's leadership team consists of the headteacher and a teacher with a part-time teaching and learning responsibility.

Strategy and action

The headteacher used the 2015 inspection outcomes as a catalyst for improvement. In the first instance, he identified the need for the school to become more outward looking to find and adopt approaches that would improve teaching and learning. Staff began to visit local schools identified as having good standards of teaching. Over a period of about eight weeks, teachers visited other schools to observe lessons, to identify good practice and to work on planning for pupils of different abilities. At the same time, the school adopted a 'teaching charter'. This continuum of descriptors of teaching helped teachers to understand what good practice might look like within their classrooms. They were able to identify many of the traits of good practice cited in the charter through their observations of and work with their partner school. These measures were effective in raising teachers' expectations of their work, in supporting them to reflect on their own practice and in bringing levels of consistency to the quality of teaching. For example, the follow-up report of 2016 noted that *'all teachers use consistent approaches, such as sharing learning intentions with pupils at the beginning of lessons and useful plenaries at the end of each session'*. As a result of raised expectations and a developing awareness of pedagogical approaches, most teachers now use a suitable range of assessment for learning strategies successfully. For example, foundation phase pupils now identify well strengths and areas for improvement in their own work and the work of others through verbal feedback and by using a traffic light grading system.

The school's leaders used inspection recommendations about aspects of their leadership to improve teaching further. For example, they improved self-evaluation processes and began to make effective use of the performance management of staff. Leaders started to involve all staff in monitoring activities. These activities included a scrutiny of pupils' books to evaluate how well feedback helped pupils to improve their work. These activities informed professional development for all staff, for example by looking at effective marking from other schools. Leaders drove this forward by

setting a performance management target for all staff of improving the quality of marking and feedback for pupils. In 2016, inspectors identified that *'arrangements for marking and feedback to pupils are effective and help pupils to understand what they have done well and what they need to do to improve further'*. These were important team building activities that supported the staff to understand the collective role they had in accelerating pupils' progress and the importance of helping each other.

Staff have developed this team ethos successfully to share planning. Collectively they plan pupils' learning experiences using the HWB digital learning platform. This is effective in enabling all staff to view each other's planning, for example to see how colleagues are catering for the needs of pupils of differing abilities.

Leaders are now beginning to make effective use of lesson observations to identify strengths and areas for improvement in teaching. These observations draw on the characteristics of effective practice set out in the teaching charter. They include suitable evaluations of the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. However, at this stage in the school's journey, the headteacher tends to carry out these observations with the support of challenge advisers. Other teachers at the school are not yet involved in formal lesson observations. The school has not yet reached the stage of setting bespoke individual targets for teachers based on an in depth analysis of their strengths and areas for development. Currently, lesson observations tend to revolve around the performance management process and do not feature as an ongoing strategy to promote professional growth.

Teachers receive useful additional professional development opportunities to improve aspects of their work. For example, training to use specific approaches to develop pupils' talking and writing skills is effective. In combination with other improvement initiatives such as developments to marking and feedback, this training has a positive impact on pupils' progress. Training to improve the understanding of and capacity to implement foundation phase pedagogy has had a positive impact overall. The school now ensures that there is a suitable balance of opportunities for pupils to learn through play and experiences as well as a good range of adult-led activities. In combination, this provision enables pupils to acquire, develop and apply their skills appropriately.

School leaders are building on recent improvements to build momentum for wider pedagogical changes. This supports the national agenda for curriculum reform appropriately. For example, leaders organise professional learning activities aimed at developing pupils as resilient learners and encourage staff to take greater advantage of digital resources to support pupils' learning. The school continues to work with partners to collaborate effectively, for instance to plan authentic real-life learning experiences, such as 'Fairtrade' events.

Outcomes

- The school has made strong progress since its most recent inspection in improving the quality of teaching and in implementing foundation phase pedagogy

- The school has developed a shared understanding of what constitutes good teaching
- Staff collaborate successfully and make good use of professional learning opportunities to improve their practice
- The quality of teaching ensures that many pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- The school is using and developing a suitable range of approaches to keep the quality of teaching under review
- Leaders show the capacity to improve teaching at a whole-school level

Next steps as identified by the school

- Further develop the school's capacity to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching independently
- Continue to use first-hand evidence to identify aspects of teaching that require improvement at whole school level
- Use the analysis of evidence of the quality of teaching to set individual improvement targets for teachers that reflect their individual needs as professional learners.
- Develop arrangements for teachers to reflect on the progress they have made against improvement goals

Llswerry High School

Context

Llswerry High School is an English-medium, 11-19 mixed, community school serving residential areas to the eastern side of Newport. There are around 800 pupils on roll with approximately 150 in the sixth form.

Around 31% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that around 29% of pupils have an additional learning needs and nearly 3% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

Around 23% of pupils speak English as an additional language. This is a substantially higher proportion than the local authority average. Sixteen per cent of pupils are at Welsh Government language acquisition stage A or B; a few of these pupils do not have any prior experience of education. The school has pupils from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Approximately 15% of pupils are not from a white British background. There are a very few pupils who speak Welsh at home.

The leadership team consists of the headteacher who has been in post since September 2017, a deputy headteacher who joined the school in 2013 and two assistant headteachers. The assistant head with responsibility for teaching and learning joined the school in April 2014.

Strategy and action

Over the last three years, senior and middle leaders have had a relentless focus on improving pedagogy and creating a culture of consistently high expectations for teaching and learning. Leaders have clarified and strengthened their minimum expectations of classroom practice and collective responsibilities. Leaders have provided staff with relevant and timely professional learning opportunities and have been careful not to overwhelm staff with too much change.

The school's strong evaluative culture has enabled leaders to judge strengths and areas for development honestly, and to pinpoint professional learning needs accurately.

The school has a detailed three-year plan for improving teaching. This outlines carefully planned and timely opportunities to introduce new strategies to ensure improved progress for learners. The main foci for improving teaching over the last two years have been the introduction of a pedagogical acronym to ensure pace and challenge, alongside a range of strategies to challenge the underlying beliefs about learning and predetermined intelligence. All teaching staff are clear about their collective responsibilities with regard to pedagogy and their personal accountability within the system.

All staff are members of one of the school's networks of professional learning. These networks use action enquiry to improve aspects of teaching. The networks follow the

Welsh Government guidance (Welsh Government, 2013) to ensure that they focus appropriately and can demonstrate the impact of their work. Recent networks have focused on national priorities as well as school priorities. Each network writes a report of their findings, which they share with the whole staff. Leaders take account of the outcomes of the networks' action enquiries when they review school policy and approaches. As a result of senior leaders taking the views of staff into account, they feel involved in school improvement and their professional opinion is valued.

Staff also participate in joint practice learning groups. This is peer coaching using the GROW model and also incorporates aspects of lesson study. Colleagues agree a focus, support each other as they prepare improvements and reflect on classroom practice through peer coaching. Through both learning communities and joint practice learning groups, teachers are encouraged to engage with evidence and employ proven effective practice. The range of support available to the groups includes video technology to capture lessons and a learning library with relevant publications and access to research.

The school plans its professional learning activities very carefully. Leaders ensure that staff have the necessary resources to support their learning. Evaluation is thorough and honest. All staff feel involved and know their contribution is valued. They understand their responsibility in improving their teaching. Staff discuss their involvement in these activities during performance management sessions that link to the new professional standards.

Evaluation processes include rigorous tracking and monitoring to support and challenge all staff. As a result of regular and robust self-evaluation activities, each teacher has a personal teaching and learning profile. Senior and middle leaders discuss the personal profiles in line management meetings to celebrate strengths and to identify appropriate professional learning opportunities. Staff value these as they appreciate the opportunity to talk about their practice and the bespoke nature of the precise professional learning opportunities offered. Each department also has a teaching and learning profile, which supports middle leaders to tailor their improvement plans accordingly. Teaching and learning is an agenda item in every line management and departmental meeting.

As a result of these thorough and detailed self-evaluation activities and line management discussions, the school is able to plan and map beneficial professional learning activity for the year ahead.

Outcomes

At the time of inspection in 2013, teachers were enthusiastic and had high expectations of pupils' behaviour and standards of work in only around half of lessons. In 2017, the quality of teaching has improved notably as evidenced by the outcomes of lesson observations, the scrutiny of pupils' work and by staff and pupil responses to faculty surveys about the quality of teaching and learning. Pupil outcomes have also improved for example, in 2017 the school is in the top quarter of similar schools based on pupils eligibility for free school meals for level 2 including English and mathematics (Welsh Government, 2017c).

Pupils are strongly of the view that teaching and behaviour has improved significantly during their time in the school. Teachers are highly appreciative of the professional learning activities available to them and of how the school supports their personal development successfully.

Next steps as identified by the school

- Embedding collective responsibilities for all staff borne from professional learning days and linking in particular to a growth mindset and developing oracy
- Developing learner voice through termly dialogues about teaching
- Development of looking at books in conversation with learners
- Embedding the language of the 12 pedagogical principles
- Introduce personal teaching and learning profiles for support staff (mirroring teaching staff) to enable them to take ownership of their professional learning and development

Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen

Context

Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen is a bilingual 11-19 school in Caernarfon in Gwynedd. There are 853 pupils on roll with 171 pupils in the sixth form. Overall, there are almost 100 more pupils than at the time of the core inspection in March 2016.

Approximately 16% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Almost 90% of pupils speak Welsh with their families and 92% are fluent in the language. Most pupils come from a white British background. The school identifies that around 13% of pupils have additional learning needs.

Since the core inspection, the substantive headteacher has been seconded to work in a regional consortium and the deputy headteacher has taken up the post of interim headteacher. One of the four assistant headteachers has taken up the post of interim deputy headteacher. In order to support the leadership team, four middle leaders have taken up further interim leadership responsibilities.

Strategy and action

Improving teaching is a main priority in the whole-school improvement plan, and the school states that it is trying to 'create an atmosphere that allows the school to push the boundaries of teaching and learning'. The interim headteacher's vision is for the school to be as inclusive as it possibly can. She believes strongly that all pupils deserve high quality teaching and high levels of support and guidance. In order to reflect this raised level of expectation and increased staff accountability, senior leaders amended or rewrote school policies and procedures.

All senior leaders have improving teaching and learning as one of their core responsibilities. Purposeful training has taken place to ensure senior and middle leaders understand the qualities of successful lessons. All teachers have a performance management target related to teaching. Teachers understand that they have a professional responsibility to improve aspects of their teaching in order to contribute to the whole-school vision. Governors support this priority well. They have prioritised spending to enable teachers to attend beneficial professional learning events. In return, leaders expect staff to share their learning about teaching methodologies and pedagogical issues with their colleagues, either in departmental meetings or at whole-school events.

The substantive headteacher and deputy headteacher (now the interim headteacher) identified the low expectations and lack of ambition of many pupils as a risk to the school achieving its aim of improving teaching and learning. To this end, they split each year group into two parallel bands. This enabled the school to allocate two classes to core subject teachers in each year group, if needed. Splitting year cohorts into two sets of 1, 2 and 3 instead of having sets 1-6 resulted in raising pupils' aspirations and promoting their belief in being able to reach their potential.

Senior leaders identified the need to make leadership more distributed across the school. They increased the accountability of subject middle leaders, giving them clear direction in terms of their responsibility for teaching and learning within their departments. All subject middle leaders became accountable for the quality of teaching and the consistency of marking and assessment within their subject. As a result of the increased distributed leadership, the rate of improvement and change was fast.

Most staff understood the need to improve teaching and shared the school's vision and ambition for greater consistency in the quality of teaching. A few teachers volunteered to lead pedagogical programmes to further their own learning and gain leadership experience. However, a minority of teachers were averse to radical changes in the organisation of classes and in the rapidly growing culture of self-reflection and self-improvement. A significant few were apprehensive about the pace of change. In order to reduce anxiety, the headteacher put in place practices to promote a culture of openness and sharing among staff.

The school introduced triad working which gave teachers the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues. Leaders ensured that they and other key staff were available to support the triads with the planning and delivery of lessons if needed. Leaders also arranged worthwhile opportunities for teachers to visit other schools to observe strong practitioners. Prior to senior leaders observing lessons, all teachers had the opportunity to co-plan the lesson with a peer of their choice.

Outcomes from monitoring activities showed that the pace of pupils' learning needed to improve. Leaders spent time researching successful ways to engage pupils in their learning. They shared their findings with staff, emphasising the importance of pupils being at the centre of the lesson and reducing the amount of teacher talk.

The school organised bespoke whole-school professional learning days and events, led by renowned practitioners with a successful background in change management. These strategies helped to reduce teacher anxiety and contributed to a more open culture within the school.

Due to the need to prepare for the introduction of the Digital Competence Framework (Welsh Government, 2016) the school invested heavily in improving its ICT hardware. Leaders purchased tablet computers, white boards, digital resources and specialist hardware for teachers. They provided bespoke training for staff on how to use these resources. They made explicit their expectations of how staff should use the new resources in lessons. In a comparatively short space of time, nearly all teachers have developed good practices in the use of digital technology in their lessons.

Leaders place a strong emphasis on celebrating good practice in teaching and assessment across the school. For example, after every period of work scrutiny, they produce a compendium containing examples of effective feedback and assessment.

