



Transition and pupil progression

September 2024

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Executive summary

This report considers how well schools work together to support pupils' transition from primary into secondary school. It focuses on how well schools work together to ensure that their curricula and teaching develop pupils' knowledge, skills, understanding and learning behaviours effectively across transition. It considers how schools support the well-being of learners at this important transition point.

It is based on engagement with a sample of 23 primary schools, 13 secondary schools and 3 all-age schools, and evidence from our inspection and follow-up work since September 2022. We also took evidence from three regional school improvement services and three local authorities.

Our findings show that headteachers or senior leaders from most clusters of schools meet regularly to discuss Curriculum for Wales and how to support pupils' transition from primary to secondary school. In nearly all cases, leaders focused well on ensuring that there were beneficial induction arrangements to support pupils' well-being and implemented strategies to support pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). However, in many cases, and for a range of reasons, transition work is not effective enough in supporting the development of a continuum of learning for all pupils that ensures that they make systematic and continual progress in their knowledge, skills, understanding and learning behaviours from primary into secondary school.

In a minority of cases, clusters have set up groups of teachers to consider examples of pupils' learning, to help them begin to develop a shared understanding of progression across their schools. However, these practices are in their infancy and, in most cases, there is still not a strong understanding of what progression looks like in most clusters of schools. As a result, these practices have not improved how well learning progresses from primary into secondary schools strongly enough.

During our visits, leaders pointed to a range of issues that made cluster work on developing curriculum progression difficult, including co-ordinating the work of multiple primary schools with one secondary school, different interpretations of the curriculum within the same cluster of schools, or having the time and resources to release staff to work together. They identified the broad nature of the descriptions of learning as something that the staff in their schools were still grappling with. Secondary school leaders often identified that changes to GCSE qualifications were adding to the difficulty of making decisions about their curriculum, but in more effective schools they also recognised that improving teaching was vital to ensuring that pupils gained good qualifications.

In a few cases, clusters of primary and secondary schools have worked together positively to map out knowledge, skills and experiences across all areas of learning and experience (AoLE)¹ and have used this to begin to develop a shared understanding of progression. However, even where this is in place, secondary

¹ See glossary

schools do not always use it to take account of pupils' prior learning well enough. As a result, learning in Year 7 and beyond did not always support pupils' continuous and progressive development.

In all-age schools, despite the potential of the all-age approach to learning, curriculum coherence and planning for progression were not always strong. In the best cases, schools were working purposefully to develop one progressive continuum of learning from age 3 to 16 and were beginning to use this to ensure that they supported pupils' progress. However, a minority of all-age settings had made limited progress on developing a coherent approach to the curriculum and still considered learning in separate primary and secondary phases.

Many schools have provided teachers with a range of professional learning to support the introduction of Curriculum for Wales. However, in only a few cases had clusters of schools shared approaches to teaching or considered how they could ensure that teaching strategies supported pupils to make effective and continuous progress from primary into secondary school. Many were embedding strategies to support pupils to be more effective learners and recognised the importance of ensuring that pupils developed skills to monitor, regulate and assess learning. However, in only a few cases had schools considered how they could ensure that pupils continued to develop these skills and dispositions effectively when they move into secondary school.

In nearly all cases, primary schools passed on a broad and varied range of information about pupils' learning and progress to secondary schools prior to transition. A minority of clusters were beginning to consider how to share information on pupils' progress, in line with Curriculum for Wales. However, in nearly all cases, there was little clarity about what expectations of learning and progress were, even within the same cluster. As a result, these processes did little to support continuity in pupils' learning. In nearly all cases, primary schools shared the outcomes of the Welsh Government's personalised assessments with secondary schools. However, nearly all schools focused on sharing the standardised score only. They were not considering well enough the wide range of information about pupils' learning available from the assessment or how this might be used to further support teaching and learning.

In nearly all cases, schools supported pupils' induction² into secondary school well. They often arranged face-to-face meetings between leaders or teachers from primary schools and staff from secondary schools that allowed for a beneficial sharing of information. Primary and secondary schools worked together conscientiously to support the transition of pupils with ALN. Often staff with responsibility for pupils with ALN began working with their feeder primary schools when pupils were in Year 6 or in Year 5. These processes helped secondary schools understand and cater for these pupils' needs supportively.

In most cases, clusters of schools supported many aspects of pupils' well-being effectively as they moved from primary to into secondary school. In many cases, staff from secondary schools visited their feeder primary schools to speak to pupils early

² See glossary

in Year 6 and in a very few cases when they are in Year 5. In nearly all cases, clusters of schools identified pupils who could find transition more difficult than their peers and put in place a useful range of supportive activities and visits that helped these pupils transition to secondary school. In the best cases, schools worked together to plan and put in place strategies based on individual pupils' needs.

Many leaders were aware of the updated guidance on, and requirements of, transition planning, and used this to plan pupils' induction into secondary school appropriately. However, in many cases, transition plans lacked clarity on how schools would support continuity in pupils' learning, and how they would achieve this through curriculum design and planning for learning and teaching.

Introduction

This thematic report is written in response to a request for advice from the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language in his remit letter to Estyn for 2022-2023.

This review considers how transition fits with the shared understanding of progression. It evaluates how well schools are working together to develop a curriculum that ensures that pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding across AoLE progress effectively as they transition from primary to secondary school. It considers how schools support the well-being of learners at this important transition point.

When evaluating the curriculum, we considered both the 'what' (curriculum content) and the 'how' (teaching and pedagogy) that schools use to support pupils' learning. The review looks at how well these processes are supported by cluster³ working.

The review focuses on provision for pupils in primary, secondary and all-age schools. It is aimed at helping schools to evaluate and improve their provision and practice and support the educational experiences of pupils as they move from the primary to the secondary phase of their education.

In total, the project team visited 13 secondary schools, three all-age schools and 25 primary schools. We visited at least one primary school that had a formal transition relationship with each of the secondary schools we visited. To ensure that we gathered a valid national picture of the effectiveness of current transition arrangements, we visited schools in 15 different local authorities. We visited English-medium and Welsh-medium schools.

To collect evidence, the project team undertook a range of activities that included meeting with pupils to discuss and sample their experiences, work and progress. The team also met with school leaders and teachers and sampled schools' curriculum documentation. In addition, the team spoke with a range of local authority staff and regional support partners to gather their views about current transition arrangements. Throughout the process, the team triangulated the different sources of evidence to

³ See glossary

identify the important strengths and areas for improvement.

