All-age schools in Wales

A report on the challenges and successes of establishing all-age schools

January 2022

All-age schools in Wales - A report on the challenges and successes of establishing all-age schools

This thematic survey is expected to support the Welsh Government by achieving the following objectives:

- To focus on the challenges and successes of the all-age model
- To provide a state of the nation report on all-age schools

The all-age schools sector is a growing sector, with more than double the number of schools open in 2020 compared with 2017. This report is focused on three broad areas:

- The rationale for establishing an all-age school
- Setting up all-age schools

CONTENTS

Document details

Copyright

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- primary schools
- secondary schools
- special schools
- pupil referral units
- all-age schools
- independent schools
- further education
- independent specialist colleges
- adult learning in the community
- local authority education services for children and young people
- teacher education and training
- Welsh for adults
- work-based learning
- learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- reports to Senedd Cymru and provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the Welsh Government and others
- makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section
Estyn
Anchor Court
Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh).

Introduction

This thematic survey is expected to support the Welsh Government by achieving the following objectives:

- To focus on the challenges and successes of the all-age model
- To provide a state of the nation report on all-age schools

The all-age schools sector is a growing sector, with more than double the number of schools open in 2020 compared with 2017. This report is focused on three broad areas:

- The rationale for establishing an all-age school
- Setting up all-age schools
- The impact of an all-age school model

An all age school can be defined as a school that combines at least two stages of a child's education (typically primary and secondary). In Wales, all-age schools are classified as middle schools and defined according to the age range of pupils that they provide for. This could be either from age 3 or 4 to ages 16 or 19. Most of the all-age schools in Wales provide education for pupils aged 3 to 16 years old and therefore include nursery provision. About half also include a sixth form that extends the age range up to 19 years old. Around a half of all-age schools are English medium schools with the others being either Welsh medium or bilingual. In 2021, six all-age schools have resource base provision.

A team of 12 HMI and two peer inspectors gathered evidence through visits to all the all-age schools that are open in Wales. Local authorities were contacted for their views through a combination of phone calls and visits.

Prior to the start of the pandemic in March 2020, during visits to providers, the team interviewed leaders and teachers. They met with governors and carried out learning walks. Pupils' views were gathered through interviews during these visits. The pupils were in small groups with their work to exemplify and evidence what they were saying. This thematic work was paused because of the pandemic and activity resumed in April 2021.At this time, the team were unable to observe lessons or partake learning walks. Interviews with staff and pupils were limited due to COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, instead, inspectors analysed existing information about all-age schools to establish the context and background. They also considered inspection evidence for the 12 all-age schools inspected. Since the all-age schools sector is still in its infancy, this can be considered as an initial report on the state of the sector.

Background

The number of all-age schools in Wales is increasing, with more due to open in the next few years. In 2020-2021, local authorities continued to propose the establishment of all-age schools. Four different local authorities submitted four proposals for consultation. In January 2020, there were 22 all-age schools in Wales, so these four proposals would be an increase of almost 20% nationally. (The statistics section below outlines the features of the new all-age schools and how they compare to the previous organisation of schools in that area.)

The growing number of applications prompted the Welsh Government to ask for a study into how successful all-age schools are and whether standards are better in an all-age school compared with separate secondary and primary schools. This report will not be able to evaluate standards in a meaningful way since many of these schools have only been established for a few years and, because of the pandemic, inspectors have not been able to evaluate standards more broadly. Furthermore, Estyn has only inspected around half of the all-age schools that are open thus far.

Research

Research into all-age schools is limited, due mainly to the relatively low numbers of all-age schools in Wales and in other countries. Research published during the last 20 year focuses mainly on the potential of all-age schools. This includes their potential to improve pedagogy and care, advantages for developing learning, and potential challenges for leadership.

Many local authorities benefited from the 21st Century Schools and Education programme (Welsh Government, 2019) to establish all-age schools. This provided large infrastructure investment in schools and colleges. As a result, many all-age schools are situated in either brand new buildings or newly refurbished and extended sites.

In 2018, the most recent research paper by Reynolds et al. (2018) explores the effects of an all-age model internationally and to examine how it might compare with the Welsh model. The report is based on visits to six all-age schools in south, mid and north Wales, and semi-structured interviews with leaders, teaching staff and pupils. It contains a literature review of international work on all-age schools. The report concludes (Reynolds et al., p.11):

- That 'emerging benefits of an all-age model on the pedagogy, and an innovative and synergistic approach to teaching and learning allows for combining of the most

effective elements of teaching strategies in different educational phases for the benefit of pupils' learning outcomes'.