Outcomes

Pupils reacted well to the significant change in teachers' practices and, generally, attitudes to learning across all year groups improved significantly in a short space of time. Pupils interviewed as part of this thematic review praised the changes in the quality of teaching highly. They made particular reference to teachers bringing the learning alive through interesting and engaging tasks that enabled them to think things through themselves.

In a relatively short period, the school has succeeded in improving the quality of teaching across the school. Nearly all teachers have enthusiastically approached the school's priority to 'push the boundaries of teaching and learning'. As a result of this new and ambitious drive for improvement, performance at key stage 4 has continued to be at least good for the third year running and standards of wellbeing have improved considerably over the same period.

Next steps as identified by the school

The school will continue to embed the practices introduced to ensure maximum collaboration and co-operation between staff.

Ysgol Uwchradd Aberteifi

Context

Ysgol Uwchradd Aberteifi is a bilingual 11-19 school situated in the coastal town of Aberteifi in Ceredigion. The school serves pupils from the town and the surrounding rural catchment area. There were 534 pupils on roll at the time of the core inspection in January 2015, but there has been a considerable increase in pupil numbers since then. The school now has 603 pupils on roll, with 84 pupils in sixth form.

Around 30% of pupils come from homes in which Welsh is the main language spoken. However, over the last three years, the school has increased the number of pupils who study Welsh first language to 67%. The school has also increased its Welsh-medium provision considerably since the time of the core inspection. Around 16% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that 34% of pupils have an additional learning need. Most pupils come from a white British background. The school hosts a learning resource centre.

The headteacher was appointed in January 2012. The senior management team includes the headteacher, an assistant headteacher and an acting assistant headteacher.

Strategy and action

Since the core inspection, the school has appointed a new deputy headteacher and three assistant headteachers. The headteacher has shared her vision for improving teaching with all staff. This vision is to ensure that all teachers collaborate with and support each other to secure a culture of a self-improving school, which is aiming for excellence. Teaching and learning are the central focus in this vision and much energy and time are devoted to ensuring teachers deliver the best possible lessons consistently.

Highly effective faculty reviews take place annually for each of the eight faculties. The robust and comprehensive review includes pupils taking part in twice-a-year teaching and learning surveys for each faculty. Leaders also scrutinise evidence from the minutes of faculty meetings and evaluations of professional learning to judge the extent to which teachers are making use of training and guidance. The full governing body receives the faculty reviews, which include recommendations about how to improve the faculty. Heads of faculty then present an action plan to the next meeting of the governors' standards committee.

A senior leader, with responsibility for teaching and learning, has invested much of her time in action research and exploring good practice in other schools. She uses strong practitioners at school to support her in the drive to improve teaching. The school has made productive and beneficial use of research into pedagogy to provide high quality and bespoke training for all staff. These activities have led teachers to amend and update policies on teaching and learning and marking and assessment. These two policies have a common aim; for teachers to be consistent and fair through creating an atmosphere of trust with the pupils they teach. The policies

emphasise the importance of teachers using their planning and assessment time wisely and productively to reduce their workload. To this end, the policies include well-considered appendices on practical ways to reduce workload and increase impact.

Since the core inspection, continuous professional learning is a key focus of school development planning. Over the course of the academic year, teachers, as part of their directed time, take part in a series of 11 professional learning events and training sessions. This has allowed leaders to train staff and put in place the well-researched pedagogy underpinning the headteacher's vision for improving teaching. All leaders of professional learning events are required to base their input on evidence gleaned from reliable and effective action research. As a result, staff respond very positively to training and guidance from their peers. After every professional learning event, all faculties carry out a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis of the quality of their current provision. Faculties then draw up an action plan to address the outcomes of the analysis.

Leaders place high importance on capturing pupils' opinions and pupil voice plays an integral part in most self-evaluation activities. For example, school council members and key teachers sit on a teaching and learning committee. This innovative group plays an important role in supporting teachers to improve their practice. The committee devised the school's 'Quality Teacher 10' strategy, which is based on the principles of effective planning and includes guidance such as having an inspiring start to lessons, purposeful content and a beneficial plenary.

Research into pedagogical strategies to develop pupils' independence and resilience underpin many of the school's agreed procedures for planning and teaching. These include boy/girl seating plans, strategic positioning of pupils from vulnerable groups, random pupil questioning and ensuring appropriate 'wait time' for pupil response, both orally and in response to written work. Teachers make effective use of a well-considered matrix of questioning techniques, which enables them to develop pupils' thinking and problem solving skills well. The school expects teachers to place as much importance on 'wait time' as on 'talk time'. Leaders provide well-considered guidance, derived from comprehensive research, to teachers on how to assess pupils' work effectively and provide useful feedback. All teachers employ the school's agreed model for marking pupils' work. This model encourages teachers to dedicate equal attention to the content of the work, the application of skills and areas for improvement. Teachers highlight areas of pupils' work that need improvement and give useful suggestions that help pupils to take responsibility for improving their own work. Teachers give pupils time in lessons to respond to comments about their work.

In order to support its goal of excellence in teaching, the school has adapted its quality assurance documents. For example, lesson observation forms and work scrutiny reports make clear that good standards, provision and teaching are the minimum expectation. If leaders judge any activity or lesson in need of improvement it is based on the fact that too few pupils made enough progress. Teachers also use common systems for planning lessons and success criteria. They share with pupils three levels of expectation, explaining the minimum expected level and what good and outstanding success looks like. Across the school, teachers make clear to pupils that nearly all of their work should be at least good.

Leaders set up many thematic projects as part of their whole-school focus on improving provision in general, and teaching in particular. The school identified a group of teachers in their third or fourth year of teaching who would benefit from clear direction and a fresh approach to improving their teaching. Leaders not only wanted these teachers to benefit from professional learning, but also to use their personal development to benefit the school through becoming leading practitioners. These teachers became the improving teaching group.

The group made productive use of video technology to evaluate strengths and areas for development in their own teaching. They met regularly, sharing video clips of themselves teaching and identifying areas of focus for the next meeting. They organised focused learning walks in school and visited other providers. In time, they identified particular strengths in their practice, which were shared with the whole-school staff in the form of ten minute 'how to' clips. The school has now increased this platform of support and guidance by enabling more teachers to create the clips, for example 'How to use multiplication tables correctly in cross-curricular numeracy tasks', 'How to get a class settled and ready for work successfully' and 'How to plan effective and inspiring starter activities'. The work of the improving teaching group has given staff greater confidence and expertise in planning purposeful activities. This has secured improvements in the quality of teaching and the standard of work in pupils' books.

The school also identified a group of excellent practitioners and enabled them to join the regional outstanding teacher programme. These practitioners provided whole-school leadership and training, based on sound pedagogical theory and methodology following their participation in the programme. For example, they led whole-school professional learning activities on using effective questioning techniques.

Outcomes

The school has successfully changed its culture and become an organisation that is continuously striving to improve.

Professional learning is a high priority for the school and leaders have invested considerable time and finance into this priority. The professional learning opportunities afforded to staff have led to better teaching practices and a much greater consistency in delivering good teaching across the school. Giving teachers the chance to lead professional learning activities has strengthened the school's leadership capacity. This has improved the school's succession planning agenda successfully and has significantly improved the quality of middle and senior leadership.

Teachers now have more frequent and beneficial opportunities to reflect on and evaluate their own practice and that of their colleagues. Learner involvement in quality assurance activities, such as work scrutiny, has created worthwhile opportunities for staff to work collaboratively with pupils to prioritise improving outcomes.

Performance outcomes at key stage 4 have improved since the core inspection and the gender gap has closed considerably (Welsh Government, 2017c). The school has also seen a great improvement in pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning.

Next steps as identified by the school

- Strengthen further teachers' skills in questioning and other assessment strategies, to increase the level of challenge to pupils
- Make teaching and learning more consistent across the school by finding opportunities to disseminate best practice through the use of technology
- Improve pupils' involvement in their learning by making assessment and marking practices more consistent across the school in order to give better feedback to pupils on their progress and to ensure that students know what they should do to improve their work
- Share best practice in involving pupils in assessing their own progress and developing their independent learning skills
- Develop teachers' understanding of the revised professional standards and engage teachers in action research as part of the new performance management procedures

Case studies of schools that have built on their existing good practice in teaching

Deighton Primary School

Deighton Primary School is in Tredegar in Blaenau Gwent. There are 182 pupils on roll, who are taught in three single age and three mixed-age classes. There is also a part-time nursery class.

Around 32% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are of white British ethnicity and none speak Welsh at home. A very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The school has identified around 34% of pupils as having additional learning needs. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. A very few pupils are looked after by the local authority.

The headteacher has been in post since April 2012, and the deputy headteacher was appointed in April 2013.

Strategy and action

Senior leaders have high expectations of themselves, their staff and their pupils. Staff agree that the school has to provide the best life chances that it can for its pupils and raise their aspirations. This is the driving force behind everything the school does.

When the headteacher was appointed in 2012, the school did not have a culture of sharing practice between teachers. After a difficult start, the culture changed gradually and gained impetus after the inspection of 2015, in response to the recommendation about sharing good practice. Now, the school uses a mixture of formal lesson observations by senior leaders and more informal observations in teacher triads to continue to raise the quality of teaching across the school.

The current school development plan reflects the school's continued drive to improve alongside its aim to prepare for changes to the curriculum. For example, teachers are developing an approach to the curriculum that uses 'vehicles', or contexts for learning, that provide meaningful, real-life experiences for pupils. In doing so, teachers aim to embed the four purposes from Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015) into the curriculum and move towards an area of learning and experience approach.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher focused initially on improving collaboration between teachers in the school. In recent years, they have extended this approach to develop a culture of collaboration with other schools in the regional consortium and further afield to help improve teaching. School leaders encourage teachers to visit other schools in Wales and beyond to acquire new ideas to influence and improve their practice. The school has useful overseas links, as well as benefiting from working with external arts agencies, as part of the 'lead creative schools' programme.

In 2012, the headteacher tried to introduce termly lesson observations. Despite some initial opposition, by 2014, regular lesson observations and sharing good practice across the school became the norm. In 2016, the school's work to improve teaching reached another level, as leaders introduced a commercial, structured framework to focus more precisely on specific elements of teaching to help teachers at all levels to improve their practice and aim to be excellent. Observations concentrate on different elements of the framework across the year, while maintaining a focus on pupil progress and standards at all times.

When senior leaders carry out their termly formal lesson observations, they provide teachers with a very detailed analysis of their lessons, including how long the teacher has spent delivering each section of the lesson. The headteacher believes that this level of scrutiny has been instrumental in helping to raise teachers' expectations of themselves and their pupils. It aids senior leaders when providing teachers with clear developmental feedback and enables them to identify specific issues that individuals can work to improve.

In addition to formal lesson observations, teachers work with their colleagues in triads and use video technology to film their own lessons at least once a term. These sessions encourage teachers to use their critical skills to review their own teaching and that of their colleagues and develop their evaluative skills. The development of trust between colleagues has been key to the success of this system. It has raised teachers' self-confidence to hear their colleagues identify strengths in elements of their teaching. It has also encouraged them to modify their teaching, often in quite subtle ways that make a considerable difference to the quality of pupils' learning, for example giving pupils more time to think before they answer or being more aware of how they question pupils.

As the school has developed its approach to collaboration between colleagues within the school, many teachers have also visited schools identified as having good practice elsewhere in the regional consortium. They have also travelled to England to visit schools with particularly interesting practice. These collaborative experiences help teachers to broaden their thinking and try new ideas that they pick up. For example, swapping classes with other teachers in the school on 'Freaky Fridays' provides valuable opportunities to understand the challenges of teaching different year groups. Also, attending meetings with teachers in the locality who are using the same professional learning framework provide good opportunities to share ideas and to discuss successes and failures in a non-judgemental environment.

Senior leaders ensure that teachers and support staff have plenty of opportunity to take part in professional discussion and contribute to decision making. An outcome of this has been the development of opportunities between classes to collaborate on problem solving and investigation activities on a Friday. In turn, this has involved pupils in contributing more to teachers' planning. For instance, in the foundation phase, pupils suggest ideas for areas of enhanced provision, based on the skills they have been learning in focused activities, such as using a story map in the writing corner, or building a bridge for the gingerbread man to cross the river in the water tray.

Outcomes

Pupils' standards at the end of key stage 2 are high with around 90% of pupils achieving the expected level in English, mathematics and science (Welsh Government, 2017d). The headteacher believes that this is a direct result of the detailed feedback given after lesson observations. Senior leaders now consider most teaching in the school to be good or excellent.

Teachers are confident and ready to take measured pedagogical risks and try new approaches and strategies. They know that senior leaders and governors are supportive of this, and they are not afraid of asking, or being asked, difficult questions. Interestingly, teachers say that some of the most beneficial improvements in teaching are not necessarily transformational in themselves, but are quite small. The school calls them 'golden nuggets', little things that add up and made a significant difference to their work. Teachers share these 'golden nuggets' with one another during discussion and reflection after triad observations.

As a result of developing teachers' understanding of standards by moderating pupils' work regularly together and quality assuring moderations, the correlation between teacher judgements and the standard of pupils' work in books is far closer than it was in the past.