Background

In 2014, the Welsh Government commissioned an in-depth review of the curriculum in Wales. This led to a published report, '[Successful Futures. Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales](#)' (2015), which made a wide range of recommendations for change. The report identified a number of issues with the curriculum linked with its structure and the transition between different phases of education. For example:

- Negative effects are evident in the transitions between the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2, Key Stages 2 and 3, and Key Stages 3 and 4. In each case, shifts in philosophy or approach at transition points can hinder progression and there was evidence that this could contribute to disengagement as young people progress through school.
- Transition points, whether between sectors or phases, give rise to inevitable questions about continuity and progression.

The resulting [Curriculum for Wales](#) (Welsh Government, 2021) identified that the new curriculum should be considered as a single, progressive learning journey for pupils from age 3 to 16.

To ensure that this is the case, curriculum guidance recognises and highlights the importance of schools working together to develop a 'shared understanding of progression' within their school and with other schools. It recognises that a shared understanding of progression is 'integral to curriculum design' and that 'improving learning and teaching and is essential to support every learner to progress'.

To do this, the curriculum recognises the importance of schools working together to develop and understand:

- their joint expectations for how learners should progress and how knowledge, skills and experiences should contribute to this in schools' and settings' curricula – drawing on the principles of progression, statements of what matters and descriptions of learning
- how to ensure coherent progression for learners throughout their learning journey and in particular at points of transition (for example, across and between primary and secondary school; across and between funded non-maintained nursery settings and primary schools, or schools and EOTAS providers; and from year to year within a school/setting)

To further support this, the Welsh Government places a statutory duty upon schools to develop transition plans between primary and secondary schools. This guidance recognises that:

- moving from primary to secondary school is a key milestone in a learner's journey, and being properly supported to make this transition is important for all learners. Equally, continuity of learning to support progression for learners is crucial at this stage in a learner's journey.

Under the [new guidance for 2022](#), transition plans must include:

- proposals generally for managing and co-ordinating the transition of learners from the feeder primary schools to the secondary school
- proposals generally for how continuity of learning will be achieved through curriculum design and planning for learning and teaching for learners in Year 6 transitioning to Year 7
- proposals for how each individual learner's progression will be supported as they transition from primary school to secondary school
- proposals for how the learning needs and the well-being of each individual learner will be supported as they transition from primary school to secondary school
- proposals for reviewing and monitoring the impact of the transition plan in respect of how it has helped:
 - achieve continuity of learning
 - support individual learner progression

However, recent reports by Estyn identify ongoing weaknesses in these areas.

Our report on '[Preparing for the Curriculum for Wales – case studies and cameos from secondary, all-age and special schools](#)' (Estyn, 2020), noted that:

- Weak curriculum links between primary and secondary schools limit planning for progression.

The [Curriculum for Wales – How are regional consortia and local authorities supporting schools](#) (Welsh Government, 2022b), shares that:

- Too often, transition arrangements are limited to sharing of pupils' levels of attainment.

'[Developing pupils' English reading skills from 10-14 years of age](#)' (Estyn, 2023), notes:

- Overall, planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills, including their reading skills, from Year 6 to Year 7, is underdeveloped in nearly all schools in the sample. This is also the case within many all-age schools because there isn't enough communication and collaborative planning between the Year 6 and Year 7 teachers.

This review considers and reports on the quality of provision and support for pupils' learning as they transition between primary and secondary education in Wales. It identifies features of effective provision, highlights where practice is less successful, and explores the reasons why.

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 Develop a clearer shared understanding of progression within and across their clusters of schools
- R2 Work more closely as clusters to ensure that approaches to information sharing, teaching, and the curriculum support pupils to develop knowledge, skills, experiences and learning behaviours progressively from 3 to 16 years old

The Welsh Government should:

- R3 Provide clear guidance on the practical application of how to develop progression through and across the curriculum
- R4 Ensure that there is sufficient support to enable leaders and teachers to develop a coherent and progressive curriculum that sets high expectations for all pupils

Local authorities and regional support partners should:

- R5 Encourage and support stronger collaboration among clusters to address the recommendations we have identified for schools, focusing on establishing well-defined clusters with specific and clear objectives

School to-school working to support transition and pupil progress.

Nearly all schools have cluster working arrangements. This means that there is a well-established relationship between the secondary school and its main feeder primary schools. Although pupils may choose to transfer to other secondary schools, cluster working arrangements remain the norm across Wales.

Headteachers or other senior leaders from most clusters of schools meet regularly to discuss issues linked with Curriculum for Wales and supporting pupils' transition from primary to secondary school. In nearly all cases, we saw that they focused well on ensuring that there were beneficial induction arrangements to support pupils' well-being. In most cases, senior leaders recognised the importance of meeting to consider how well their curricula worked together to ensure that pupils made effective progress across transition. For example, leaders shared that they understood the need to prioritise more collaboration between staff, such as leaders of AoLE, to focus on ensuring a more progressive continuum of learning through curriculum planning. However, in many clusters, school-to-school working was not effective enough in supporting the development of a continuum of learning that ensured that pupils made systematic and continual progress from primary and into secondary school.

In nearly all cases, school leaders recognised the importance of supporting pupils' induction into secondary school and prioritised it well. They had often set in place useful processes for familiarising pupils with their new routines and classmates. This had helped to reduce pupils' anxiety about the transition to secondary school.

In nearly all schools, there were valuable links between pastoral leaders and staff with responsibility for pupils with ALN. As a result, in many cases, transition arrangements that supported these pupils' move from primary to secondary school were strong. In nearly all cases, secondary schools used the information they gathered from primary schools to support pupils with ALN beneficially, for instance to identify where pupils needed extra-support with their learning, or with their well-being.

In most cases, leaders from all schools identified that they had the opportunity to contribute purposefully to the focus of cluster meetings. In a very few cases, primary school leaders felt that they could not influence the agenda or the timings of meetings sufficiently. Where leaders identified that external support partners attended cluster meetings, they shared that their contributions were helpful and supportive.

Many leaders identified that Curriculum for Wales had brought with it an exciting opportunity to develop a curriculum that is fit for their pupils. However, in a few cases, headteachers from secondary schools chose not to attend cluster headteacher meetings and sent others in their place. Where this was the case, primary school leaders often felt that working together as a cluster was not seen as a high enough priority and expressed concerns that it slowed work towards developing shared curriculum arrangements. They felt that these secondary schools were not prioritising the development of a shared understanding of progression highly enough.

In many cases, clusters of schools had set up working groups to support curriculum development, such as AoLE groups. Headteacher groups often set the strategic direction for these groups and oversaw their work helpfully. However, the work of these groups, especially in relation to developing a coherent curriculum and considering how learning should progress effectively from primary to secondary schools, was still at the early stages of development. In a minority of cases, they had been slow to pick-up their work following the enforced break caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and, in a very few cases, staff from all of the cluster schools did not attend meetings consistently enough.