- An all-age school model 'appears to stimulate the professional development of staff, enrichment and diversification of their skillset, and with it, increase in their professional competence and confidence to create the best learning environment for their pupils'.
- 'The continuity of the education throughout the key stages within the same environment can allow for greater coherence and reduction in the transition related issues, which in consequence may minimise pupils' stress, enhance their wellbeing and give them a better chance for more favourable educational outcomes and a higher quality of life in the future.'

In England and Scotland, research has focused on the benefit of an all-age school model. A paper by the Department for Education and Skills (2006) identifies potential benefits but with no evidence to prove the fulfilling of that potential. In 2011, the inspectorate of Scotland provided a guide to opening up learning in all-through schools and identified current strengths as being (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Scotland, 2011, p.6):

- climate and ethos, including the quality of relationships
- partnerships with parents and the local community
- meeting the needs of young people with additional support needs

A report by Swidenbank (2007) on the challenges and opportunities of leading and managing an all-age school for the National College for school leadership highlighted opportunities and challenges for leadership of all-age schools. The opportunities included (Swidenbank, 2007, p.6):

- being part of something new and exciting
- having the ability to change and to develop as a leader, which in turn promotes distributed leadership
- reducing the barriers to learning across the primary and secondary phases
- improving the personal development and wellbeing of students and gaining a greater understanding of the community
- gaining greater value for money through economies of scale

Whilst the challenges highlighted were (Swidenbank, 2007, p.11):

- changing the culture and addressing the context and the history of the school
- changing perceptions and raising awareness about what it means to be a primary or secondary school teacher
- time pressures and facilities

International research in Jamaica (Jamaica All-Age Schools Project, 2003) and Finland (Wilborg, 2004) were only small-scale studies and made generalisations about the

system within their own countries.

Facts and figures

Over the last four years, the number of all-age schools in Wales has risen from 10 schools in 2017 to 23 schools by September 2021. With this, the number of pupils taught in all-age schools has more than doubled.

All-age schools are usually formed from a combination of secondary school(s) and primary school(s). Three all-age schools have evolved from one initial school, these being St Brigid's, Ysgol Caer Elen and Ysgol Llanhari. Since they are so new, there is no all-age school in Wales that has educated pupils throughout their statutory education period (other than St Brigid's that was an independent school prior to changing its status).

To illustrate further the complexity and variance in all-age schools in Wales, the percentages of pupils that transfer to Year 7 from Year 6 range from 80% down to 6%. You can find more detail in Appendix 3.

Figure 1: All-age schools in Wales

Source: Address list of schools, WG, accessed October 2021
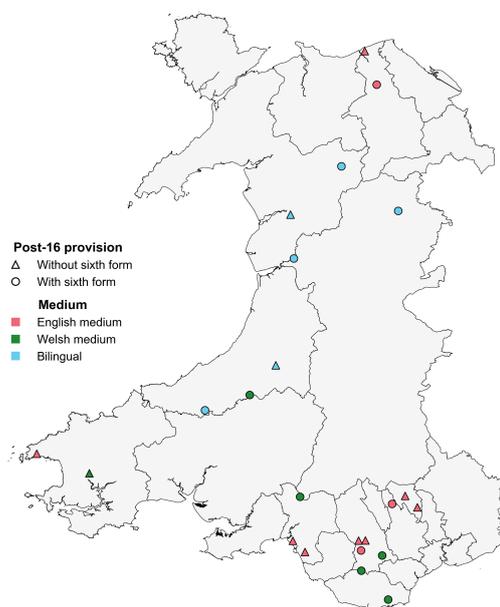
Inspection outcomes

Inspection outcomes since 2017 show a variable picture across the schools. Of the eight schools inspected under the new arrangements introduced in 2017, four were judged good or better for all or most inspection areas. Four schools required follow-up activity with two of these going into Estyn review and two requiring significant improvement.

The strongest inspection area is wellbeing and attitudes to learning, while provision for care, support and guidance is also strong. Standards is the weakest of the inspection areas, which in nearly all cases reflects the shortcomings in teaching and leadership.

Main findings

The rationale for establishing an all-age school

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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).

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.

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.