Learning conversations in staff meetings are based around learning and teaching. Importantly, teachers and support staff feel valued and encouraged in their professional learning. They acknowledge that senior leaders have very high expectations of them, but understand that they need to be the best teachers they can be if they are to provide pupils with the best possible chance of succeeding.

Next steps as identified by the school

- Continue to provide teachers with clear developmental feedback that enables them to improve their practice
- Embed and extend triad working
- Continue to prepare for the new curriculum

Hafod Primary School

Context

Hafod Primary School is in Swansea, close to the city centre. There are 247 pupils on roll, aged between 3 and 11 years. Pupils are organised into seven classes. The school provides nursery facilities for 36 three and four-year-olds who attend school on a part-time basis initially. In addition, the school manages the Flying Start provision on the site. Around 29% of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

Around 60% of the pupils are white British. Forty per cent of the pupils speak English as an additional language. A majority of these pupils are of Asian heritage, predominantly Bangladeshi. There are 15 different languages spoken by pupils, the most common of which is Sylheti. No pupils speak Welsh at home.

About 35% of pupils have additional learning needs. A few pupils have statements of special educational needs.

The current headteacher has been in post since 2006. The deputy headteacher has been in post for a similar length of time.

Strategy and action

Much of the school's success in developing a vibrant curriculum and improving teaching pedagogy is due to the longevity, consistency and creativity of the school's leadership. Leaders know their pupils and staff exceptionally well and create a climate that encourages mutual support, creativity and innovation.

The school has recently evaluated its provision to ensure that it is fully prepared for the forthcoming curriculum changes. As a part of this work, it has re-organised the senior leadership team to incorporate teaching and learning responsibility posts for literacy, numeracy and digital competency. It has developed teams and individuals with responsibility for overseeing the six areas of learning as well as staff with responsibility for assessment for learning and ensuring continuity in pupils' learning from the age of 3-16. While there are teams for each area of learning, the school does not allow staff to work in 'silos'. Effective monitoring and staff development from senior leaders, for example on professional learning days, ensure that the areas of learning and the school's pedagogical approach stay joined-up.

Senior leaders, leaders of specific areas of learning and their teams evaluate the curriculum and its impact on learning through a carefully planned calendar of monitoring activities. These include book scrutiny, lesson observations and, more recently, learning walks. This work has identified clear and appropriate next steps. For example, the digital competence team understands that, while pupils' presentation and creative skills are strong, aspects of work around data handling are at an earlier stage of development. Leaders have also identified that too much work in pupils' books is correct, which means that it is not consistently challenging all pupils well enough. They identified that their electronic tracking system did not meet

its need in relation to informing pupils' next steps for learning well enough. They also identified issues with using the system to ensure rigour in the accuracy of assessments. The school is working to address this by developing a new assessment model.

Leaders undertake similar monitoring activities to evaluate the quality of teaching. Through this work, they identify aspects of professional practice that require improvement at whole-school level for all teachers as well as strengths and areas for development for individual teachers. To address whole-school improvement priorities, the school is beginning to use action research effectively. For example, having identified assessment for learning and feedback as an area for improvement, leaders allocated responsibility for improvement to a teacher. He used this as part of his masters work. The work started with hypotheses and a literary review. In this case, the reading focused on whether five and six-year-olds were able to evaluate their own progress effectively. This led to the development of a range of permanent success criteria to help a group of six pupils to evaluate aspects of their written work, for example punctuation. The research found that this work was effective in supporting pupils to evaluate their own work. Since this initial trail, the findings have influenced the whole school assessment for learning and marking policies. The school is keeping further impact of this work under review.

In other research work, the mathematics leader joined with colleagues from across Wales to identify areas of the subject that pupils found difficult to understand. They identified reasoning skills and the difficulties that pupils had in solving problems independently. They came up with the idea of using story maps to help solve the problems. Each teacher in the group trialled the strategy with half of the pupils in their class. The outcome was slightly improved outcomes for targeted pupils. Leaders at Hafod School ensure that staff have time to share the findings of their work in order to discuss the benefits and any pitfalls. This is supporting a culture of professional reflection and learning at the school. The school is aware of the need to trial these initiatives in more depth to make the findings reliable. This type of work is helping the school to take good account of the new professional standards for teaching and leadership. For example, senior leaders ensure that all teachers have opportunities to innovate, collaborate and lead initiatives that affect the school's teaching and pedagogical practices positively.

Monitoring work from lesson observations and scrutiny of books ensures that leaders keep a close eye on levels of compliance with initiatives as well as on their impact. This enables them to challenge staff effectively. For example, leaders use a post-it note system to identify specific strengths or weaknesses in teachers' work when scrutinising books. This shows teachers that leaders' observations are evidence based. Individual professional dialogues based on these first-hand sources of evidence also ensure that individual teachers have clear targets for improvement. These targets, as well as whole-school teaching targets, such as improving feedback, become teachers' performance management goals.

Pupils make a strong contribution to self-evaluation and improvement planning work. For example, they participate in lesson observations and make suitable evaluations. This has produced interesting suggestions for improvement, for example by identifying that in a few instances teaching assistants needed to engage more proactively with pupils during learning experiences.

Leaders are very confident in the decisions that they make about teaching strategies in the school. They know what suits their learners best. For example, they have introduced a formal approach to teaching phonics based on a published scheme. They have trained all staff to use this effectively. This has led to improved outcomes for pupils in their reading ability and end of key stage teacher assessments. Leaders resist guidance from external partners to revise this approach because their own self-evaluation identifies this practice as effective.

Next steps as identified by the school

- Introduce video observations of teaching to support professional growth
- Consider with teachers the benefits of and barriers to teachers observing their own class during their planning, preparation and assessment time to inform their assessment of individuals and groups of pupils
- Further develop pupils' digital skills
- Increase the level of challenge for more able pupils

Maes-y-Coed Primary School

Context

Maes-Y-Coed Primary School is in Pontypridd in Rhondda Cynon Taf. There are 313 pupils on roll, including 56 who attend the nursery on a full-time basis. There are 11 classes, four of which have pupils of mixed ages.

Most pupils come from homes where English is the main language. A very few pupils speak English as an additional language. Around 18% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that approximately 33% of its pupils have additional learning needs.

The headteacher, who was previously the deputy headteacher at the school, took up her post in October 2011.

Strategy and action

The headteacher believes strongly in using external research, the outcomes of internal action based research and exploring good practice in other schools, both nationally and internationally, to inform the pedagogy in her school. In recent years, senior leaders have visited many local schools to explore foundation phase provision. They also visited schools in Denmark and Iceland to see how schools in Europe develop outdoor provision to encourage play. Leaders are open to new ideas and follow up well on strategies they hear about when attending meetings and conferences with other professionals. They visited a successful 13-18 high school in Yorkshire to learn about accumulated marginal gains and the principles that underpin the school's teaching and learning philosophy. They also recently attended an international conference to learn more about lesson study.

Most teachers also take part in additional action research as part of their own professional development or as a member of a school improvement group. Teachers have undertaken action research on a range of topics. For example, topics include collaboration in the outdoors, developing the pedagogical principles of the foundation phase in key stage 2, using the creative and expressive arts and developing the use of continuous provision. The school makes good use of the Leuven Involvement Scale to measure the impact of changes on pupils' levels of involvement. One large-scale piece of action research combined the school's work on developing the use of expressive arts, promoting outdoor learning and delivering the digital competency framework. This project culminated in collapsing the school's timetable for a fortnight.

Leaders synthesise the findings from visits and research effectively, giving staff the main highlights to start discussions about what may be of benefit to their school. Leaders and staff select carefully what they trial in the school. They use the outcomes of their visits and research to inform, but not to determine decisions about their pedagogy and practice.

In 2016, after hearing a speaker at a national event explain the theory behind lesson study, the headteacher and a member of senior staff attended the international lesson study conference. This led to a whole staff discussion about the principles behind lesson study. Staff agreed to trial the approach in the academic year 2016-2017. Staff decided that each of five triads would consist of a higher level teaching assistant, a main scale teacher and a member of the senior leadership team.

The school started by formulating a policy that set out their approach to lesson study and joint professional development. Staff agreed that lesson study would:

- replace the school's existing lesson monitoring system
- remove the use of the existing session observation forms

This would mean that lessons or a series of lessons would not be graded.

Teachers and higher level teaching assistants agreed that triads would:

- value all members equally regardless of their experience or status in the school
- carry out research to improve teaching and learning in the agreed focus areas
- focus on reflective analysis, professional dialogue and action research
- use agreed planning, pupil interview and reflection tools to focus discussions
- use video technology to aid analysis
- accept all feedback constructively and build on discussions to improve understanding
- share the aims and outcomes of lesson study with pupils

Each triad follows the same format. Using data analysis and/or outcomes from monitoring, staff agree an area to improve, for example supporting borderline pupils to achieve an outcome 6 in writing at the end of the foundation phase. Staff carry out their own research on the area before the first formal meeting. The school provides cover for the full three days of triad activities for all staff involved. In the first meeting staff:

- discuss the research they have carried out
- agree the focus for the first lesson
- select three pupils who will be the focus of the joint observations
- formulate questions to ask pupils prior to planning the lesson
- meet selected pupils to pose the questions
- discuss ideas for the lesson and agree learning intentions
- make a list of questions to ask pupils at the end of the lesson
- predict how the focus pupils will respond to different parts of the lesson

After these activities one member of the triad writes up the lesson plan, another creates the proformas and minutes of the day and the final member resources the lesson.

During the second day, one member of the triad teaches the lesson while the other two observe. The lesson is recorded using video technology. Although the focus is on the outcomes of the selected three pupils, noting as much as possible what pupils say and do, the group members make evaluative comments on all aspects of the learning and teaching.

After the lesson, the group members meet the three focus pupils to ask the post lesson questions. The triad members then work together for the rest of the day. They discuss their initial reflections and watch the recording of the lesson to focus on key points and reactions of different pupils. Staff write up their reflections in detail before sharing once again.

A key to the success of this process is staff engaging in open and honest professional dialogue where they feel comfortable to challenge, make suggestions for improvement and hypothesise. Prior to starting the lesson study project, the majority of staff had taken part in professional development activities that improved their coaching skills and helped them to see challenging comments as constructive suggestions rather than personal criticism. Teachers state that they do not see challenge as a threat, as they feel it is challenge without judgement.

The triad members look carefully at the pupil responses to post lesson questions and compare how they thought pupils would respond to the lesson and how they actually responded. They note any patterns or issues to explore further in the next lesson. They use all the information gathered to decide what needs to be repeated or altered in the next lesson. For example, in one session teacher reflection noted that two of the focus pupils did not use partner talk effectively to think about and discuss the teacher's question. This led to the suggestion that in subsequent lessons the teacher needed to walk around the partners to ensure the effectiveness of the strategy and to make sure that pupils understand what they should be discussing. Triad members then plan and resource the next lesson jointly.

Outcomes

Across the school, there is a greater emphasis on staff reflecting on and analysing their own practice and that of their peers. Staff are more aware of their own strengths and areas for development in terms of improving their classroom practice and understanding the needs of the pupils in their classes. Conversations in the staffroom now focus more on teaching and learning. These conversations are solution focused with a willingness and confidence from staff to share any difficulties and to talk about what went well in lessons. This helps staff to learn from each other. Staff now place greater emphasis on what pupils can and cannot do. They reflect on their teaching and make small changes that have a big effect on individual and groups of pupils. For example, teachers now allocate roles in group work after analysis of video evidence showed that individuals were not contributing to group work. The pupils not contributing were a surprise to staff as they were not the ones that staff would have predicted.

Leaders have invested heavily in developing the lesson study approach across the school by purchasing video equipment and allocating funding to release jointly every member of every triad for at least three days each academic year. Lesson study is working for this school as all staff believe in the approach and are committed to making it a success. This has led to consistently high levels of sharing pedagogy and resources and has improved the consistency and quality of teaching.

Next steps as identified by the school

The school will continue to use the lesson study approach and will monitor carefully its impact on pupil outcomes and the quality of teaching.

Oldcastle Primary School

Context

Oldcastle Primary School is in the centre of Bridgend. There are 421 pupils on roll, including 57 in the school's nursery class. Pupils are organised into 15 classes.

Around 8% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. A very few pupils are looked after by the local authority. No pupils speak Welsh at home, and a few pupils speak English as an additional language, and many of these pupils have only very recently joined the school. The school identifies that around 14% of pupils have additional learning needs. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum and other professional learning.

Strategy and action

The headteacher took up his post in March 2013. One of his first actions was to carry out a series of lesson observations to make an informed judgement about the quality of teaching in the school. His observations found that, although all staff were working hard, they were not necessarily focusing on the right things to help them improve their teaching and in turn pupils' learning. Prior to his appointment, teachers had attended numerous external one off professional development courses and sabbaticals. The headteacher identified that teachers had a range of different strengths and areas for development. He did not believe that attending further external events would bring about the improvements needed. He wanted to improve teaching by using internal mechanisms of support. The headteacher introduced an intensive twelve-week coaching and mentoring system to assist further teacher development. The school released a senior teacher from her classroom duties for one year to run the programme and to establish partnerships with other schools and institutions to develop newly qualified teacher and student development programmes.