In many clusters of schools, there were useful strategies to support a few areas of curriculum development. These schools often had groups considering progress in areas, such as digital skills and maths and numeracy. However, in other curriculum areas, for instance in Humanities or Health and Well-being, they often had no work underway to consider how pupils' learning would progress effectively from primary into secondary school. Where secondary schools sent subject specialists to cluster meetings, they could not always support the work to develop the curriculum effectively enough. For example, leaders from computer science subjects could only speak for their area and not support the development of the whole Science and Technology AoLE. This slowed the work of groups and made progress towards more joined-up curriculum arrangements difficult.

In a minority of cases, clusters had set up teacher groups to consider examples of pupils' learning, to help them begin to develop a shared understanding of progression across their schools. For example, teachers from different year groups were sharing written work from their schools to compare pupils' learning and progress. Where they evaluated learning from pupils in Year 6, they often involved teachers from their local secondary schools helpfully. However, in most cases clusters had yet to apply any learning taken from these processes in their respective schools. As a result, these practices had not improved how well learning progresses from primary into secondary schools strongly enough. In many cases, secondary schools did not use the information they gathered from primary schools about pupils' progress well enough. This meant that pupils often revisit work too regularly rather than making better and more effective progress.

During our visits, leaders often pointed to a range of issues that made cluster work on developing curriculum progression difficult, such as different interpretations of the Curriculum for Wales within the same cluster of schools. They often pointed to the number of different reforms that are taking place and the difficulty in finding the time and resources to release staff to work together.

In many cases, leaders considered that the curriculum guidance on the Welsh Government's website was generally helpful. However, they noted that it was difficult to know when it had changed or been updated. This made it difficult for them to keep up with the latest guidance. They often identified the broad nature of the description of learning as something that the staff in their schools were still grappling with. As a result, their development of a clear understanding of progression and pedagogy, as part of a continuum of learning from 3 to 16, was still at the early stages of development. Many leaders identified that they would value more guidance and

support with identifying what effective progress through the progression steps looked like.

Local authorities and regional support partners provided professional learning to both primary and secondary colleagues on curriculum development. In the best cases, this provided them with a helpful understanding of curriculum progression and effective pedagogy. For instance, headteachers pointed to the supportive work of the Central South Consortium (CSC) in helping schools to map out a range of knowledge, skills and experiences in each of the AoLE. Schools identified that the support they receive from The Educational Achievement Service (EAS) in implementing the digital competence framework (DCF) as particularly helpful.

In a few cases, schools identified that the professional learning run by support partners did not always support curriculum design and coherence between primary and secondary schools well enough. For example, leaders identified that there was professional learning focussed on progression in the primary curriculum and secondary curriculum separately, but little to help them develop a strong understanding of progression to support transition between the two. In a few cases, leaders expressed concern at the variation in the quality of guidance and support they had received from support partners. For example, the guidance they were given about the curriculum and transition varied depending on which officer they worked with.

Curriculum coherence from primary to secondary school

Clusters have often used aspects of the curriculum as a way to support pupils' transition from primary to secondary school, for example with cluster activity days linked with science, sport or art. Following the introduction of Curriculum for Wales, most school leaders recognised that, in order to ensure that pupils develop their knowledge and skills systematically and progressively, they needed to refocus this work on developing a shared understanding of, and approach to, progression across the whole curriculum. As part of this, most leaders that we spoke to understood the need to ensure that there was effective continuity of learning from primary and secondary school.

Where schools were working to develop curriculum coherence across their cluster of schools, this work was often trialled in one or two AoLE. Often, curriculum or AoLE leads have met together to consider and begin planning for the development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding at different progression steps. In most cases, this work was at the early stages of development and processes were not yet developed well enough to help schools deliver their curricula in a co-ordinated way.

Cameo – Planning for progress in learning and teaching

In one Denbighshire cluster, the secondary and its feeder primary schools have worked together effectively, supported by their regional support partner, to develop a shared understanding of progress in pupils' digital skills. They have set out clearly the skills that pupils will develop at different stages of learning from primary and into secondary school. They have held joint training sessions, so that teachers from all cluster schools use similar language and have a common understanding of how to teach skills, such as coding. They use the same software packages across the cluster, but adapt learning tasks to suit their own context. This means that pupils from across the cluster build a broad and common range of knowledge and skills that develop progressively from primary and into secondary school.

In a few cases, clusters have worked together positively to map out knowledge, skills and experiences across all AoLE and have used this to begin to develop a shared understanding of what knowledge and skills they would like most pupils to have by the end of primary school. Leaders expressed that this has provided a useful platform for early professional dialogue around a shared understanding of progression. However, even when these processes and expectations were in place, teachers in secondary schools did not always use them well enough to take account of the learning that takes place in primary schools. As a result, learning from Year 7 did not always build on pupils' prior knowledge, skills and experiences well enough.

In a majority of clusters, there was still not an effective vision, or planning, for how schools will ensure purposeful continuity in pupils' learning between primary and secondary school. Where this was the case, secondary schools did not have a clear enough understanding of what knowledge, skills or experiences pupils had as they began Year 7. As a result, pupils' progress slowed, and they spent too much time repeating learning needlessly. Across the schools we visited, pupils gave us clear examples of times when their learning in Year 7 was at too low a level for too long, including in all-age schools. For example, pupils told us that they made too little progress in mathematics or that they spent Welsh lessons repeating simple words and sentence patterns that they knew well from their time in primary school.

In a few cases, where clusters of schools had not yet started to plan for pupils' progression from primary and into secondary school, leaders in secondary schools expressed concerns about a lack of depth in pupils' learning in primary school in a few areas of the curriculum. For example, they identified that a majority of pupils began Year 7 without sufficient knowledge and skills in science. This was supported by a majority of the pupils that we spoke to in Year 7 and Year 8, who shared that the amount of science they learned in primary school was limited and that they were not well prepared for science work at secondary school.

In a few cases, secondary schools have produced 'non-negotiables' for their feeder primary schools, for example sharing their expectations of the knowledge and skills that pupils need in maths and numeracy to engage with the secondary school's Year 7 syllabus. Where primary schools had worked on and agreed these with their secondary colleagues, they had begun to help ensure that learning progressed more systematically across transition. Where these non-negotiables had been given to

primary schools with little or no consultation, primary leaders highlighted important issues, such as that the expectations did not fit well with their curricula or their understanding of pupils' progress. As a result, they had little impact on ensuring continuity in pupils' learning.