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.

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.

Recommendations

The Welsh Government should:

R1 Consider introducing national all-age schools guidance to support all-age schools, their leaders, governors and local authorities

Local authorities / regional consortia should:

R2 Ensure that consultation on establishing an all-age school is meaningful, transparent and helpful in engaging the local community to support change to improve the provision for their children

R3 Appoint leaders for new all-age schools early to provide enough planning and preparation time

R4 Provide better focused, sector-specific training and support, for example to improve classroom practice across all phases of the school

Schools should:

R5 Continue to plan and provide a rich curriculum that naturally progresses across the full age range

R6 Collaborate further with other schools to develop all-age school policies and procedures, and share good practice

The rationale for establishing an all-age school

Despite support for the establishment of all-age schools, there is no national sector specific 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. In addition, there is no commonly recognised term for the sector within 'My local school' and pupil level annual school census (PLASC) referring to them as 'middle' schools and others as 'all-through' schools. Other notable issues include little specific initial teacher education and limited bespoke professional learning for the sector. The Welsh Government normally publishes separate guidance for primary and secondary schools. Measures such as free school meals thresholds and attendance are also calculated for secondary and primary phase separately. This makes it difficult for all-age schools to establish their own position statements and maintain their identity as one school. Separate guidance also has the potential to add additional burden for teachers and school leaders in all-age schools as they need to read multiple documents.

For most local authorities, establishing an all-age school is an integral part of their school reorganisation strategy. This is reflected in the increasing number of reorganisation proposals concerning all-age schools submitted to the Welsh Government that sit beside the strategies linked to 21st century funding.

Models

Across Wales, all-age schools have been formed from various combinations of pre-existing schools to suit the needs of the local community. In a majority of cases, secondary schools amalgamate with primary schools. The number of schools involved varies considerably from three secondary schools with one primary to one secondary school with eight primary schools. Details of models currently in existence can be found in Appendix 2.

Local authorities consider carefully what model to adopt and how it fits in their reorganisation plans. The amalgamation of several primary schools with the secondary school allows a few local authorities to close schools whose buildings are in a poor state and thus reduce the school's estate and maintenance costs,

while looking to provide smooth changeover for pupils.

Funding

A few local authorities secure funding for new buildings to accommodate all pupils. These purpose-built schools, generally planned in conjunction with pupils, parents and the local community, provide much better amenities than those previously available. In general, authorities upgrade existing buildings and, where required, add new buildings on the existing site.

Reducing the number of sites has released some capital funds for local authorities This has mostly been reinvested into the authority's education service and used to meet with demands of restructuring. Many of the old sites have been returned to the community or made available for local development.

Local authorities rationale

A few local authorities published a position statement regarding the rationale behind establishing an all-age school. These statements or policies indicated the possible benefits of the all-age model. This served the local authorities well for the formal consultation and provided a firm basis for future consideration of all-age schools. One of the main possible benefits indicated is to improve the wellbeing of pupils throughout their school life. They also identified the development of whole school pedagogy as a positive feature of all-age schools that could lead to improved learning and sound progress.

There were various responses from local authorities regarding the rationale for establishing an all-age school in their area. Every case had an individual set of reasons behind the rationale, taking into consideration the needs of the pupils in the school's catchment and the surrounding community.

In three local authorities, it was stated that opening an all-age school would protect education in rural areas. In some cases, this meant closure of small schools and forming one large school serving a wider area. It was also noted that reorganisation and forming an all-age school protected and developed Welsh medium provision through amalgamating small Welsh medium primary schools

with a larger, but still small, secondary school.

A few all-age schools have been established to help to improve standards of previously failing schools. In these instances, local authorities believed that amalgamation of successful schools with poorer performing schools would provide sound leadership, improve teaching and lead to higher standards. At this early stage there is little proof that this has been fully realised. This approach also has the potential of creating discontent amongst school staff and the wider community. In a few cases, all-age schools have been the preferred model in response to falling roles in the area as well as deteriorating buildings.

Staffing

In most cases, the local authority working with the shadow governing body usually deployed staff from the existing schools but did not guarantee jobs. However, in a few instances, pledges made to the school community during the development phase regarding funding and maintaining staffing levels were not always sustainable or realistic.