The coaching and mentoring programme was personal and bespoke to the teachers involved. Individual programmes focused on areas identified as needing improvement through lesson observations and book scrutiny, as well as on areas the teacher identified as wanting to hone. The teacher coach met with every teacher at least once a week. She provided in-class support through modelling lessons and co-teaching. She also worked with teachers on lesson planning and classroom management strategies. After every coaching session, teachers identified what they were going to work on prior to the next meeting. A key to the success of this programme was the honest and open working relationships that senior leaders established with those staff involved in the programme. This led to high levels of trust for those involved in the programme and built teachers' confidence and self-esteem.

A similar coaching and mentoring programme is in place for newly qualified and graduate teachers who join the school. The school currently employs two teachers on the graduate teacher programme and a teacher in their second year of teaching. The deputy headteacher meets these teachers each week to plan their professional learning experiences, such as arranging for the modelling of lessons, co-teaching and peer observations and to set future pedagogical targets. The school tailors the experiences effectively to meet the needs and stage of development of the individual teacher.

The headteacher is very aware of the demands of the teaching profession and the additional pressures that some staff place on themselves. In order to raise awareness of the importance of a work-life balance and of staff taking care of their mental health, he invited all teachers to attend a mindfulness course. A national teaching union funded the course and teachers attended on a voluntary basis for two hours after school for eight weeks. Nearly all teachers attended. Teachers agree that attending helped raise their awareness of each other and the importance of communicating honestly and openly so that issues became shared rather than hidden. This has helped to improve further lines of communication within the school and encouraged a more openness so that teachers are now comfortable with colleagues just popping into their classrooms.

The school takes a whole-school approach to professional learning. For example, when the school decided to introduce new mathematics resources and ways of working, all staff attended regular in-house development events. After each event staff agree a focus to work on linked to their learning. They share the outcomes of their work at staff and senior leader meetings. This helps to ensure consistency of implementation and approach across all classes. Staff attend regional and local update and information sessions, but very rarely attend standalone professional learning events.

Leaders encourage teachers to take part in action research and to trial new ideas. For example, teachers have used research inquiry techniques to explore how games can improve pupils' mathematical and spelling skills. Teachers also trial ideas for improving pupils' comfort and wellbeing by introducing bean bag seating and wearing slippers in classrooms. The school's leadership is not afraid to abandon projects and trials if they are not meeting the needs of pupils and staff. For example, a few years ago the school introduced the use of video technology for lesson and peer observations. However, at that time teachers were not at a stage of sharing practice to be comfortable with this type of approach. The school also trialled and abandoned triple marking when teachers agreed that it was not improving the quality of feedback to pupils and was not an effective use of their time.

Over the last academic year, the school invested heavily in a six day bespoke leadership programme for all members of the senior leadership team. Over the six days, participants learnt about their own behaviours and leadership styles. They explored how to best communicate and give feedback, avoiding conflict and raising staff confidence, by using assertive positive behaviours. They learnt about coaching and mentoring techniques and received one to one coaching and feedback on their own performance from an external mentor. All teachers that took part in the programme feel that it built their confidence and grew their ability to have in-depth

professional discussions about the quality of teaching and provision. This has resulted in higher levels of openness and honesty when examining and sharing practice within the school.

The school is moving away from formal lesson observations. Leaders in the school do not believe in grading whole lessons or breaking down and grading separate components of teaching. In 2017/2018, they are trialling a system of drop-in sessions where leaders will regularly pop into lessons for around 15 minutes and then have professional dialogue with teachers. Over time, staff in the school have become accustomed to the headteacher and other senior staff dropping into their lessons unannounced to talk to pupils and take part in the teaching and learning. In 2017/2018, teachers will be encouraged to observe each other more frequently.

Outcomes

The school's approach to coaching and mentoring teachers based on their individual needs and stage of development has resulted in consistently good teaching practices across the school. The ability of senior leaders to take part in open and honest feedback has improved because of the bespoke training on leadership, coaching and mentoring. This means that all leaders are comfortable challenging their own and each other's ideas about what makes good teaching. This has led to all staff being reflective practitioners. The whole school approach to aspects of professional learning ensures the consistent implementation and development of new initiatives across the school.

Next steps as identified by the school

The school's three main priorities are to:

- Refine the lesson observation process so that teachers can access a higher level of professional support
- Continue to conduct and publish high level research to improve the quality of learning and teaching
- Use lesson observations to listen to learners and conduct book scrutiny, ensuring that activities for basic skills pupils are more closely matched to their ability

Ysgol Cynwyd Sant

Context

Ysgol Cynwyd Sant is in Maesteg in Bridgend local authority. There are around 300 pupils on roll, including 40 nursery pupils. There are 11 classes, five of which are mixed-age. Welsh is the main medium of the school's life and work. Around 30% of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes.

Around 12% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school has identified that around 23% of pupils have additional learning needs. A very few pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds. A very few pupils are in the care of the local authority.

The headteacher, who was previously the deputy headteacher at the school, was appointed in September 1999.

The school is a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools on developments relating to the curriculum and professional learning. It is also part of the Welsh Government's lead creative schools programme and is a hub school for its regional consortium. This means that it supports other schools in the consortium by providing training and opportunities to observe and share good practice.

Strategy and action

The school has always invested considerable resources into developing the skills of its staff as teachers and leaders. This includes teaching assistants with responsibility for leading learning with classes and groups.

The headteacher is an experienced leader who instils confidence in her workforce. She encourages them to try new ideas and different ways of doing things, and supports them to do so by providing the time and resources to plan and execute things properly. As a result, members of her leadership team and other staff develop strong leadership skills and considerable self-assurance. They are not afraid to evaluate their work critically and adapt or abandon plans when necessary. Leaders do not risk damaging pupils' progress or wellbeing and always ensure that there is good evidence to suggest that any changes will have positive outcomes. Although teachers have high levels of autonomy, there are clear guidelines within which they should work. For example, when planning a topic, senior leaders identify a set of non-negotiable expectations. This includes a preparatory week when teachers remind pupils of basics, including the importance of purposeful talk, classroom and school rules, presentation and spelling, and the four purposes.

The school has a joined-up approach to everything it does, and ensures that all developments link to one another. School improvement planning, performance management, professional learning, teacher research and changes to the curriculum all link closely and this ensures that teachers do not feel as if they are repeating work unnecessarily, or carrying out work for the sake of it. In nearly all cases, anything teachers do fulfils multiple purposes.

In recent years, the school has changed the emphasis of classroom observations. The headteacher and other senior leaders still carry out statutory observations, but, three years ago, teachers started to work in triads with their colleagues. Staff feel that they now gain far more from this collaborative approach to improving teaching.

The headteacher is also committed to the concept of teachers as researchers. Senior leaders have introduced innovative ways to develop teachers' research skills as part of their everyday work, and without overburdening them. Research now supports teachers' performance management and school self-evaluation.

To maintain and extend the strengths identified in teaching at the time of the last inspection, the school has worked hard to remain at the forefront of educational developments. The headteacher has searched out opportunities to improve her own professional knowledge and understanding, working closely with outside agencies, including the Welsh Government and arts organisations, to make international visits and carry out research. She has extended the school's involvement in sharing good practice by expanding its role as a hub school. She enables members of the school's staff to provide training for staff from other schools, and hosts many visitors to the school. For example, several members of staff recently facilitated a course on assessment for learning for other schools. Preparing for these activities provides teachers with good opportunities to reflect on the work of the school, as well as learning about the approaches that other schools use.

The school first embarked upon triad working several years ago, initially inspired by guidance from the Welsh Government. However, the school has done what it often does particularly successfully, and has adapted the idea to suit the needs of its own teachers and the school's context. At the outset, staff agreed a way of working that was less prescriptive and formal than the guidance suggested. Each triad is made up of a senior leader, and two other members of staff with different skills and different levels of experience. They plan lessons together and observe one another teaching their own classes. They then come together for a professional discussion. These conversations are supportive, but raise many important and interesting issues, which teachers debate critically in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching on raising pupils' standards.

To facilitate teacher research, the school has taken a different approach to performance management. The new approach not only ensures that performance management connects well to other school developments, but also secures the commitment and full engagement of all teachers in the process. At the start of the year, teachers set themselves a research question. For example, one teacher has chosen to consider whether increased physical exercise has a positive impact on the motivation, engagement and academic progress of a group of boys at risk of disengagement. These research questions become the main driver for teachers' performance management throughout the year and they set targets related to the research question. Although teachers have a free choice of research questions, leaders' expectations of teachers are clear. During the year, leaders expect teachers to:

- undertake action research with their pupils
- carry out related professional reading and research

- evaluate their findings and prepare a report to share with colleagues and as part of their annual performance management review

To reflect this alternative approach to performance management, the school has also taken a completely different approach to school improvement planning by using a whole-school research question, which, for 2017-2018, focuses on the school's preparation for the new curriculum. The current line of inquiry focuses on how well staff use the pedagogical principles outlined in *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015) to raise the standards and wellbeing of all pupils.

Outcomes

As a result of the strong focus on developing leaders and continuing to improve teaching, the school has made considerable progress in preparing for the new curriculum. For example, pupils talk about the four purposes confidently at a level suitable for their age and stage of development. Pupil involvement in planning topics is an important part of the school's philosophy. This ensures high levels of engagement in learning and contributes to strong pupil wellbeing and progress from starting points.

As part of the school's self-evaluation, staff have started to evaluate progress against the four purposes outlined in *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015). The school also carries out a survey to assess the attitudes of pupils towards learning and the responses of teachers to their professional learning. In both cases, responses are positive. For example, a recent staff questionnaire confirms that all staff questioned feel that their understanding of the changes in the new curriculum is good or very good.

Teachers are highly engaged in their own professional learning and welcome the opportunities they have to take part in research and in sharing good practice with others. They are a confident staff who respond enthusiastically to new ideas and are flexible in their approach to all aspects of their work. They have high expectations of themselves, their colleagues and pupils.

Next steps as identified by the school

The school intends to:

- Develop further its triad working for teachers and support staff, to include staff who cover classes regularly
 - use experienced staff in the school to enhance certain aspects of training and mentoring
 - increase the number of joint planning sessions and joint lesson observations for teacher triads from two to three in a year and ensure that the team leader produces a report on the outcomes of the triad's work to share with other staff across the school
 - enable individuals to reflect within triads on their performance and use the professional teaching standards to identify personal areas for development

- Focus on one of the pedagogical principles identified in Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015) as a school, with the intention of creating a whole-school strategy for critical thinking, creative thinking and problem solving
- Encourage staff to use a personal inquiry approach as part of performance management so that they take responsibility for their own personal development and identify their development against the professional standards
- Work in triads with two primary schools from neighbouring local authorities to create a strategy for pedagogy

Ysgol Pencae

Context

Ysgol Pencae is in Llandaff in Cardiff. There are currently around 210 pupils on roll, aged from 4 to 11 years. The school has seven single-age classes. As the school has no nursery provision, pupils come to the school from a wide range of pre-school provision.

Around 2% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that about 13% of pupils have additional learning needs. A very few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. About 16% of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. The headteacher has been in post since September 2008 and the deputy headteacher joined the school in September 2016.

Strategy and action

The school first renewed its focus on improving teaching in 2013. Leaders introduced a few published schemes to bring more consistency to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics and to help sharpen teachers' skills in these areas of the curriculum. Following this came a focus on developing the school's approach to formative assessment through an understanding of assessment for learning.

In recent years, the school development plan has outlined clear priorities in relation to teaching, including improving feedback to pupils and refining the structure of lessons. The current plan includes a target to improve the standards of teaching and learning throughout the school, with the broad aim that all lessons should be good or excellent and develop pupils' independent learning through activities set in real-life contexts. Senior leaders have clear expectations and staff understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to improving teaching. Teachers take responsibility for their own professional learning and know that they are accountable for the outcomes of the pupils in their classes.

In September 2016, teachers began working in triads with teachers in the same year group from two other local schools. The purpose of this work is to share good practice and to reflect on the effectiveness of their own teaching and that of colleagues.

Leaders and other members of staff have worked hard to develop a positive attitude and flexible approach to internal activities such as classroom observations, whole-school scrutiny of pupils' books, and team and whole-school staff meetings. This has enabled staff to become more open with one another and given them the confidence to address concerns and solve problems together. Staff now more readily acknowledge and discuss strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the school. Collaboration with teachers from other schools has encouraged this ethos of openness and reflection. Teachers now have greater confidence to question methodology and to trial and adapt new approaches for the benefit of pupils.

School leaders outline the following strategies that they feel are the backbone of the school's approach to improving teaching, these are:

- regular lesson observations
- a clear line management system
- the use of an agreed set of criteria to judge teaching
- in-house professional learning days focused on aspects of teaching
- regular in-school team meetings
- attendance at courses focusing on pedagogy
- teachers working collaboratively to develop various teaching elements
- regular joint moderation sessions
- teachers with specific responsibilities attending relevant courses and sharing learning with others in school
- the employment of a part-time teacher to help develop and deliver strategies to support more able and talented and gifted pupils.