In a few cases, secondary schools had not joined in well with their cluster to work on curriculum development. Where this has happened, secondary schools expressed different reasons for not working towards better curriculum coherence, such as it being too complex to work with different primary schools with different curricula. In a very few cases, secondary schools identified that they had already begun to develop their curriculum and that working with primary colleagues to develop a continuity of learning through curriculum design and planning would provide too many challenges. In these cases, secondary schools were unclear about how they could ensure that pupils made effective progress from primary into secondary school and had often little understanding of how Curriculum for Wales had been developed in primary schools in their cluster.

While a majority of leaders in secondary schools expressed concerns that changes to GCSEs were hampering their decision-making around the curriculum, in the best cases they understood that if they developed an effective curriculum and strengthened teaching then this would prepare pupils for future examinations well.

In a minority of cases, clusters of schools had begun considering progression through Curriculum for Wales by monitoring and evaluating what pupils' learning looked like in their different schools at different stages of learning, rather than through curriculum planning. These schools had often shared examples of what pupils' learning looked like through strategies, such as scrutiny of pupils' books, and in a very few cases by talking to pupils. In a few cases, leaders from primary and secondary schools had undertaken joint learning walks to support this work further. Where schools were using these strategies, it was beginning to help leaders understand what learning and progress looked like at different stages in pupils' development. However, in most cases, these schools were still at the early stages of considering how they would use this information to structure pupils' learning so that it developed their knowledge and skills systematically and progressively from primary and into secondary school.

Cameo – Evaluating pupils' learning to understand progression

In Torfaen, one cluster of schools has begun to hold regular meetings to consider pupils' progress from cluster primary schools and into secondary school. During these meetings they have looked closely at pupils' learning, for example by scrutinising and evaluating pupils' books from each school. They have used these opportunities to help them begin to develop a beneficial understanding of pupils' progress in languages, literacy and communication, maths and numeracy and health and well-being. They have compared standards of pupils' learning across the schools and have started to identify common expectations and opportunities to develop more shared approaches, for instance in the teaching mathematics across the cluster.

In all-age schools, despite the potential of the all-age approach to learning, curriculum coherence and planning for progression were not always strong. In the best cases, these schools had set out clear responsibilities for leaders and teachers regarding the planning and development of the curriculum. They were working together purposefully to develop one progressive continuum of learning for each AoLE from age 3 to 16 and were beginning to use this to ensure that they supported pupils' progress. However, a minority of all-age settings had made limited progress on developing a coherent approach to the curriculum, and on developing a shared understanding of progression. Where this was weakest, schools still considered learning in separate primary and secondary phases, rather than as one 3-16 continuum. In a few cases, this lack of coherence was reinforced by regional support services allocating different improvement partners to the primary and secondary phases of one school.

Cameo – Common approaches supporting progress

One Bridgend cluster have worked together thoughtfully to plan and deliver relationships and sex education (RSE). Leaders from the primary schools and secondary school met to develop common approaches to delivering RSE and a shared understanding of progression, so that learning in all of the local primary schools is similar and continues into Year 7 beneficially. All of the schools are now aware of what each other teach in this area, and pupils' learning has begun to progress more systematically. Leaders identified that this is easier to do in an area where there is clear national guidance.

Teaching and pedagogy across transition

Many schools recognised the importance of providing teachers with a suitable range of professional learning on teaching strategies to support the introduction of Curriculum for Wales. For example, schools had focused professional development on the 12 pedagogical principles identified in Curriculum for Wales guidance. However, the impact of this was too variable and too few schools were focusing on improving teaching. In only a few cases were clusters of schools beginning to share approaches to teaching and consider how they could ensure that teaching strategies supported pupils to make effective and continuous progress from primary into secondary school.

Many schools recognised the importance of ensuring that pupils took an active role in their own learning and developed the skills necessary to monitor, regulate and assess their own learning. For example, many schools identified that they had worked with pupils on developing their independent learning skills or their ability to evaluate their own work against agreed success criteria. In a minority of cases, pupils were able to talk about these strategies knowledgeably and confidently. However, in only a few cases were clusters of schools sharing practice and considering how they

could ensure that pupils continued to develop these skills and dispositions effectively across transition.

In a majority of clusters of schools, there was an understanding of the need to develop better continuity in teaching approaches and classroom practices between primary and secondary schools. Leaders often identified the importance of aligning pedagogy and practices between primary and secondary schools to ensure that pupils continued to progress effectively, for example in the way that teachers developed pupils' metacognitive⁴ skills. However, in most cases, schools were at the very early stages of considering how to do this in practice.

In a few cases, schools in the same cluster were beginning to share how they integrated assessment for learning processes into teaching and learning in primary and secondary school. This was beginning to help them develop an understanding of the practices that each used and how they might help pupils to develop these skills more systematically as they moved from primary into secondary education.

In a few cases, groups of local primary schools were beginning to work together and share approaches to teaching and ways in which they supported pupils to develop skills and strategies to support their own learning, such as independence and metacognition. However, these groups did not always share these approaches with their cluster secondary school. A few primary leaders noted that there was often little consistency across cluster primary schools regarding pedagogical approaches and assessment practices, and this made it difficult for them to build continuity across transition.

Cameo – Developing a cluster approach to pupils' independent learning skills

One cluster of primary schools in the Central South Consortium have organised a cluster group for their primary schools to consider how pupils develop their independent learning skills, what this should look like in the classroom and how these skills should develop as pupils progress. They recognised the importance of considering this in order to support continuity in pupils' learning from across their cluster and particularly at transition. They are examining and evaluating how pupils develop these skills through the curriculum's principles for progression. This is beginning to help ensure that pupils develop skills and habits that empower them to take ownership of their learning more effectively.

In discussions with pupils, many primary aged pupils shared how they could influence what they would like to learn in different topics within their curriculum and identified that they had a range of opportunities to decide how to approach tasks. Few pupils in secondary schools identified that they had similar opportunities.

⁴ See glossary

Cameo – Developing pupils’ learning to learn skills

In Gwynedd, pupils in one cluster of schools identified that their schools had helped them to become an integral part of the learning process. They noted that they often worked with their teacher to create success criteria for different tasks, and this supported them well in knowing what they needed to do to be successful. They shared how they evaluated their own learning against these criteria, and this helped them see what they could have done better. Pupils described a range of different ways in which they could learn, including working individually or in a group work.

Pupils we spoke to often recognised that strategies to help them to be independent were not well developed in their secondary school. For example, they explained a whole-school strategy of the 4Bs (Brain, Buddy, Book, Boss) that they used when they encountered problems in primary school: try to recall previous learning, ask classmates for assistance, do some independent research and ask an adult as a last resort. The same pupils shared that in secondary school these processes were not always encouraged and so they always went straight to the teacher.