Middle leadership structures vary according to the school's context and size. Some schools adopt a structure with leaders for each area of learning and experience; these are generally whole school responsibilities across all phases. In other schools, there are structures that relate generally to subjects or disciplines, skills or pastoral roles. In a few schools, regardless of the leadership structure, there is not a continuum of whole school responsibilities outside of the senior leadership team. In addition, in a few schools where middle leaders have responsibility for whole areas of learning and experience, these leaders do not have the knowledge and skills beyond their own subject to support improvements across the whole AoLE. However, schools are continuously reviewing their staffing structures to meet current needs and national and local priorities.

Support from local authorities

Local authorities support school leaders appropriately with matters relating to personnel and give guidance to schools on matters such as salary protection and redundancies when required. Schools are given strong guidance on legal matters

regarding processes to close schools and establish a new school, for example in running consultations and dealing with the community. However, a few schools felt that the local authority did not always see through promises made at the time of consultation such as matters regarding funding, job security and support.

In the early days of considering all-age schools as models in school reorganisation, most challenges grew from lack of communication and engagement and resulted in some fear of the unknown. Governors became concerned that there was no legislation defining constitutions of governing bodies for all-age schools other than generally for maintained schools. They also described how the local authority did not always work closely enough with them to guide them through complex processes.

In a few instances, communication with the school community was not always clear enough. As a result, parents and staff sometimes perceived wrongly what were the intentions of the governing body and local authority. The establishment of a new all-age school was seen as a threat to local communities through the closure of local schools in small communities. Staff report that they felt intimidated by a new school and were concerned for their future employment. Engagement with the local community during consultation was not always meaningful, transparent or helpful to support change to improve the provision for pupils.

In a few cases, the rationale for forming an all-age school did not include a compelling narrative of the educational benefits for learners. There was lack of transparency and communication in bringing more than one school community together, which was a particular problem in more than one area. For example, parents were concerned about young children mixing and sharing the same facilities with much older pupils and about the impact of changes on the length of journeys to schools. The local authority underestimated the strength of feeling regarding ethos and culture of pre-existing schools, and there was strong opposition to a few schools.

Overall, in considering the rationale for establishing an all-age school, local authorities and governing bodies have very little research or expertise to draw upon in Wales. Since the first schools were established, they have developed a strong culture of sharing practice and learnt valuable lessons from previous experience. As a result, the most recent consultations are much sharper in terms of the benefits of establishing an all-age school. They also pay due attention to the possible effects on communities and set out clearly how the new school would

affect pupils, parents, and staff. This has led to successful applications and a smoother transition to an all-age school.

Setting up all-age schools

In general, headteachers are appointed in time to prepare for establishing the new school. Preparation time varies from 18 months to a few days. This often depends upon the circumstances surrounding the closure of the existing schools and the length of the consultation period. Where headteachers are appointed in a timely manner, they have opportunities to learn from established all-age schools and to consider how best to apply the learning to their own context. As a result, they are able to plan strategically for policy and practice and develop a clear vision for the new school. These headteachers also play a prominent part in, firstly, appointing senior staff and later appointing all other staff. These headteachers successfully establish a new ethos and culture, for example by rebranding the school, creating a whole school vision and bringing all staff together to establish a shared sense of purpose. It appears that allowing a headteacher adequate time to plan and prepare before opening the school is beneficial. Those appointed less than 12 months beforehand have noted that time for planning and preparing was very tight.

Where headteachers are not afforded enough planning time, too many decisions have to be made quickly and previous policies and procedures are adopted in the short term. They find it difficult to establish a new climate for learning that is different to that in the pre-existing schools. It also makes it difficult to consult fully with parents and staff about key changes.

One of the initial challenges for leaders is to establish a whole school, cross phase culture and ethos. To support this aim, many base leaders in different parts of the school. This approach is essential in multi-site schools. Leaders have to ensure that pupils and staff acclimatise with the new building and become used to having different school communities together. Many decide upon a new school uniform that gives a new identity to the school. In many cases, primary aged pupils' school uniform is different to the secondary aged pupils but carries the same branding through colours and school badge. This gives pupils a sense of belonging to the same new school.

Nearly all schools changed their name, signalling a new era and new beginning. In a few cases, agreeing a name proved difficult with some opposition from the community. Schools who consulted with pupils and parents on naming the school found the transition easier to manage. Only a very few schools retained the old

name of the secondary school.