Following teachers' self-evaluation of their teaching against agreed criteria from a published continuum, teachers and leaders identify areas for development that are common across the school. For example, they recently noted that the way teachers used lesson objectives and success criteria to support pupils' learning was inconsistent. To agree a consistent way forward, teachers then discuss these issues in focused staff meetings or electronically. Teachers re-visit the agreed actions at further meetings or in a subsequent lesson observation. Where these actions are insufficient, school leaders often plan a series of professional learning sessions for staff.

The school uses lesson observations to monitor the quality of teaching every term. There is a timetable in place and observations focus clearly on two agreed targets every term from their self-evaluation and any personal targets from previous observations. For example, the current focus is on planning for numeracy and the impact of feedback to pupils, and next term leaders will consider pupils' independent learning skills and the use of the outdoors.

As well as formal lesson observations, all teachers are working in triads with teachers of the same year group in other local schools. In its first year, this trial involved each triad planning a series of lessons, observing one another teach, reflecting on the good practice they identified, and sharing resources. Now in its second year, the focus is on developing lessons and ideas in areas of learning and experience from Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015). The aim of this triad working is to share skills, learn from subject specialists and create sustainable partnerships between schools.

Outcomes

As a result of the school's focus on improving teaching, there is a high level of professionalism among staff. All teachers are engaged in elements of self-evaluation, particularly in relation to teaching. They take increased responsibility for their own professional learning and are enthusiastic and willing to try new ideas and approaches, particularly because of triad working with colleagues from other schools. Teachers have increased their understanding of the benefits of developing pupil voice,

the importance of communicating effectively with parents, and the need to embrace all aspects of curriculum reform.

Teachers feel that developing pupils' involvement in their own learning has had the greatest impact on standards of learning and wellbeing. Increased opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own learning, contribute to planning the curriculum, and modifying the language pupils use to talk about their work. For example, thinking of 'opportunities to improve', rather than 'making mistakes', has led to increased independence and 'buy in' from pupils.

Next steps as identified by the school

Consider how successfully teachers perform in relation to the 12 pedagogical principles outlined in Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015).

Dŵr y Felin Comprehensive School

Context

Dŵr y Felin Comprehensive School is an English-medium 11-16 mixed comprehensive school in Neath Port Talbot with around 1,150 pupils on roll.

The school draws pupils from Neath and the surrounding area. Around 17% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. About 2% of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. Most pupils are from white British backgrounds with a very few from minority ethnic groups. The school identifies that around 26% of pupils have additional learning needs.

The senior leadership team consists of the headteacher, two deputy headteachers, two assistant headteachers and a bursar. The headteacher has been in post since 2012 and the two deputies have been members of the senior leadership team since 2009 and 2008. The assistant headteacher responsible for teaching and learning has been in post since June 2017. Previously, one of the deputy headteachers held this responsibility.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum and other professional learning.

Strategy and action

The headteacher and senior leadership team in Dŵr y Felin are clear that the school motto 'Nid da lle gellir gwell' 'It's not good enough unless it's your best' applies to the whole-school community. Leaders have high expectations for the provision of teaching and assessment. They provide extensive professional challenge and support to staff to enable them to reach these expectations.

The school considers a wide range of evidence through its self-evaluation processes. This ensures a holistic view of how effective teaching is across the school and what needs to improve further. This informs teaching as a central priority in the school development plan. Senior and middle leaders understand that improving teaching is one of their core functions. Teaching features on the agendas of all team and line management meetings, as well as being a key performance management objective for all staff, personalised to their role and their development needs.

An established teacher learning network group meets on a monthly basis. This group gives staff the opportunity to share pedagogy and teaching resources, in line with the termly school pedagogy focus.

This year the school has chosen to concentrate on four of the pedagogical principles from 'Successful Futures' (Donaldson, 2015). These are:

- mindset and the power of effort, which supports the focus on more able pupils in the school development plan

- deepening thinking, for both critical and creative purposes
- learning autonomy and independent learning; pupils still need guidance, but they also need to learn to take ownership of their learning
- meaningful and authentic learning

Through these foci, the school is seeking to provide stimulating enrichment activities that add depth and breadth to learning.

The network group has created and trialled approaches which staff now implement across the school. For example, after making feedback a focus, the group made a number of refinements to their current methods. Group members trialled and evaluated the effectiveness of these changes before rolling them out at a whole school level. The group used a similar approach when considering how to refine and improve questioning. These collaborative approaches offer staff an opportunity to research and then apply relevant theory to wider school priorities, such as raising the attainment of more able pupils.

Dŵr y Felin has adopted a coaching approach as an aspect of its professional learning offer. The school uses coaching in two distinct ways:

- 1 All staff review their own performance using digital technology. Self-reflection takes place at an individual level, although most teachers choose to discuss aspects of their teaching with a colleague or line manager. All teachers have had training on how to use this dialogue as a tool for reflection. In discussion with performance managers, staff set themselves clear actions to develop further pedagogical techniques and approaches.
- 2 Due to a recent senior leader appointment, Dŵr y Felin has had an opportunity to use the GROW coaching model with all staff. This non-threatening professional dialogue is welcomed and embraced by many staff and is becoming a strong tool for professional learning in the school.

All staff have beneficial opportunities to discuss their current goals and personal development needs with a coach. The school's investment in time has been rewarded by renewed commitment to the school's drive to continue to improve performance at all levels. Staff feel listened to, and have access to bespoke, personalised support, much of which the school provides through its internal expertise. All professional learning opportunities teachers identify have to demonstrate that they benefit other staff and pupils, as well as linking to the new professional teaching standards.

A further benefit of this approach is the deep knowledge gained of staff views on a range of important aspects of school life. This has enabled senior leaders to target whole school activities more precisely, particularly regarding wellbeing. They have made the most of useful readily available external resources to do this, such as Academi Wales publications.

Outcomes

As a result of the continued sharp focus on teaching, there are significant improvements on those aspects that have been identified as priorities. Using evidence from lesson observations, work scrutiny and pupil voice activities, the school concludes that, due to changes made by staff, questioning is now a strong feature in many lessons and the quality of written feedback has improved. Many comments now enable pupils to understand how to improve their work.

Nearly all staff understand the importance of quality teaching and are partners in the school's improvement journey. They feel empowered to try new approaches, knowing they can reflect on their successes and areas to develop with colleagues through the various networks and meetings. Most of all, staff clearly enjoy the opportunities they have, and take on the challenge of further improving their teaching with pride. They are proud to belong to Dŵr y Felin and share the headteacher's ambition for the school and its pupils.

Pupils feel challenged by their teaching and embrace this with zeal. Older pupils recognise the changes that have taken place over time, and how teaching now offers new challenges and opportunities to aim higher. Many pupils understand that learning is not always easy, but feel supported and encouraged by all staff.

Next steps as identified by the school

- Developing four further pedagogical principles
- Continuing to focus on pupil responses to feedback
- Incorporating the four core purposes
- Using digital resources in the classroom

Tredegear Comprehensive School

Context

Tredegear Comprehensive School is a mixed 11-16 school in Blaenau Gwent local authority. It has around 650 pupils on roll. Around 21% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that 28% of pupils have additional learning needs.

Nearly all pupils speak English as their first language and come from a white British background. No pupils are fluent in Welsh.

The headteacher has been in post since 2012. The senior leadership team is comprised of a deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers.

Strategy and action

On joining the school, the headteacher immediately identified many shortcomings in teachers' and middle leaders' understanding of data. This included a lack of awareness of how to use national indicators to measure the performance of pupils compared with those at similar schools, as well as how to use data to measure the progress and outcomes of individual and groups of pupils. Over time, this had prevented the school from developing an accurate assessment of how well pupils were achieving and consequently of the school's strengths and areas for development. The existing staff group was well established, staff turnover was low and relationships at all levels within the school were very good. However, overall, the culture within the school was not aspirational. Senior and middle leaders were unclear about their roles and responsibilities and they did not hold staff well enough to account for their performance.

The first round of lesson observations conducted by the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team identified that despite pockets of good practice in teaching, expectations of pupils were low and teachers' planning did not challenge individual pupils well enough. Opportunities for teachers to share good practice and access professional learning were limited. Across the school, teachers and leaders focused too much on the judgements attached to lesson observations and paid little attention to the impact of their teaching on pupils' learning.

The new headteacher, together with representatives from the local authority and consortium, had a shared view of the need to raise standards of attainment and attendance in the school. The headteacher was clear that it was essential to develop the leadership of teaching and learning in the school. To do this she would need to strengthen the capacity of middle and senior leaders to understand and use data to drive improvements in pupil outcomes. At the same time, the school would need to establish a common approach to teaching that focused more on the impact of teaching on learning and less on the judgements attached to individual lessons and teachers.

Initially, the headteacher implemented a comprehensive programme of professional learning with senior and middle leaders, focusing on the use of data at both a whole-school and individual pupil level. This included developing a shared understanding among staff of the most important performance indicators at key stage 3 and key stage 4 and the use of these to measure the relative performance of the school against other similar schools.

In addition, the school's processes to evaluate the attainment and progress of individual pupils were underdeveloped. The headteacher worked with staff to strengthen systems to track and monitor the performance and attendance of individual pupils and to identify suitable intervention programmes for those pupils in need of additional support. This ensured that all staff had a clear understanding of pupils' progress, as well as the school's performance overall. In turn, this enabled staff at all levels to identify the school's strengths and priorities for improvement more accurately.

Linked to this, the headteacher implemented a range of measures to strengthen the degree of challenge and accountability within the school. Leaders reviewed the school's performance management to ensure that performance management targets addressed whole-school priorities. These included challenging but realistic targets for teachers that focused on pupil outcomes and related to pupils' prior levels of achievement. A review of the school's meeting structure ensured that meetings throughout the school focused consistently on school priorities, as well as providing increased opportunities for staff to contribute to discussion and self-evaluation.

Underpinning these developments, the headteacher was clear that it was essential to develop a culture of professional learning in the school that could support teachers to improve and become more consistent in their practice. A central requirement of this was the development of a shared language to discuss teaching and learning that could facilitate successful joint working and the sharing of effective practice.

As part of the support brokered to the school by the local authority, the headteacher had visited a school in England shortly after her appointment and was impressed by the ethos and approach to developing teaching in the school. In September 2013, two members of staff from this school began working with middle leaders from Tredegar School on a bespoke programme to develop teaching within the school with a focus on improving teachers' planning to demonstrate increased challenge, active learning and impact.

In 2014, the headteacher of the partner school in England was appointed as Tredegar's Schools Challenge Cymru (SCC) challenge adviser. This further strengthened the working partnership that had developed between the two schools and enabled the remaining teaching staff in the school to complete the bespoke teaching and learning programme. Following this, a small group of staff enrolled on an outstanding teacher programme, again facilitated by staff from England.

The school used part of its SCC funding to invest in a range of teaching and coaching programmes. This has enabled staff at the school to participate in a variety of professional learning activities closely related to their teaching and leadership responsibilities and their developmental needs.

A further element to the headteacher's strategy has been to ensure the development of consistent approaches to learning and teaching practice between the secondary school and its partner primary schools. Historically, the schools had always enjoyed positive working relationships and this has strengthened further in recent years through the shared focus on teaching and learning strategies.

A key feature of this collaboration has been to extend access to the suite of teaching programmes to staff across the cluster. This has enhanced significantly the opportunities for teachers to take part in cross-phase joint working and networking. The assistant headteacher from Tredegar and teaching and learning leads from each primary school meet every half-term to plan developments in teaching and learning, and regular 'TeachMeets' are held for teachers from across the cluster to share good practice after school.

Outcomes

Within a remarkably short space of time, the school's approach to improving teaching has enabled staff to establish shared pedagogical principles and a common language for discussing teaching and learning. The programmes have enthused staff and provided a consistent whole school approach to classroom practice. As part of the programmes, staff have benefitted from many opportunities to work together to share good practice and to develop ideas and resources. Pupils have welcomed the implementation of non-negotiable elements for lessons and like the daily routines and the consistency of practice across the school. They feel this has given them greater ownership of their learning as they know what to expect in lessons. Together with the emphasis on increasing the accountability of all staff for the outcomes the school's pupils achieve, these approaches have contributed significantly to raising the culture of challenge and aspiration within the school.

Teachers from across the Tredegar cluster have responded enthusiastically to the school's investment in its teaching programmes. To date, 60 teachers from across the Tredegar cluster have taken part in the outstanding teacher programme, 32 have taken part in the outstanding leaders of education programme, 12 have taken part in the improving teacher programme and 50 have taken part in the outstanding teacher assistant programme. In addition, schools in the cluster have trained five facilitators to ensure sustainability.

Pupils benefit considerably from effective continuity and progression in learning. Since 2012, outcomes at the school have improved considerably. For example, outcomes in the level 2 indicator including English and mathematics at key stage 4 have risen from 29% in 2012 to 55% in 2017. Performance in many indicators in 2017 placed the school in the upper 50% of similar schools based on free-school-meal eligibility (Welsh Government, 2017c).

