

Main findings

The rationale for establishing an all-age school

1. Despite support for the establishment of all-age schools, there is no national guidance available for local authorities and school leaders. Therefore, local authorities have their own, diverse plans to suit their unique circumstances. These are nearly always part of that authority's wider school organisation plans. Welsh Government guidance is usually separate for primary and secondary schools, which makes it difficult for all-age schools to consider and navigate in order to establish their own position statements. As a result, the all-age schools sector is not currently recognised as a discrete sector well enough.
2. The national network of all-age schools brings a worthwhile sense of belonging to a newly emerging, separate sector. Due to a lack of national guidance, this group has provided support for each other, brokered grants from external sources and worked to highlight the pitfalls and best practice.
3. Most local authorities anticipate that the benefits of an all-age school will outweigh the disadvantages. These benefits are usually well explained in consultation documents and include advantages to pupils' wellbeing, improved learning experiences, smooth transition, improved quality of the learning environment and often the retention of successful Welsh medium provision.
4. Over time, local authorities have learnt from each other's experiences, as well as making use of the research into successful all-age models. As a result, the most recent consultations are much sharper in terms of the benefits of establishing an all-age school and avoid many of the pitfalls experienced by early adopters of the all-age model.

Setting up all-age schools

1. Most all-age schools are formed as a result of closing pre-existing schools and reopening on one of their sites as a new school. This is sometimes as a newly built school, or the adaptation of existing buildings. In many cases, an all-age school is planned as multi-site, ranging from two sites to as many as six different sites. In a few cases, the school sites are situated a few miles apart.
2. Where new, all-age schools have been most successful, leaders and the local authority have engaged well with the local community. They have taken care not to underestimate the strength of feelings, for example concerning the schools earmarked for closure. Leaders have taken time to outline the benefits for pupils and the community, to ease concerns and provide reassurances. Parents, staff and governors have valued being kept informed of the process and procedures.

3. Local authorities generally have provided appropriate support for governing bodies during the process of establishing an all-age school. In particular, support from human resources and legal departments has ensured that, normally, correct procedures are followed. However, support for headteachers has varied across Wales. In a few instances, local authorities could do more to support headteachers when establishing the school, for example in managing communication with the community, managing buildings and staffing issues.
4. Planning and preparation time for headteachers prior to opening a new all-age school varies. Where headteachers have had time to consult and develop policies and procedures, this has had benefits for the school. Most schools adopted a leadership structure where leaders have whole school responsibilities that span all phases. In the few instances where this was not established from the beginning, schools have quickly realised its advantage and adapted their leadership responsibilities accordingly.
5. School leaders regarded the first year of opening as the most challenging. They have shared the lessons learnt about creating common systems and a collective ethos with their peers. More recently established schools have benefited from this advice and, as a result, avoided many pitfalls and barriers.
6. Many local authorities and leaders identify that clearer, more transparent communication with the community, staff and pupils during the consultation process would have supported the smoother establishment of the all-age school. Improved communication would have avoided many misconceptions and resulted in fewer objections and a less fractious process.

The impact of an all-age school model

1. In nearly all all-age schools, a significant proportion of pupils transition from partner primary schools into Year 7. This could be as many as 94% of the cohort down to 20%. On transfer from Year 6 to Year 7, schools report that pupils from within an all-age school settle well in Year 7 and make better progress in their first year than those who transition from separate primary schools. This is because those pupils are familiar with how they are taught and, in addition, teachers already know these pupils well (see Appendix 3).
2. Pastoral care and support for pupil wellbeing are a strength in most all-age schools, having been a priority since schools opened. This means that provision and interventions in many schools are often seamless and build to bring about improvements to outcomes during the child's time at the school. As a result, pupils generally feel safe in school, are well looked after, supported, and valued.
3. Improving teaching is a key priority for all-age schools. Most teachers work together to plan and implement a curriculum that considers progression across all phases. Most schools have developed their vision for the Curriculum for Wales and began trialling resources and approaches. This includes realising the need for a coherent curriculum that considers progress appropriately. Teachers with expertise in different aspects of the curriculum enhance learning experiences across all phases. Professional learning arrangements in all-age schools are particularly

useful, including the sharing of good practice in teaching internally or between schools. However, external professional learning is often not specific enough for the all-age sector.

4. When establishing and developing leadership teams for all-age schools, governors realise that schools require skills from primary and secondary sector backgrounds. Overall, successful all-age leadership teams normally comprise of a mix of leaders with different sector backgrounds.
5. The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement across the sector is variable. However, in the best examples, schools evaluate provision and standards across and between phases. Teachers scrutinise pupils' work across age ranges and evaluate progress over time. This provides an increasingly accurate picture of pupils' progress during their time in the school and allows leaders to address any dips in learning promptly.