Establishing a new school is mainly managed by the local authority who guide and support the governing body to appoint leaders and staff. This is in the absence of a specific national strategy or toolkit to support all-age schools' governing bodies. Most schools found that providing stakeholders, including parents, with regular updates was helpful and provided essential information in preparing families to transition to the new school on opening. Many schools appreciated the stability of having nominated local authority officers who managed their arrangements. In a few cases, where there was no designated project manager from the local authority, the schools struggled with the burden of ensuring that correct procedures were followed and that the community were kept informed of developments.

Leadership structures in all-age schools show some similarities and are generally based on a secondary school model. This is often because the number of pupils on roll is much greater. In many cases they were predetermined by the shadow governing body but adjusted as senior leaders were appointed. Many have taken the opportunity to look at whole school staffing structures. It is now common to have a headteacher, one or two deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers. An increasingly common approach to the staffing structure and leadership is to split the school into phases. These are usually nursery to Year 4 (phase 1), Years 5 to 8 (phase 2) and Years 9 to 11 (phase 3). The sixth form, when present, would be the fourth phase. Various combinations of other leaders with roles such as phase leaders, co-ordinators and middle leaders complete the leadership structure. The number and combination of leaders varies notably according to the school's size, location and number of sites, and general complexity.

Responsibilities designated to leaders are increasingly cross phase and whole school. In the first schools to be established, responsibilities mirror those found in the primary and secondary schools. This includes several heads of subjects, key stage leaders and co-ordinators. Over time, schools have moved towards leadership of whole school initiatives, for example the new curriculum areas of learning and experiences and pastoral care across all ages. This has led, for example, to better co-ordination of planning for pupil progression.

In establishing the first all-age schools, most senior leadership roles were filled by staff from secondary school backgrounds. Appointing a headteacher or deputy headteacher from a primary background was the exception. Over time, the

balance of leaders from secondary and primary school backgrounds has slowly been readdressed and, in most schools, there is a mix of senior leaders from the different sector backgrounds.

Many schools regarded their first year of opening as being very difficult. They had to cope with problems with school buildings as well as the emotional side of bringing staff together after amalgamation. In a few cases, the new school found itself overstaffed with insufficient funding and had to reduce the number of staff.

Despite anticipating financial gains from establishing an all-age school, very few all-age schools have provided savings for local authorities. Initially they might have expected savings due to the requirement for fewer staff, selling off assets and rationalising costs but this has not materialised and in many cases local authority costs have increased due to redundancies and salary protection. Many schools have encountered unplanned financial barriers and, in 2021, a minority (22%) held negative reserves. This is high compared with the proportion of secondary schools (17%) and primary schools (4%). This is in stark contrast to the situation before the pandemic when a majority (64%) of all-age schools carried negative reserves with the secondary and primary schools also showing larger proportions with negative reserves (43% and 17% respectively). Any money raised, for example from selling unwanted buildings, has been reinvested in the wider education services of that authority, but has not always specifically benefited the new school.

Support for headteachers during the initial planning and development has varied considerably across Wales. Many headteachers noted that they would have valued more support from their local authority, and the Welsh Government. This was particularly the case for those who had very little time to prepare and plan for the opening of the new school.

Leaders generally believe that an all-age school requires at least five or six years to establish itself and to ensure that staff, parents, and pupils see the benefit of the all-age model on progress and wellbeing in particular.

Governing body

It has been normal practice to establish a shadow governing body to oversee the transition from pre-existing schools to the all-age school. This governing body

usually includes representation from all pre-existing schools including chairs of governors and current headteachers. In a few instances, members with hidden or personal agendas have been a barrier to a smooth transition. Very few members have previous experience of establishing an all-age school. Many found that they had to work to adapt their mindset, to consider the school as a single new entity and to plan strategically as one school. Governors recognised the importance of making crucial staff appointments at an early stage. They also have a key role in working with and in the community to allay fears and misconceptions. To this end, the quality of governors is key to driving and supporting the establishment phase.

Governors appreciated a clear vision and well-focused approach by local authorities to establishing and providing strategic direction for the new school.

Cameo – Governing body of Idris Davies School 3-18

Context

Idris Davies School 3-18 is an English medium school for pupils aged 3-18 maintained by Caerphilly local authority. The school was opened as Idris Davies School in January 2018 following the amalgamation of Rhymney Comprehensive School, Abertysswg Primary School and Pontlottyn Primary School.

There are currently 898 pupils in the school.