Next steps as identified by the school

- Strengthen opportunities for joint practice development through a programme of peer observations where teachers work together to identify areas for development and plan lessons
- Develop opportunities for action research projects across the cluster

- Develop all staff as leaders of learning by continuing to invest in professional development that focuses on ensuring high standards of learning and teaching
- Promote opportunities to share effective practice within the school, across the cluster and beyond

Ysgol Bro Pedr

Ysgol Bro Pedr is a bilingual 3-19 school in Lampeter, Ceredigion. The school admits pupils to the primary department at three years of age. Pupils from other partner primary schools within the local authority and beyond join the secondary department at age 11. There are approximately 1,050 pupils on roll, with approximately 360 pupils in the primary department and 151 in the sixth form. The school is an amalgamation of two previous schools, Ysgol Gynradd Ffynnonbedr and Ysgol Gyfun Llanbedr Pont Steffan. 'Canolfan y Bont', which is a local authority resource for secondary age pupils with profound needs, is also an integral part of the school. There is also a specialist unit for pupils with profound educational needs and vulnerable pupils with behavioural needs.

Around 14% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that over 40% of its pupils have additional learning needs. Around 5% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Approximately 60% of pupils come from non-Welsh speaking homes. Over 8% of pupils speak English as an additional language, which is much higher than the national average.

The headteacher was appointed in January 2016. At that time, the school had one deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers. Following a period of restructuring, it now has two deputy headteachers and three full-time equivalent assistant headteachers. All senior staff have specific responsibilities relating to developing the school as an effective learning community.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum and other professional learning.

Strategy and action

The headteacher has a clear vision based on the principle that 'Every child counts at Ysgol Bro Pedr'.

As part of its work as a pioneer school the school is considering how best to develop the 12 pedagogical principles cited in Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015).

The first priority in the school development plan for 2016-2017 was to 'Raise standards of learning and teaching in order to improve pupils' progress and achievement'. This continues to be a main priority in 2017-2018.

When starting the work as a pioneer school, leaders identified the need to:

- 1 Establish an appropriate climate to enable teachers to teach successfully and for pupils to achieve to the best of their ability
- 2 Evaluate the effectiveness of teaching
- 3 Ensure consistency, share good practice and develop pedagogy

1 Establishing an appropriate climate to enable teachers to teach successfully and for pupils to achieve to the best of their ability.

Initially, staff had a productive discussion about the main barriers that were preventing them from teaching effectively and delivering the lessons that they had planned for pupils. They concluded that spending time dealing with cases of low-level misbehaviour was the main barrier across the school. Teachers in the primary sector also raised issues relating to pupils' wellbeing.

In order to ensure that it gives teachers an opportunity to teach without having to deal with these persistent behavioural issues, the school put appropriate actions in place.

In the primary sector, leaders decided to have a dedicated support room where pupils could go if they were disrupting learning excessively. The school appointed a level 3 member of support staff as the support room co-ordinator. If a pupil disrupts lessons excessively in a primary class, a member of staff takes them to the support room. The support room co-ordinator talks through the issues with the pupil concerned and tries to resolve their problems and address any concerns. Under the supervision of the co-ordinator, the pupil completes the tasks they would have undertaken in their class. When necessary, the co-ordinator also liaises with parents to try to resolve any underlying problems or behavioural issues that the pupil may have.

In the secondary sector, the school has established a code of conduct that it calls the 'Bro Pedr Right to Learn'. The code sets out clear rules of conduct for pupils and makes them responsible for the choices they make concerning their own behaviour in the classroom and around the school. Teachers register pupils at the beginning of every lesson and at the end of each lesson give each pupil a grade. The grades go from one to four. Grade one is for excellent work or good behaviour towards learning, grade two is for the expected behaviour, grade three means that the teacher has issued a warning and grade four means that the pupil has been removed from the classroom to complete their work in the support room. Staff use an electronic registration system to log a grade four and record the reasons why they made the decision to remove a pupil from the classroom. Leaders analyse this information effectively to address persistent misbehaviour and to identify behaviour patterns in pupils.

As a result of the introduction of these systems, staff soon reported a significant improvement in pupils' behaviour and an improvement in their personal wellbeing. Teachers were able to teach throughout the lesson without interruption, and greater pupil progress was evident, not only among pupils who had misbehaved previously, but also among their peers.

2 Evaluating the effectiveness of teaching

Leaders set teachers' performance management targets and base their evaluations about the effectiveness of teaching through judging the quality of pupils' standards. Every teacher has at least one quantitative target that relates to the expected outcomes of a group of pupils at the end of the relevant key stage. Leaders ensure that all teachers are familiar with the national professional standards and implement

them consistently. Leaders expect teachers to use pupil data to inform their lesson plans and their preparation of teaching resources. This includes setting interesting, differentiated and challenging class work and homework tasks that enable all pupils to make appropriate progress.

The school provides additional individual support for teachers who receive a judgement of adequate or below in two or more classroom observations.

3 Ensuring consistency, sharing good practice and developing pedagogy

As the school is a pioneer school and working with the Welsh Government and other schools to lead work around professional learning, developing effective pedagogy is a priority at Ysgol Bro Pedr.

Leaders made a decision to use professional triads to develop the 12 pedagogical principles cited in *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015). The school believes that triads are an effective way of observing good practice, sharing ideas, increasing confidence and supporting staff. Professional triads involve three teachers working together over time to plan, try out new ideas, observe, teach and evaluate each other's practice.

Professional triad planning cycle

Meeting 1: The three teachers plan jointly, and one of the three teaches the lesson, while the two other teachers observe. They then complete a lesson observation sheet.

Meeting 2: Teachers feedback their observations from the first lesson and then jointly plan the next lesson. The second teacher from the triad teaches and the two other teachers observe. They then complete a lesson observation sheet.

Meeting 3: Teachers feedback their observations from the second lesson and then jointly plan the next lesson. The last teacher from the triad teaches and the two other teachers observe. They then complete a lesson observation sheet.

Meeting 4: Teachers feedback their observations from the third lesson and jointly complete a feedback form that they present to the leadership team.

The feedback from teachers gives senior leaders a strategic overview of how well the triad system is working and helps them to make decisions about how best to adapt the system as it embeds across the school.

The triads are organised in the following ways:

- three teachers with the same level of responsibility
- inexperienced teachers working with experienced teachers
- cross-subject triads

In the first cycle, triads focused on one of the following pedagogical principles:

- mind-set and the power of effort
- assessment for learning
- overall purpose

This year, all triads are focussing on the principle of blended teaching. The school has decided to use this aspect to upskill teachers in order to help them to develop digital competency across the school.

A few of the triads, and individual teachers, record their lessons using digital video equipment to enable them to evaluate themselves and their peers. This has proved to be very successful.

To ensure consistency and improve teaching across the school, all staff follow the school's agreed classroom practice policies. These include using a common marking code, teachers discussing pupils' work with them rather than only giving written feedback and teachers considering more of the pupils' voice in lessons to ensure a better level of challenge for all.

To support teachers in providing an appropriate challenge for all pupils, the school has produced a staff handbook on differentiation. The handbook confirms the importance of creating lessons that address the needs of all pupils to ensure effective learning in all classes. It gives teachers a clear explanation of what the school means by the term differentiation and provides helpful ideas, strategies and examples for them to use in their lessons. These include advice on:

- presenting, displaying and discussing key words
- modelling conversations
- seating plans
- giving examples of answers
- showing examples of good work
- differentiating by outcome
- extending tasks
- pacing lessons appropriately
- group work
- giving thinking time
- skilful questioning
- using writing frames

Teachers, including supply staff, appreciate the handbook. They think that it is a valuable resource, which helps them to improve the quality of their teaching and raise pupils' standards of learning.

To ensure that practices in the primary and secondary sector are as consistent as possible, the school develops the thematic element of teaching that the primary sector uses frequently for Year 7 pupils in subjects such as history, geography and ICT. This facilitates the transition for pupils and prepares staff and pupils effectively to meet the requirements of the Digital Competence Framework.

Outcomes

One of the main outcomes is the improvement in pupils' behaviour in classes. Pupils take greater responsibility for their behaviour, concentrate better and show an improved commitment to learning. Unexpectedly, the self-confidence of many pupils who had misbehaved historically has increased, and they are beginning to realise that they are able to succeed in tasks. As a result, they have higher aspirations for their futures. Teachers have reported improved standards of achievement not only for pupils who had misbehaved previously, but also for the other pupils in their classes. There has been an increase in pupils' attainment in a majority of indicators at the end of key stages.

Staff wellbeing has improved. Teachers take pride in the fact that they are able to concentrate on teaching throughout their lessons, rather than waste time dealing with misbehaviour and underperformance.

Teachers see the value of working in triads and feel that leaders continuously support them in improving their teaching practice.

Leaders have a good understanding of the standard of teaching and learning across the school, and they recognise that there is now better consistency and practice in teaching.

Next steps as identified by the school

- Ensure that systems to improve teaching and learning become embedded
- Improve further teachers' ability to assess the quality of their own practice, and that of their peers
- Ensure that teachers know which aspects of pupils' learning need improving to allow them to reach their potential

Case studies of schools that have sustained excellence in their teaching

Gladestry Church in Wales Primary School

Context

Gladestry Church in Wales Primary School is in the village of Gladestry in Powys. There are just over 40 pupils on roll between 4 and 11 years of age. The school has two mixed-age classes. Since the last inspection, in line with the policy of the local authority, the school no longer provides for nursery-aged pupils.

All pupils are white British and no pupil speaks English as an additional language or speaks Welsh at home. No pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that around 15% of pupils have additional learning needs.

Since the 2009 inspection, there have been no changes to teaching staff. The headteacher has been in post since September 2001. The headteacher has 1.6 days per fortnight to carry out her leadership responsibilities and teaches the key stage 2 class for the remaining time.

Strategy and action

All staff, pupils, governors and parents believe in the school's guiding principle, which is that pupils should be at the heart of the teaching and learning process and that pupils should own their school and everything that happens in it. This is central to the school's ethos, vision and daily practice and leads to pupils consistently making informed choices about what and how they learn.

One of the main catalysts for the school's approach to curriculum development and pedagogy was the publication of the non-statutory skills framework for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a). This document, coupled with additional guidance in the form of 'Making the most of learning – Implementing the revised curriculum' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008b), gave the school the impetus to adopt a new curriculum and alter the way in which teachers facilitated learning. The document reiterates the aims of the curriculum, as:

- focusing on the learner
- ensuring appropriate skills development is woven through the curriculum
- focusing on continuity and progression for 3 to 19-year-olds
- offering reduced subject content with an increased focus on skills

This was the starting point for asking pupils what and how they would like to learn. Since 2008, the school's pedagogy and curriculum have evolved, but pupil voice, respect for everyone, independence and creativity remain central. Many of the

school's current teaching practices exemplify well the 12 pedagogical principles outlined in *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015).

Both teachers in the school are highly successful in encouraging pupils to make their own decisions. They ask pupils questions such as

- what do you think we should do next?
- how best can the adults or your peers help you?
- how can you help yourself to improve?

Questions like these are not one off events but happen on a regular basis and help pupils to have control over their own learning. Comments from a pupil who has joined the school recently encapsulate the teachers' approach. He says that in his previous school, 'I was always told what to do, never asked what I wanted'. During a learning conversation with his teacher about what he wanted to achieve, they looked together at the work in his books from the previous school and he came to the realisation that his work, prior to starting at Gladestry, had not challenged him. What is interesting is his comment that he would not have known or even thought about challenging himself before he joined the school. Challenging yourself, each other and asking when you do not know something are common and consistent themes in conversations between everyone involved in the school. Teachers model learning conversations with each other and pupils. Their regular and insightful feedback helps pupils to improve their learning and encourages them to take greater responsibility for their own outcomes.

Another successful feature of the teaching in the school is the high level of trust between staff and pupils. Teachers model effective teaching and talk explicitly to the class about what makes effective teaching, such as good questioning, high expectations, valuing all responses and planning appropriately challenging work. They encourage pupils, particularly those in the key stage 2 class, to plan their own lessons and teach the rest of the class. Older pupils also regularly support the learning of pupils in the foundation phase. This practice has grown over time and pupils are now very confident in delivering lessons to their peers. In the summer term 2017, key stage 2 pupils split into groups with each group taking responsibility for planning and delivering a week's worth of lessons on a topic of their choice. The teacher talked to pupils about what the plan should contain in terms of developing skills and knowing what they wanted their peers to learn. She gave pupils planning time. The pupils' planning contained success criteria, links to the literacy and numeracy framework and often tasks at different levels. When pupils are teaching, the teacher observes carefully, directs the pupil teachers to those in need of additional support and models questions that pupils may wish to ask individuals and groups. Again, this is a two way process with pupils also suggesting ways that teachers could improve their practice. Every term, Year 6 pupils formally observe the teaching in each class. They fill in a proforma showing their thoughts on what they have seen and set relevant targets for the teachers.

To make sure that they keep in touch with the learning and pedagogy in the other class teachers swap classes for a session every week. They formally observe each other each term and use the regional consortium proforma to evaluate the quality of learning and standard of teaching. However, the headteacher is considering moving

away from this practice as she feels that it adds little value and is not telling her anything she or the other teacher do not already know. She is researching different models before making any changes. Teachers, pupils and governors monitor the quality of provision and the standard of work in books regularly. They use the outcomes from these activities extremely well to inform priorities in the school development plan. Teachers and pupils produce detailed action plans, which focus well on improving standards and teaching. For example, the school is now prioritising the ‘taking measured risks’ element of Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015) as pupils identified that this is an area they need to improve.