A majority of all-age schools had begun to develop more cross-phase approaches to pedagogy and common approaches to teaching and learning, for instance by using consistent terminology when talking with pupils about their learning. Where this happened, pupils noted that they valued the continuity and did not feel that there were large differences in teaching between primary and secondary phases. In the best cases, these schools had arranged opportunities for teachers to observe teaching across phases. They had agreed practices across the whole school, such as approaches to providing pupils with challenge in lessons. This helped pupils to develop appropriately. However, these practices were still not common in a minority of all-age schools and, in a few, leaders had done little to consider how teaching approaches would support pupils’ progression. Pupils who had joined all-age schools in the secondary phase from other schools often felt that they needed to adapt quickly to practices with which other pupils were already confident. They identified that transition arrangements had not always prepared them well for their new school.

All local authorities and regional support partners provide a range of professional learning designed to improve teachers’ understanding of pedagogy that supports Curriculum for Wales, and ways in which they can support pupils to develop and use their metacognitive skills. Where regions had provided professional learning to clusters of schools, a few had used this to consider how they could develop continuity from primary to secondary school beneficially. For example, one cluster of schools had begun by setting out the language and processes they would use when implementing formative assessment⁵ strategies in classes. This was beginning to help them build on pupils’ understanding from primary and into secondary school well. Where these common strategies and practices had developed best, colleagues from both primary and secondary schools had participated in professional learning

⁵ See glossary

together, which had helped develop a common understanding and approaches to teaching and learning.

Information sharing to support transition

In nearly all cases, primary schools passed on a broad and varied range of information about pupils to their cluster secondary schools prior to transition. In many primary schools they completed agreed proformas to share information, such as the outcomes of assessment they had made of pupils' learning. They also passed on other valuable information, such as pupils' strengths, dislikes, and friendship groups. However, how well secondary schools used this information varied notably.

In a minority of cases, primary schools shared 'one-page pupil profiles'⁶ with secondary schools. This allowed primary schools to capture and share the most important information about each pupil. In a very few cases, clusters of schools gave pupils the opportunity to complete a profile of themselves to pass on to their secondary school. This helped pupils to share information about themselves that they wanted their secondary school to know. Pupils that we spoke to valued this opportunity highly and felt that it helped their teachers to get to know them better.

Many clusters had begun to consider how to share information on pupils' progress, in line with Curriculum for Wales. For example, schools had started to pass on information linked with the descriptions of learning and progression steps. This generally provided only a very brief summary that identified whether pupils were working at, above or below what their school expected. For example, in a few cases, the summary identified that pupils were 'emerging, developing or secure' in their knowledge and understanding. However, in nearly all cases, there was little clarity about what the expectation was or what the descriptors meant, even within the same cluster. As a result, these time-consuming processes did little to support continuity in pupils' learning.

In nearly all cases, primary schools shared the outcomes of the Welsh Government's personalised assessments with secondary schools. However, in nearly all cases, schools focused on sharing the standardised score only and did not consider well enough the wide range of information about pupils' learning available from the assessment and how they might use this to support teaching and learning.

In a very few clusters, leaders in primary schools identified that they passed on very little information about pupils' learning as part of the transition process. In these cases, they still focused on sharing information on pupils' well-being appropriately.

Where information on learning was passed from primary to secondary schools, a minority of secondary school leaders shared concerns that they felt the information was not always reliable and so they relied on testing pupils early in Year 7. In many cases, they then used the outcomes of these tests to help group pupils by ability. A

⁶ See glossary

minority of leaders in primary schools expressed doubts about how well secondary schools used the wide range of information that they had shared about pupils. They were concerned that secondary schools continued to test pupils early in Year 7, stating that this was not the best way to evaluate pupils or provide continuity in their learning.

One of the more positive transition strategies that we found was the way in which clusters of schools supported pupils' induction into secondary school and developed strategies to help them become familiar with their new school. In nearly all cases, schools supported pupils' induction well by arranging face-to-face meetings between leaders or teachers from primary schools and staff from secondary schools, such as a head of year or a pastoral lead. These meetings allowed for a beneficial sharing of information to support pupils' well-being, and for primary schools to pass on their knowledge and experience of pupils in a more detailed way. In the very few cases, where these meetings did not take place, primary school leaders expressed concern that there were not strong enough opportunities for them to help secondary schools understand pupils and their needs, and particularly pupils with additional learning or well-being needs.

Cameo – sharing information to help support pupils' individual needs

In Denbighshire prior to spending four days at the local secondary school, primary schools share a wide range of helpful information about pupils with secondary school leaders. This included staff meeting together to share information verbally, as well as information about pupils, such as their attendance teachers discussed pupils' well-being, their behaviour and their personalities. The secondary school was then able to plan for pupils' pastoral induction on an individual basis where needed. For example, from this information and discussion they were able to identify pupils who would benefit from being placed in their support classes. They also planned specific, individualised help where appropriate, for instance a quiet room for pupils who need time away from others if they are overwhelmed. This purposeful information sharing led to pupils feeling confident and well-supported at transition.

In a few cases, clusters of schools were trialling a variety of ways of sharing information that focused on using online platforms from commercial providers. The focus of this was on trying to identify each pupil's progress against the curriculum's description of learning. This information was then transferred with pupils as they moved to secondary school. However, leaders expressed concerns that the information was neither reliable nor helpful enough and that the descriptions of learning are generally too broad to provide specific enough information about pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.

In many cases, staff with responsibility for pupils with ALN began transition processes when pupils were in Year 5. Staff from secondary schools often visited primary schools to spend time speaking with teachers and support staff, and in a minority of cases observed pupils when they were learning. These processes helped secondary schools understand pupils' needs well and allowed primary schools pass on helpful information that supported pupils with ALN.

Cameo – information sharing to support well-being

In one cluster in Wrexham, the schools have focused beneficially on supporting pupils' well-being across transition. The secondary school saw the primary school, and particularly the Year 6 teachers, as a key source of valuable information. It appreciated the information that they passed on via an online form, such as pupils' characteristics, behaviour and other pastoral information. The information was used well by the secondary school to plan beneficial support for vulnerable pupils and to provide suitable interventions for pupils with ALN. The information was shared widely with all staff in the secondary school so that teachers get to know pupils helpfully.

Where local authorities provided online systems to schools, such as those to track the support given to pupils with ALN, or to share information about pupils' attendance and behaviour, they supported information sharing effectively. When schools used this information purposefully, it supported transition well. For example, in one local authority, provision for pupils with ALN was recorded in all schools using the same online system. This enabled ALN co-ordinators to monitor the support that pupils had and ensure that secondary schools were able to make appropriate provision for pupils with ALN when they moved on from primary school.