Actions

The governing bodies of the three amalgamated schools initially established the full governing body. Due to the 'contentious amalgamation' it was felt that there had to be a mindset change. After six months the governing body was totally restructured as an all-age school governing body. Committees focus on inspection areas and the responsibilities of the governors were altered amicably with all governors given responsibility. None of the members had any prior experience of all-age schools.

Outcomes

The governing body feel that a consistency in their actions is a strength of the school. Setting up of the school was a lengthy process. They had many meetings with the local authority and amalgamated schools. Parents and the community were consulted 12 months before the school opened.

Governors believe that they did not appoint a headteacher early enough, which left the governors with a large amount of work that they felt unqualified to do, for example consulting on the changes to the school day.

Despite the initial challenges, the governing body feel that the following are factors that have contributed to the success of the school:

- Setting common goals across the whole school

- Catering for all pupils' needs in each phase

- The sharing of ideas and strategies between and within phases, including cross-phase development groups

- Seamless transition between key stages for pupils within the school

- Shared facilities, for example 3G facilities and specialist teaching facilities

- Consistent approaches across all ages

Partner primary schools (that account for 75% of Year 7 intake) are included in provision by Idris Davies School with respect to facilities, strategies, lesson materials, and physical resources.

Working with the community

Working with the community is crucial in ensuring the successful establishment

an all-age school. In the most successful examples, governors and local authorities worked with clusters of schools affected to outline their rationale and the benefits of an all-age model. It has been important to inform and consult staff, parents, and other members of the community about the process and how it will benefit the community as a whole, both now and for future generations.

In many cases, the community benefits from the use of high-quality facilities after school hours. These include sports facilities, large spaces for events, theatres, and cinema. The schools often provide a 'hub' for the community where parents can access specialist services from multiple agencies.

Cameos – facilities for community use

In Ysgol Bae Baglan a new building provides pupils with modern facilities for sport and creative arts. The building is open to the community each evening and they can make full use of facilities such as a recording studio, drama studio, the school hall, fully equipped theatre, sports hall, fitness studio and floodlit 4G all-weather pitches.

In Ysgol Godre'r Berwyn the old school buildings were refurbished and extended to accommodate primary pupils. The old school hall has been transformed into a fully equipped community theatre and cinema. The school reception area acts as a foyer for the evening performances.

Initially in many cases, members of the community have had reservations around amalgamation and have been resistant to change. As the school becomes successfully established, reservations have eased significantly. Many schools have succeeded in creating a brand-new culture and ethos befitting of one all-age school.

The establishment of all-age schools has also been received better in some local authorities than in others. For example, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Rhondda Cynon Taf experienced less resistance to their reorganisation and have multiple all-age schools in their authority. They engaged and communicated effectively with the local community at most stages of the schools' formation. As a result, communities believe that all-age schools benefit their children. Success in

establishing the first all-age school in an authority also contributed to the acceptance of other new schools in other communities.

In a few local authorities, all-age schools have had a positive effect on Welsh medium provision with an increase in pupils attending Welsh medium schools.

Lessons learnt

There were some early successes in establishing all-age schools, but leaders have also identified areas that they would want to improve. Lessons learnt have been shared within and between schools and local authorities. This has meant that the most recently established schools have benefited from hindsight and avoided certain pitfalls. The main lessons learnt include the following:

- Ensure that leadership structures are not too complicated and costly
- Establish common systems and timetabling
- Provide enough planning and preparation time for leaders and plan for enough time to see the process through
- Ensure that local authorities guard against making unrealistic or unsustainable promises, for example regarding job protection or funding
- Provide buildings that are fit for purpose and ready for occupancy when the school opens to pupils
- Be aware that loyalties to previous schools can lead to resistance from well-established staff; work on building an inclusive ethos by providing support to staff throughout the transition
- Consider carefully the make-up of a shadow governing body, to avoid those solely advocating their own agendas
- Consult meaningfully and thoroughly with all stakeholders; avoid a feeling of being 'done to' rather than 'done with – provide regular information updates
- Be prepared for opposition from the community; parents will be concerned about issues such as losing the 'familial' ethos of primary schools and young children mixing with much older pupils
- Ensure transparency when a reorganisation proposal is linked to other educational reform processes, for example reorganising post-16 provision

Impact of all-age school model

Impact on teaching and learning

Transition arrangements in all-age schools are robust. Many work very closely with their partner primary schools to ensure cohesion in curriculum delivery and moderation. Joint planning and subject expertise within the school and cluster ensure continuation when pupils transition to Year 7. Since teachers know their pupils from an early age, pupils from within an all-age school settle better in Year 7 than those who transition from separate primary schools. During the coronavirus pandemic, all-age schools ensured suitable transition arrangements through innovative activities such as virtual tours of the school and question and answer sessions with staff. Virtual open days were held for parents. Many all-age schools benefit from continuous transition experiences where pupils regularly attend lessons in the secondary phase of the school.