The headteacher is very conscious that, as a small school in a rural location, she needs to be proactive in establishing professional relationships with other providers. She has weekly conversations with the headteacher of the local pioneer school to ensure that she is aware of what is happening in the wider field of education. She also reads extensively to keep abreast of new research and curricular developments. The headteacher shares this information with others in the school. The foundation phase teacher also seeks out information actively and uses online forums to learn about the practice in other schools and share ideas. Both teachers are very keen to acknowledge that they are responsible for their own professional learning and take this responsibility seriously.

Outcomes

Due to the exceptional levels of respect within the school and teachers’ determination to facilitate learning through their teaching practices, the school is well on its way to exemplifying many of the pedagogical principles that underpin the new curriculum.

Teachers:

- maintain a consistent focus on the overall purposes of the curriculum
- encourage pupils to take increasing responsibility for their own learning
- support social and emotional development and positive relationships
- encourage collaboration
- challenge all pupils by encouraging them to recognise the importance of sustained effort in meeting expectations that are high but achievable for them
- employ a blend of approaches including those that promote problem solving, creative and critical thinking
- set tasks and select resources that build on previous knowledge and experience and engage interest
- create authentic contexts for learning
- employ assessment for learning principles
- regularly reinforce cross-curriculum responsibilities, including literacy, numeracy and digital competence, and provides opportunities for pupils to practise them

Next steps as identified by the school

- Work with another local school to share practice using video technology
- Take part in an action research project about taking physical measured risks
- Consider further how well the school compares as a learning organisation

Herbert Thompson Primary School

Context

Herbert Thompson Primary School serves the Ely area of Cardiff. There are 524 pupils on roll, including 70 in the nursery. Pupils can join the nursery on a part-time basis at the beginning of the term following their third birthday. Many pupils are of white ethnic background, the remainder are of mixed ethnic groups. Around 7% of pupils speak English as an additional language. No pupils speak Welsh as a first language. Around half of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that about 38% of pupils have additional learning needs

There are currently 14 full-time teachers and nine part-time teachers at the school. The headteacher was appointed in 2016 having previously been the deputy headteacher for three years.

Strategy and action

The headteacher and senior team do not take the excellent judgements for granted or underestimate the planning and determination needed to sustain the school's high performance. The school sees developing practice and pedagogy as an ongoing improvement priority that has at its heart a shared understanding of what constitutes good and excellent teaching in Herbert Thompson. Quality professional learning opportunities linked to classroom practice and supported by effective coaching build the capacity of all teachers and learning support assistants to 'aim for excellence' in their teaching. All staff have challenging performance management targets and receive beneficial support to help achieve their targets. The senior team actively seek to ensure all staff feel valued and respected by taking steps to improve wellbeing across the school. These include, for example, ensuring that staff have enough time to carry out their tasks and that meetings focus sharply on core issues. Leaders make sure that they build in regular opportunities to thank colleagues and celebrate the work and life of the school. Teachers and learning support assistants are proud and happy to belong to the school community.

Through its improvement hub, Herbert Thompson has delivered a range of development programmes for schools across the Central South Consortium including one designed to improve the skills of teachers who already perform well. The school has enabled many of its own teachers to follow this programme. The senior team are clear that however good these professional learning opportunities are, it is necessary to follow up and build on the skills developed. They therefore make a commitment that teachers can reflect and improve on focused aspects of their pedagogy over time. To facilitate this they invest time and resources to release teachers to undertake peer observations and to use the coaching skills developed during professional learning time. This allows teachers to share ideas, practice and resources, and begin to unpick the pedagogical principles outlined in *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015).

These actions drive home the point that improving teaching is central to school improvement. The school is planning further opportunities to facilitate discussions about pedagogy to sustain the improving practice. Alongside the established initial teacher and newly qualified teacher programmes and the pedagogy and coaching work, the school is now sharpening its action research activity to be a manageable yet meaningful addition to the professional learning that takes place.

Learning support assistants in the school benefit from strong professional learning opportunities. Through mini learning reviews, learning support assistants reflect on the quality and impact of their work. These reviews give support staff the time to reflect on how well they deliver aspects of their work, what still needs to improve and how the school can support them. Support staff have also led professional learning sessions with schools across the consortium on some of the programmes developed by the school. This has improved their confidence and skills.

Outcomes

As a result of these actions, teaching in Herbert Thompson continues to be very strong and the school has sustained its excellent practices. The school uses evidence from pupil outcomes, lesson observations and drop-ins, work scrutiny and listening to learners to make this judgement. All pupils continue to make very strong progress during their time in the school, including groups of pupils vulnerable to underachievement.

Perhaps the biggest difference that the focus on teaching has had is that leaders, teachers and learning support assistants all share how extremely proud and happy they are to belong to the school community. They feel valued and supported as well as challenged to be the best they can. They continue to make a significant contribution to enriching the learning experiences for pupils at the school. Leaders and all staff live out the vision of the school, and exemplify the positive values and behaviours set out for all members of the Herbert Thompson community.

Next steps as identified by the school

Through its rigorous self-evaluation processes, the school has decided to focus on two of the pedagogical principles this year. Staff are now linking their performance management targets to the new professional standards for teaching and learning, and in particular to the pedagogy dimension of advancing learning. Teachers can choose from blended learning experiences or real-life, authentic contexts. As part of performance management, senior leaders have a monitoring and evaluating impact target from the new formal leadership standards that they link to improving pedagogy.

Ysgol Gynradd Parcyrhun

Context

Ysgol Gynradd Parcyrhun is on the outskirts of the town of Ammanford in Carmarthenshire. There are around 210 pupils on roll. The school has a Welsh language stream and an English stream, and both languages are used in the day-to-day life of the school. A resource centre for children with hearing impairments, which serves Carmarthenshire, is an additional part of the school. The school is divided into eight mixed-age classes in the mainstream, and one additional classroom in the resource centre for children with hearing impairments. The school employs ten full-time teachers, including the headteacher, and two part-time teachers.

Just over 20% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that around 50% of pupils have additional learning needs this includes pupils who attend the resource centre. Very few pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes or ethnic minority backgrounds.

There have been no notable changes to the school's staff since the inspection. The headteacher was appointed in January 2009, following a short period as the school's deputy headteacher.

Strategy and action

From the outset, the headteacher had a clear vision that is based on ensuring that pupils at Ysgol Parcyrhun receive an education of the highest standard to enable them to achieve to the best of their ability. When she started working there, she realised how vital the school's role was in providing broad and rich experiences for its pupils.

Soon after taking up the headship, the headteacher appointed the deputy headteacher, who shares her vision and works effectively with her. Together, they put in place monitoring, self-evaluation and strategic plans to enable them to identify the school's strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, they decided that teachers' expectations of what pupils could achieve needed to be raised, accountability procedures needed to be established and best practice in teaching needed to be consistent across the school. This case study focuses on ensuring consistency in effective teaching practice across the school.

Leaders established basic principles at an early stage to ensure that teaching was effective. These included providing effective professional learning opportunities and support for staff, and ensuring that they have appropriate resources to fulfil their roles successfully.

Procedures for monitoring and managing staff performance are now an integral part of the school's work, and are a way of recognising good practice and identifying each individual's development needs. Leaders arrange specific professional learning

activities to address the development needs of each member of staff. They evaluate professional learning in detail and identify its effect clearly. Professional learning opportunities vary according to individual need and include activities such as attending external courses, sharing good practice within and across the school and other schools, or working with another member of staff with specific expertise.

There is a clear focus on high expectations and consistent provision across the school, particularly between the two streams. In order to ensure this and reduce the workload, teachers frequently work in pairs to plan lessons, produce resources and moderate assessments. This is a good opportunity for them to share their expertise, and support and challenge each other's ideas.

One of the school's most effective procedures to ensure consistency and high standards in terms of teaching is the monitoring week that it holds each term. It has a high profile in the school's termly calendar and is a forum to enable leaders at all levels to evaluate teaching and learning and share good practice. Leaders, in consultation with teachers, agree on a specific focus for the week, for example numeracy, literacy or independent learning. Leaders arrange useful opportunities for members of staff to visit each other's classes to observe practice and scrutinise pupils' work. During the week, they invite governors with a specific link to a particular area to take part in learning walks. This enriches governors' awareness of the school's work and enables them to operate better in their strategic role.

As a result of the frequent and successful co-operation between staff, they are now very open with each other, honest in their judgements and willing to support each other to improve in order to provide the best possible education for pupils. Leaders consider the ideas of staff when introducing new strategies, which encourages ownership and enthusiasm.

In order to enrich this further, leaders have begun the practice of engaging with pupils through questionnaires. For example, survey questions ask what kind of learners they think they are, which spelling strategies work best for them and how they like to learn new computer skills.

Teachers' practices are now effective and based on a number of educational principles that relate to the four purposes identified in *Successful Futures* (Donaldson, 2015). They place a clear focus on improving pupils' literacy skills in Welsh and English, numeracy skills and ICT skills, and provide regular opportunities for them to apply them naturally across the curriculum. Lessons engage the interest of nearly all pupils and promote their thinking skills, their independence and their co-operation skills well.

Ensuring good teaching is no longer the aim in itself; it is now more about sharing and sustaining excellence.

Outcomes

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They use the information well to set appropriate priorities for the school development plan.

All of the school's teachers are dedicated and confident in their work. They are open and honest with each other and are effective critical friends. They have high expectations of themselves and pupils, and are willing to try out new ideas. Teachers have embedded the principle of consistency across the school. They work effectively to ensure that all pupils receive the best provision possible.

Standards of pupils' learning have improved consistently over recent years. Nearly all pupils now speak confidently about their work and discuss complex concepts confidently. They express their opinions eloquently and appreciate what the school does for them.

Next steps as identified by the school

Using its current thematic plans, the school will build on the excellent practice that exists in order to develop all of the 12 pedagogical principles from Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015).

Pontarddulais Comprehensive School

Context

Pontarddulais Comprehensive School is an 11-16 mixed school maintained by Swansea local authority. There are approximately 800 pupils on roll. The school hosts a unit which supports key stage 3 and key stage 4 pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities from across the local authority. The school serves pupils from Pontarddulais and the surrounding villages. Around 15% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that approximately 29% of pupils have additional learning needs. Around 3% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Most pupils come from a white British background and very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2011. The senior leadership team is made up of two deputy headteachers and two acting assistant headteachers.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum and other professional learning.

The school has recently restructured its staffing to align with the four core purposes of Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015).

Strategy and action

Leaders place a strong emphasis on ensuring that staff lead on school improvement initiatives and that teachers lead, develop and refine the school's pedagogical practices. This has ensured that there is a positive learning climate across the school. Pontarddulais staff are involved fully in the construction and implementation of the school development plan. The headteacher and senior team hold a Saturday school development-planning day at an external venue in the city, which, along with the school's robust self-evaluation cycle, helps to formulate key priorities. Staff attendance at this voluntary event is high and this has helped to continue to foster a collegiate, inclusive approach to school improvement. All staff are members of working groups that lead on these key priorities and are therefore advocates for whole school initiatives.

In order to raise expectation within their departments, middle leaders set ambitious targets using value-added data. They conduct forensic monitoring of pupils' progress through a nine-week tracking cycle based on thoughtfully scheduled assessment across subjects. This results in a meaningful progress check for each pupil. Pupils have ownership of their learning and progress through this system and they reflect genuinely on their learning and progress. The school shares this work effectively with parents and carers. This creates a mutually supportive relationship that focuses on improving standards. Teachers use this information beneficially to inform their planning and to intervene at an early stage when pupils are at risk of underachieving. Where appropriate, the school uses highly effective intervention programmes in both key stages to support pupils with weaker skills. These programmes build pupils' confidence across the curriculum and are a strong feature of the school's work.

Over time, the headteacher has established and maintained a positive learning climate in which teachers lead and embrace change and innovation. There is a culture of sharing of good and excellent practice and an open and transparent self-evaluative approach in all aspects of the school's work. For example, the whole school approach to the delivery of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework has ensured that skills development is an integral and fundamental part of every teacher's pedagogical toolkit. Working together, teachers led on how to embed the skills of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. This has resulted in very high levels of consistency in approaches to reading and writing and high levels of pupil confidence when reading complex texts and when undertaking a wide range of writing tasks for a variety of audiences and purposes.

Teachers have also have implemented very effective changes to the school's approach to marking and feedback. A working group of teachers undertook an action research project to look to improve the consistency of approach to diagnostic marking and pupils' responses. This group were keen to align the school's ethos and its culture of growth mind-set as part of this work on assessment. As a result, they revised the school's marking policy and clarified the school's approach to marking the technical features of pupils' work. Most importantly, the teacher led group initiated a consistent approach to giving pupils opportunities to respond to teacher feedback following key assessment tasks through introducing dedicated 'STAR' (stop, think, act and reflect) time. This has resulted in pupils taking purposeful ownership of their learning and has helped them not only to understand what they need to do to improve but also given them frequent, timely opportunities in which to do so.