In only a very few cases did secondary schools gather information from parents when pupils transitioned from primary schools into Year 7. There were often opportunities for parents to speak to schools at events such as at open evenings.

Supporting pupils' well-being at transition

In most cases, clusters of schools supported many aspects of pupils' well-being effectively as they transitioned from primary into secondary school. For instance, schools often planned a beneficial range of opportunities for pupils from primary schools to visit their new secondary school during Year 5 and Year 6. This allowed pupils to become more familiar with their secondary school and helped to reduce their anxiety about the move. In the very few cases, where this area of a cluster's work was weaker, it affected pupils notably. For example, in one cluster where induction was not planned or developed well, pupils still had little understanding of what to expect in secondary school almost half-way through Year 6. As a result, many pupils told us that they were concerned about going to secondary school and still had a wide range of unanswered questions.

In nearly all cases, secondary schools held open evenings for parents of pupils in Year 6. Often, they also provided open evenings for parents and pupils from Year 5. In many cases, pupils and parents made use of these opportunities to receive valuable early information and it helped them get to know their new secondary school. In the best cases, pupils were able to tour the school, visit classes and ask questions that helped them to learn about their new school. However, where the parents of primary age pupils did not attend with their child, schools did not always share important messages and information with those pupils who had missed out.

In many cases, staff from secondary schools visited their feeder primary schools to speak to pupils early in Year 6 and in a few cases when they were in Year 5. Often, leaders, such as assistant headteachers or a head of Year 7 used this opportunity beneficially to begin to get to know pupils, share useful information and answer questions that pupils had. In a minority of cases, leaders took pupils from the secondary school with them, so that they could answer questions from a pupils' perspective. Pupils that we spoke to noted that having visits from secondary school pupils made them feel less worried about their move to secondary school, particularly when they were past pupils from their school. In a few cases, secondary schools did not make such visits or had still not restarted many of the helpful induction practices that they paused during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cameo – pupils supporting pupils at transition

One Wrexham cluster has a peer mentoring programme where pupils from Year 9 support pupils in Year 6 effectively during transition. This included these pupils making visits to primary schools, playing games, such as rounders with the Year 6 pupils, and supporting them on the transition days. These mentors continued their work into Year 10 and acted as buddies/mentors to each class throughout Year 7. Younger pupils valued their support highly. They felt confident about moving to secondary school as they had friends who were older and who they could ask questions of when they were unsure of what to do or where to go.

In many cases, clusters of schools organised a range of joint events throughout the year, such as sports days, well-being weeks, STEM⁷ days and music events. These allowed primary aged pupils to visit their secondary school in different contexts and become more familiar with expectations and day-to-day procedures. In the most helpful cases, primary aged pupils got to meet secondary school pupils or pupils from other primary schools with whom they would begin secondary school. Pupils shared that they enjoyed and valued these opportunities.

Most pupils that we spoke with felt that while transition arrangements to support their induction into secondary school were helpful, most of the activities were based around supporting their well-being and did not always prepare them well for lessons and learning in secondary school. A majority shared that they did not always feel challenged in Year 7 as lessons sometimes focused too heavily on knowledge and skills with which they were already confident, particularly in Welsh and mathematics.

In nearly all cases, pupils from Year 6 attended their secondary school for an induction or transition day, or days, in the summer term. These varied in length from less than one whole day to four days at their secondary school. In general, pupils who had spent more time at their secondary school felt more confident and happier about moving on to their new school. In the best cases, these days were planned thoughtfully to help pupils get to know school routines and practices, and to allow them to experience secondary school life in a supportive manner. In weaker cases, pupils felt that the time they spend was too short and did not help to prepare them well. For instance, pupils explained that transition days did not prepare them well for

⁷ See glossary

lessons in secondary school or to move around the school at the same time as older pupils. As a result, in Year 7 they felt nervous and overwhelmed.

Many pupils identified that, while induction days and open evenings were often beneficial and an important part of transition, they often did not reflect the reality of secondary school life and particularly the lessons that they experienced in Year 7 and Year 8. For example, pupils shared that open evenings or induction days included 'fun' activities, such as seeing an animal's heart or creating small explosions in science laboratories. However, their day-to-day reality was that lessons in secondary school focused more on writing and paper-based exercises.

In nearly all cases, clusters of schools identified effectively pupils who may have found transition more difficult than their peers and set in place a useful range of supportive activities and visits to help these pupils transition to secondary school. In the best cases, schools worked together to plan and put in place strategies based on individual pupils' needs. For example, primary and secondary schools worked together to develop pastoral support plans that identified clearly what extra help pupils would have in Year 6 and in Year 7 to support their move to secondary school.

Cameo – helping pupils who need extra support at transition

In one Bridgend cluster, the 'Helping Hands' project supported pupils who needed more help with transition from primary to secondary school well. ALN staff in the primary and secondary school, and the family engagement officer, worked closely to share information on vulnerable pupils and planned activities to support their transition beneficially. For example, they took pupils from Year 6 to the secondary school for a range of visits prior to the transition day to familiarise them with procedures, such as ordering and eating lunch in the secondary school canteen. The schools Community Focus Schools officer built relationships with vulnerable pupils and their parents throughout Year 6 through engaging activities, such as cooking and making bird boxes. She maintained contact with pupils and parents through the summer holidays with two more days of activity and continued with this support into Year 7.

In nearly all cases, primary and secondary schools worked together conscientiously to support the transition of pupils with ALN. Often secondary school staff with responsibility for pupils with ALN began working with their feeder primary schools when pupils were in Year 5 or in Year 6. For example, secondary school staff attended pupils' Year 6 person-centred reviews⁸ to get to know pupils and their parents before they moved to secondary school. Many schools arranged for the parents of pupils with ALN to meet secondary school staff to share useful information about their children prior to transition. As a result, secondary schools were often aware of the help that these pupils needed and, in most cases, supported their transition effectively.

Where pupils needed individual support, for instance because of medical issues, schools worked together carefully to share information on how best to care for these pupils and their well-being.

⁸ See glossary

Cameo – supporting vulnerable pupils

In one Neath Port Talbot cluster, schools were helped by the local authority's support teams and planned individual transition pathways for pupils with medical issues. They arranged meetings between the schools, parents and pupils to share information beneficially. Important information was then recorded in a pupil profile which was given to all staff in the secondary school who had contact with the pupils. The team continue to meet with the pupils throughout Year 7 to ensure that arrangements were continuing smoothly. This supported these pupils' needs well.