Outcomes

The school has a rich culture of support, challenge and collaboration. Strong leadership, at all levels, has enabled the focus on learning and teaching to flourish. The headteacher and leadership team have established an ethos of excellence in all aspects of the school's work. They have high expectations of everyone in the school community coupled with an intrinsic trust in their staff. The school has robust systems for self-evaluation and for gathering first-hand evidence and this is aligned to very effectively planned and tiered continuing professional development and learning for all staff. The combination of the culture created and nurtured by the headteacher and headship team and their trust in aspiring leaders to lead and manage whole school developments has ensured excellent outcomes and innovative approaches to pedagogy over time.

As a result of this culture and approach, pupils at Pontarddulais Comprehensive School, understand and have pride in the ethos of the school and its expectations of the highest quality of teaching and learning. Pupils can articulate confidently the school's focus on standards and the excellent working relationships between teachers and pupils, which means that pupils feel valued and known as individuals. Pupils have high levels of engagement and motivation in their learning. They demonstrate strong reading, writing and numeracy skills across the curriculum and the overall standards achieved by pupils are well above modelled expectation.

Next steps as identified by the school

The school is committed to ensuring leadership continues to focus upon teaching, learning and assessment and through its pioneer role, the school will look to share its good practice and learn from others locally and nationally.

Y Pant Comprehensive School

Context

Y Pant Comprehensive School is an English-medium 11-19 school, maintained by Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority. It serves the areas of Pontyclun, Talbot Green, Brynna and Llanharry. There are around 1,300 pupils on roll, of whom 205 are in the sixth form. Nearly all pupils speak English as their first language and come from a white British background. A very few pupils are fluent in Welsh.

Around 10% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school identifies that around 12% of pupils have additional learning needs. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

The headteacher at the time of the January 2017 inspection has since left the school. Currently, an acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher both of whom were at the school at the time of the inspection lead the school.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum and other professional learning.

Strategy and action

Over time, the school has developed a highly effective three-pronged approach to maintaining and improving excellent standards in outcomes and teaching. Central to this has been the evolution of an approach to pedagogy, which staff understand and apply consistently. At the same time, the school has developed robust mechanisms to develop teachers as reflective practitioners, enabling purposeful opportunities for colleagues to share and reflect well on each other's practice. Finally, the school has developed a rigorous approach to the use of data and qualitative evidence to support its evaluation of teaching and to identify further areas for improvement.

At the heart of the school's approach to developing teaching is a strong and shared understanding by teachers about the impact that effective teaching has on learning and pupils' outcomes.

The school's teaching and learning policy describes its approach to teaching and learning through key principles. The school refers to these principles collectively as the 'Y Pant Way'. The policy explains the approach clearly. This supports teachers that are new to the school. At strategic points in the school's professional learning cycle, leaders reinforce and discuss the key principles with all staff.

A key priority for the school's leadership team in developing these principles has been to ensure that they remain simple, memorable and relevant. Leaders and teachers at the school are clear that this approach should not result in a formulaic or tick-box approach to evaluating teaching that prohibits the development of individual teachers' autonomy. On the contrary, the principles form a common framework to

guide and inform discussions on teaching, learning and professional learning, within which teachers are encouraged to identify and develop their own strengths. This ensures a rich and varied diet of learning experiences for pupils across the school.

The school's approach to teaching and learning focuses on the following essential principles:

- All learning has a clear structure
- High levels of engagement are sustained
- Learners are sufficiently challenged
- Assessment for learning is embedded
- Cross-curricular requirements are meaningful and relevant
- Positive and supportive working relationships between teachers and learners support learning

Leaders and staff are clear that the consistent focus on these key principles by all staff has provided a highly effective starting point for discussions about teaching. Over time, this has led to the development of highly consistent practice across the school. It has also helped to create a culture of professional autonomy that enables staff to implement new policy requirements and curriculum initiatives in a staged, considered and proportionate way.

Well-established processes, which aim to develop an ethos of reflective practice within the school, strengthen the consistent approach to teaching and learning. The school has implemented many relevant opportunities for teachers to share their experience and practice in a context that allows for meaningful discussion and debate. For example, the school has moved away from the practice of using lesson observations to judge teachers and lessons, to one that sees observations as a vehicle for identifying best practice and a rich context for coaching for teachers seeking to improve aspects of their practice. Peer observations, conducted by members of the senior leadership team and subject specialists, help the school to gather rich information about the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching across the school. Staff use this information well to inform priorities in whole school and departmental improvement plans.

Small groups of teachers within or across departments take part in learning walks, which have a clear focus on identifying what works well. These learning walks provide valuable opportunities for teachers to share and reflect on best practice. Leaders allocate time, as part of the school's professional learning programme, for teachers to work together in groups of three or six to plan, complete and report on learning walks. Staff share and discuss the key findings annually.

The school's after-school strategy groups, which are part of teachers' directed time, have also given staff opportunities to engage with research and to develop action research projects. These groups act as discussion forums to enable staff to keep abreast of initiatives in education and to develop colleagues' awareness of pedagogical practices. In the first year of the current cycle, leaders selected a range of academic texts for discussion. Staff chose topics they felt were most relevant to them, and met regularly over the course of the year to read and discuss their text, providing a synopsis of their work to the whole staff at the end of the year. Teachers

valued the opportunity to explore and develop their understanding of these ideas in their own time, as opposed to passively receiving information from the senior leadership team. In the second year of the cycle, colleagues were encouraged to consider the practical applications of what they had discovered and initiate individual or collaborative action research projects.

The school supplements the sharing of good pedagogical practice described above with high quality professional learning days. Staff from across the school have beneficial opportunities to plan and deliver these. A teacher leads each session and focuses on an area identified as best practice within their own area of responsibility. While these days and sessions frequently address whole-school developmental needs, leaders ensure that there are regular opportunities for teachers to access a more varied menu of professional learning activities that reflect their individual needs.

In addition, the school's involvement with networks of other schools, for example through its work as a pioneer school and a professional learning hub school for the Central South Consortium, has provided meaningful opportunities for staff to work with other schools to share and gather best practice.

The final element of the school's strategic approach to improving standards in outcomes and teaching lies in its rigorous approach to the use of data and other sources of qualitative evidence. The school has established robust procedures to evaluate pupil progress through the development of its own value-added measure, the 'Y Pant residual', which it uses to track and monitor pupil progress at key stage 4 and key stage 5. Middle leaders conduct departmental reviews for all departments each year, using this information as well as the outcomes from work scrutiny and pupil voice activities, lesson observations and learning walks. These reviews provide a comprehensive overview of the department's work, informing departmental self-evaluation and improvement planning. These activities inform in turn whole-school self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Regular departmental quality assurance meetings ensure that staff across the school are involved in evaluating the standards of pupils' work and provide further opportunities for staff to exchange ideas and share practice. These procedures have helped to strengthen the capacity of middle leaders across the school and to ensure that senior and middle leaders have a common approach to evaluating standards and identifying priorities for improvement.

The school views data on pupil progress, the outcomes of pupil voice activities and work scrutiny as the key indicators when evaluating teaching and learning in the school. Leaders feel these activities provide a much more reliable and informative source of information to identify the school's strengths and priorities for improvement than relying on the outcomes of lesson observations alone.

Outcomes

The school demonstrates the strengths of its approach to developing high quality teaching through the consistently high outcomes pupils achieve. In lessons and over time, pupils at Y Pant Comprehensive School make consistently strong progress. At

the end of key stage 4, performance is consistently above modelled outcomes, and compares very well with that of similar schools based on free-school-meal eligibility. Pupils that are more able do extremely well. Boys, girls and pupils eligible for free school meals perform better than these groups of pupils in similar schools (Welsh Government, 2017c).

The Estyn inspection report of January 2017 judged that, overall, the quality of teaching at the school is excellent. Inspectors reported that the school places a strong emphasis on professional learning and this results in highly consistent and effective classroom practice. The school provides many valuable opportunities for teachers to improve their skills, including participation in research, which benefits both their own practice and that of other colleagues. The school actively supports and collaborates with other schools. This has strengthened the practice of teachers within the school.

Next steps as identified by the school

As it moves forward, the school is clear about the challenges it faces and the need to continue to evolve and refine its practice to ensure the best possible outcomes for its pupils. Its next steps include:

- ensuring that learning walks and teachers' professional development focus on strategies to improve boys' engagement in learning
- developing collaboration with cluster primary schools regarding common approaches to securing excellent learning and teaching, including cross-phase learning walks
- developing the role of pupils and governors in learning walks
- ensuring that the school's key principles regarding learning and teaching are shared more effectively with parents
- developing robust progress measures at key stage 3 in line with the approach used at key stage 4 and key stage 5

Evidence Base

This thematic survey draws on visits to 26 primary and secondary schools across Wales that have improved from very different starting points, including schools that have required follow-up after a full Estyn inspection and schools that have sustained good or excellent performance over time. The school visits took place in the autumn term 2017. In these visits to schools, inspectors:

- interviewed senior leaders, middle leaders, class teachers, learning support staff and pupils to capture all aspects of how the school was improving their teaching practices and building a sustainable workforce
- scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, staffing structure and continuous professional development records
- scrutinised samples of pupils' work and analysed school performance data
- carried out learning walks with pupils

Additional evidence was drawn from:

- primary and secondary school inspections from September 2010 to July 2017

List of schools visited

Deighton Primary School, Blaenau Gwent
 Dŵr y Felin Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot
 Gladestry Church in Wales Primary School, Powys
 Hafod Primary School, Swansea
 Herbert Thompson Primary School, Cardiff
 King Henry VIII Comprehensive School, Monmouthshire
 Lliswerry High School, Newport
 Maes-Y-Coed Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
 Neyland Community Primary School, Pembrokeshire
 Oldcastle Primary School, Bridgend
 Pontraddulais Comprehensive School, Swansea
 Rogerstone Primary School, Newport
 Sketty Primary School, Swansea
 Solva Community Primary School, Pembrokeshire
 St. George Church in Wales Primary School, Conwy
 Tonypandy Community College, Rhondda Cynon Taf
 Tredegar Comprehensive School, Blaenau Gwent
 Y Pant Comprehensive School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
 Ysgol Bro Pedr, Ceredigion
 Ysgol Cynwyd Sant, Bridgend
 Ysgol Gynradd Llanaelhaearn, Gwynedd
 Ysgol Gynradd Parcyrhun, Carmarthenshire
 Ysgol Pencae, Cardiff
 Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen, Gwynedd
 Ysgol Uwchradd Aberteifi, Ceredigion
 Ysgol Uwchradd Bodedern, Isle of Anglesey

Glossary

Accumulated marginal gains	A theory inspired by the philosophy that underpinned the success of Team GB Cycling at the Beijing and London Olympics. The philosophy is to focus on doing a few small things really well.
Academi Wales	The Welsh public service's centre for leadership excellence
Assessment for learning	An approach to teaching and learning that creates feedback, which is then used to improve pupils' performance
Blended teaching	A term that is generally applied to the practice of using both online and in-person learning experiences when teaching pupils
Brain Gym	A programme that calls for children to repeat certain simple movements such as crawling, yawning, making symbols in the air, and drinking water, which are claimed to increase blood flow to the brain, "integrate" the brain, and "repattern" the brain
Differentiation	The process by which differences between pupils are accommodated so that all pupils in a group or class have the best possible chance of learning
GROW	A structured coaching conversation. GROW stands for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal (what do you want to achieve) • Reality (where are you now) • Options (how could you achieve your goal) • Will or Way Forward (what are you going to do)
HWB	A digital "learning platform" designed to allow all pupils and teachers in Wales greater access to online resources
Lead creative schools scheme	A scheme funded by the Arts Council for Wales, which aims to promote new ways of working in participating schools by providing the opportunity to develop an innovative and bespoke programme of learning designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning
Learning Styles	A range of competing and contested theories that aim to account for differences in individuals' learning. These theories propose that all people can be classified according to their 'style' of learning, although the various theories present differing views on how the styles should be defined and categorised.

Lesson study	A Japanese model of teacher-led research in which triads of teachers work together to target an identified area for development in their pupils' learning
Leuven involvement scale	A five-point scale designed by Professor Ferre Laevers to measure a child's wellbeing and involvement to assess the level of learning that is taking place
Meta-analyses	Statistical analyses that combine the results of multiple scientific studies
Modelled outcomes	A prediction of a school's mean performance based on the statistical relationship between the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and a particular indicator
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Pedagogy	The discipline that deals with the theory and practice of teaching. Pedagogy informs teaching strategies, teacher actions, and teacher judgments and decisions.
Rich tasks	Projects that connect different subjects (interdisciplinary) and involve a variety of teaching and learning methods
Schools Challenge Cymru	The Welsh Government's multi-million pound programme introduced to improve performance at some of Wales' most challenged schools
Successful Futures	<p>A report on curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales. It highlights the shortcomings of the current curriculum arrangements and identifies four purposes for the new curriculum. It recommends that the entirety of the school curriculum should be designed to help all children and young people to become:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives • enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work • ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world , ready to be citizens of Wales and the world • healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society
Teach Meets	Organised but informal meetings for teachers to share good practice, practical innovations and personal insights in teaching
Triads	Groups of three teachers observing teaching and planning together

Numbers – quantities and proportions

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

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