Transition planning

Many leaders were aware of the updated regulations that identify the importance of, and requirements of, transition plans. They recognised the need for schools to have a transition plan that met these new requirements in place for 2022. However, across the schools we visited, there were a few schools who had yet to put this updated guidance into practice. In a few cases, headteachers and senior leaders did not have a good understanding of the updated guidance or of how their cluster transition plan would support consistency in learning and teaching across transition.

Where regional support services had provided professional learning and support on the updated guidance, schools generally had a stronger understanding of the purpose of transition planning. For example, following attendance at a GwE conference on transition, many leaders in north Wales spoke confidently about the importance of transition and of schools using the updated plans to support pupils' transition from primary to secondary school. As a result, they often planned helpful initiatives, such as cluster groups of primary schools having one shared school improvement priority to support transition. This enabled all schools in the cluster to build transition practices into their own strategic planning helpfully. However, being familiar with the guidance did not always lead to stronger planning or more effective strategies.

In most cases, transition plans identified a beneficial range of strategies to support pupils to become familiar with their secondary school, such as the visits that pupils from primary schools would make to secondary schools. In most cases, they recognised the need for transition to include pastoral support for pupils' well-being. Where these strategies were planned carefully, they generally supported pupils' induction purposefully.

In most cases, leaders planned carefully the extra support that they put in place to help those pupils who have ALN or who were particularly anxious about their move from primary to secondary school. This helped to ensure that these pupils' needs were met considerably.

In many cases, plans to ensure continuity in pupils' learning through curriculum design lacked clarity and sufficient detail. They did not identify well enough how schools would work together to develop their curricular and ensure that, as pupils

moved from primary to secondary school, their knowledge, skills and experiences developed systematically and progressively. Plans were often too broad and did not support curriculum development well enough. For instance, plans identified that there would be some time for staff from primary schools to meet subject leads in the secondary school to begin to share how pupils' knowledge, skills and experiences could be developed. However, leaders had not considered when this would happen, or how it would be achieved. As a result, leaders told us that these meetings had not happened regularly enough and there had been little progress in this area.

In many cases, plans did not focus clearly enough on continuity in teaching. In only a few cases did they identify how schools would consider approaches to teaching to support continuity and progression in pupils' learning. Where there were strategies to support continuity, they were often vague and unclear. For example, cluster plans identified that schools would embed common practices for assessment, but with no consideration of what assessment practices or how schools would do this. As a result, leaders were unsure how they could achieve this goal.

In general, plans did not consider well how schools would support each individual's progress as they transitioned from primary school to secondary school. Plans often identified when staff would meet, for instance to look at pupils' work. However, in many cases the purpose of the meetings was unclear, with no consideration of how this would help support pupils' progress.

In many cases, transition plans did not identify well how leaders would evaluate the impact of transition strategies. As a result, they were not able to be clear about how well different practices supported pupils' move from primary to secondary school.

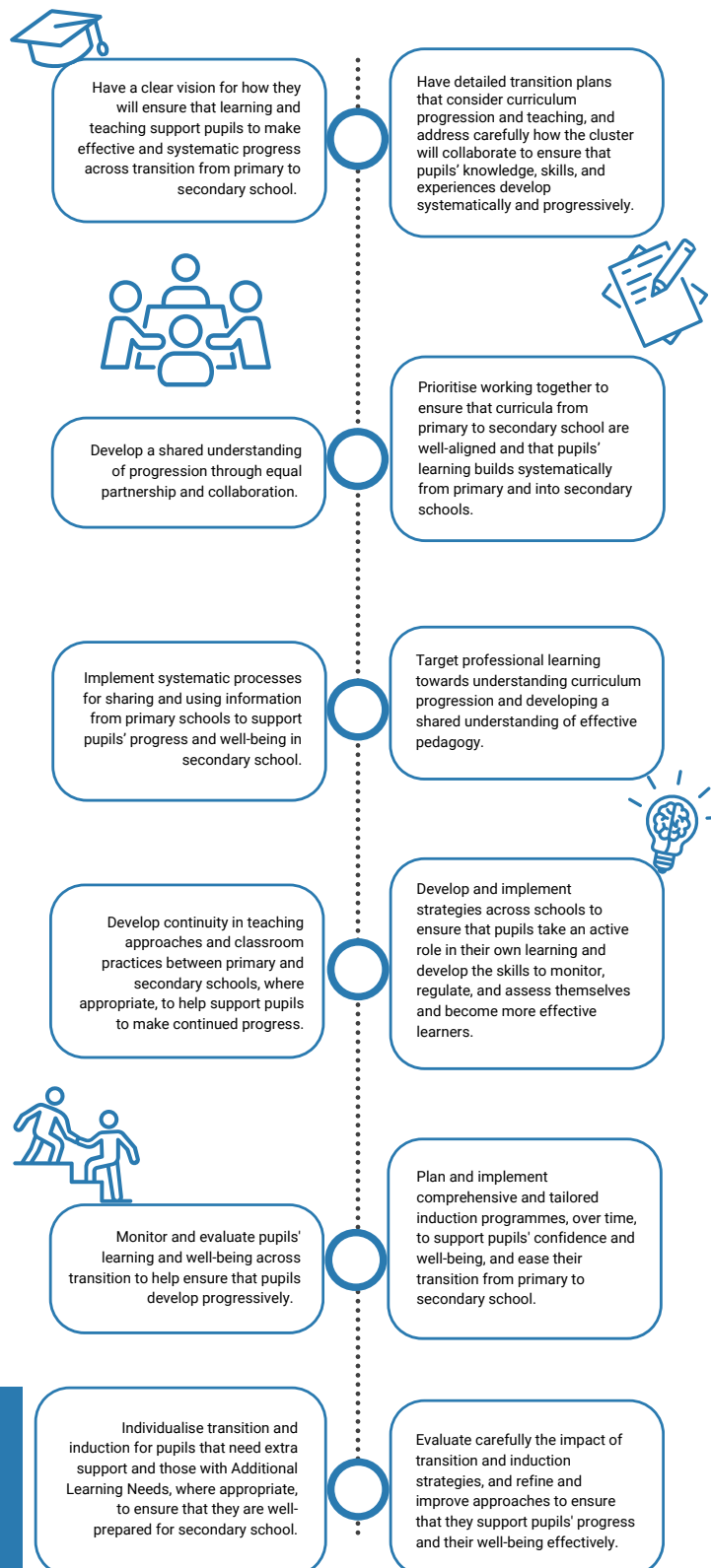
Appendix 1: Questions for self-evaluation and reflection: transition and pupil progress

1. Does the cluster have a clear vision for how its schools will ensure purposeful continuity and progression in pupils' learning between primary and secondary school?
 - a. Does this include a clear understanding of how schools will work together to ensure that their curricula and teaching develop pupils' knowledge, skills, understanding and learning behaviours effectively across transition?
2. Has the cluster developed clear and well-understood strategies that identify how continuity and progression of learning will be achieved through curriculum design, and learning and teaching?
 - a. How well do leaders monitor and evaluate the impact of these strategies?
3. Is this work a high enough priority for all schools in the cluster? Is this work based on an equal partnership between all schools?
4. Do strategies for ensuring pupil progress from primary to secondary school consider all areas of learning and experience?
5. How well is the cluster developing a shared understanding of what effective progress should look like across its schools?
 - a. What processes are in place to help schools understand what progress looks like in other schools, both within and outside of the cluster?
 - b. How well are individual schools applying any learning taken from these processes in their respective schools. (In particular, how well are secondary schools taking account of the progress that pupils make in primary school?)
6. How well is the cluster sharing approaches to teaching to support continuity in learning and help pupils' make effective progress from primary into secondary school?
7. How well is the cluster considering pupils' development as independent learners who acquire the skills necessary to monitor, regulate and assess their own learning?
 - a. Are schools sharing practices and considering how they can ensure that pupils continue to develop these skills and dispositions effectively across transition?
8. How openly and effectively has the cluster considered what information on pupils' learning and well-being primary schools should share with secondary schools?

- a. Does the information support secondary schools to know what progress pupils have made in primary school?
 - b. Do secondary schools use the information purposefully to inform teaching and learning, and ensure that pupils continue to make progress?
9. Do schools share sufficient and helpful enough information about pupils with additional learning needs (ALN)?
- a. Are there effective strategies in place to ensure that pupils with ALN continue to receive appropriate support during and after transition?
10. Do cluster arrangements support pupils to become familiar and comfortable with their new secondary school?
- a. Do these ensure that pupils becoming familiar with a broad enough range of practices in secondary school, such as lessons, breaks, lunchtime, start and end of day, and moving between classes?
 - b. Are there processes in place for pupils to express any concerns or difficulties they encounter during transition?
 - c. How well does the cluster listen to pupils about their experiences to help make improvements?

Appendix 2: Transition and pupil progress; Features of effective practice

Where practice is most effective, schools and clusters:



Methods and evidence base

This report draws on evidence from our inspection and follow-up findings, and visits to 41 schools in 15 local authorities. They consisted of 23 primary schools, 13 secondary schools and 3 all-age schools. Of these, 14 were conducted through the medium of Welsh. To help triangulate evidence, we ensured that in nearly all cases we visited two primary schools linked with the secondary schools we visited.

Schools were selected based on their size, type, geographical location, and socio-economic context. All discussions were face-to-face and took place during the spring term 2024.

During school visits, we met with school leaders, curriculum leaders and pupils from Year 6, Year 7 and Year 8. We looked at a range of documents, including curriculum planning, pupils' learning and transition plans.

We took evidence via virtual meetings from three regional support services and three local authorities.

We would like to thank the pupils, school staff, local authority officers and regional support services staff who supported this thematic review.

School	Phase	Local Authority
Aberdare Park Primary	Primary	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Abermorddu CP School	Primary	Flintshire
Abersychan Comprehensive	Secondary	Torfaen
Abertillery Learning Community	All age	Blaenau Gwent
Alltwen Primary School	Primary	Neath Port Talbot
Burry Port Community Primary School	Primary	Carmarthenshire
Buttington Trewern C.P. School	Primary	Powys
Castell Alun High School	Secondary	Flintshire
Croesty Primary School	Primary	Bridgend
Cwmffwrdoer Primary	Primary	Torfaen
Cwmtawe Community School	Secondary	Neath Port Talbot
Eirias High School	Secondary	Conwy
Garnteg Primary	Primary	Torfaen
Glan Llyn Primary School	Primary	Newport
Glan-yr-Mor School	Secondary	Carmarthenshire
Llangiwig Primary School	Primary	Neath Port Talbot
Llanwern High School	Secondary	Newport
Pembrey C.P. School	Primary	Carmarthenshire
Pencoed Comprehensive	Secondary	Bridgend
Pencoed Primary School	Primary	Bridgend
Penglais School	Secondary	Ceredigion
Penygarn Community Primary School	Primary	Torfaen

Rhyl High School	Secondary	Denbighshire
St John Baptist High School	Secondary	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Welshpool Church in Wales Primary School	Primary	Powys
Welshpool High School	Secondary	Powys
Ysgol Bae Baglan	All age	Neath Port Talbot
Ysgol Bodhyfryd	Primary	Wrexham
Ysgol Caer Elen	All age	Pembrokeshire
Ysgol Craig y Deryn	Primary	Gwynedd
Ysgol Estyn Community School	Primary	Flintshire
Ysgol Gymunedol Llwynyreos	Primary	Ceredigion
Ysgol Gymunedol Plasgrug	Primary	Ceredigion
Ysgol Gynradd Penybryn	Primary	Gwynedd
Ysgol Llywelyn	Primary	Denbighshire
Ysgol Nant Y Groes	Primary	Conwy
Ysgol Morgan Llwyd	Secondary	Wrexham
Ysgol Plas Coch	Primary	Wrexham
Ysgol Swyn Y Don	Primary	Conwy
Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn	Secondary	Gwynedd
Ysgol Y Castell CP	Primary	Denbighshire

Glossary

Areas of learning and experience (AoLE)	Learning in Curriculum for Wales is split into six AoLE: Expressive Arts; Health and Well-being; Humanities; Languages, Literacy and Communication; Mathematics and Numeracy; and Science and Technology.
Induction	This term refers to processes that familiarise primary aged pupils with their new secondary school, such as helping them to know their way around and how the school operates on a day-to-day basis.
Cluster	A cluster of schools is generally considered to be made up of a secondary or an all-age school and the primary schools that ‘feed’ that school. When developing a transition plan, the Welsh Government identifies that this should happen where there is an established and ongoing relationship between a primary school and a particular secondary school founded on the majority of the Year 6 cohort from the primary school transferring to that particular secondary school.
Metacognitive skills	These are skills that pupils can develop that enable them to being aware of how they think, monitor their understanding, and regulate their learning. They enable pupils to plan, organise, evaluate, and adjust their learning approaches.
Formative assessment	Assessments used by teachers to gather information on pupils’ learning so that they can provide them with timely and beneficial feedback that helps pupils to improve
One-page profile	A page of information about a pupil that identifies their strengths, the things that are important to them and the best ways to offer them support. It contains important information to be shared with everyone who supports and works with the pupil and can form the basis for planning personalised provision for the pupil.
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
Person centred review	A review of a pupils’ progress aimed at developing ‘person-centred outcomes, which move the learner towards their aspirations, change what isn’t working, and build on or maintain what is working’

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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