Most pupils at the end of Year 6 in an all-age school enter Year 7 in that school. A few pupils from partner schools decide not to transfer to the all-age school in Year 7. This is due to a range of reasons including language, perceived better standards and distance to travel.

Cameo – Transition for Welsh medium pupils

Context

Ysgol Caer Elen is a Welsh-medium school for pupils aged 3-16 maintained by Pembrokeshire local authority. The school was opened as Ysgol Caer Elen in September 2018 following the closure of Ysgol Glan Cleddau. There are currently 638 pupils in the school.

Strategy and action

The school has a language centre that offers immersion education for all pupils new to Welsh and those moving from English-medium to Welsh-medium education. This unit offers opportunities for a new cohort of pupils to develop their skills in Welsh and provides a sound linguistic basis for

them to participate fully in their bilingual education and take advantage of the experiences offered. They provide valuable opportunities for pupils to hear and practise pronunciation of vocabulary and language patterns and develop confidence in a safe environment. Pupils are constantly encouraged to use the language beyond the classroom. The teachers who deliver the lessons at the language centre are enthusiastic and are keen to present as many varied and enriching experiences as possible to their pupils through the medium of Welsh. The unit is supported by the governing body and very effective use is made of the experience and expertise of members of the governing body to lead and develop this unit in the school.

Outcomes

The school succeeds in building the confidence of these pupils to use the language orally and in writing in lessons and outside. The rich opportunities for pupils to practise and improve their Welsh literacy skills equip them effectively to be able to communicate, work and study successfully through the medium of Welsh.

As with many schools, where specific areas perform poorly, they are given support through the regional consortium or local authority, depending on the context. More general support is provided in line with school support services for schools who may have a history of poor performance. This is especially true where schools are in a follow-up category prior to amalgamation.

An accepted potential benefit of an all-age school is the ability to coordinate and plan provision across all phases. This includes planning common experiences, consistent teaching policies and planning for seamless progression. In many schools, teachers plan experiences across all phases well. Many schools have adopted the principles of the Curriculum for Wales and, as well as implementing the curriculum in early years, have planned for progression with key stage 3 pupils.

Cameo – Planning and evaluating the curriculum cross phase

Context

In September 2012, Ysgol Llanhari was expanded to provide education for pupils from the age of 3 up to the age of 19. It has 701 pupils in total, 514 in the secondary phase, including 63 in the sixth form and 187 pupils in the primary phase.

Strategy and actions

The school uses creative methods to plan the Year 5 to Year 8 curriculum in order to offer valuable learning experiences. The school has the principles of the Curriculum for Wales at the heart of its planning. The secondary department works effectively with the primary department to develop experiences and a continuum of learning through joint lesson planning. Through detailed planning, pupils are provided with broad experiences, and develop their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills effectively through cross-curricular teaching.

The school also places great emphasis on self-evaluation, with ongoing curriculum review and evaluation used to gain a clear picture of strengths and areas for improvement. This helps staff to adapt this provision regularly so that it meets pupils' needs more effectively and develops their knowledge, understanding and skills. There is also a great emphasis on the contributions of pupils and parents to the planning processes. Learning experiences are carefully planned to enable pupils to build systematically on their knowledge and understanding as they progress through school.

The school encourages parents to share their views and makes consistent use of the strategy 'what went well and even better if' to strengthen planning and learning experiences. This ensures that the curriculum develops successfully to match pupils' interests, ambitions, and abilities.

The school consistently develops and supports the professional learning of all staff in a creative way to provide a stimulating and purposeful curriculum.

Outcomes

Pupils enjoy ownership of their curriculum and this approach has had a very positive impact on their learning, wellbeing, and behaviour. There is also a growing confidence among staff to share expertise and embrace their own professional learning.

Most schools have appointed leaders for each area of learning and experience and these roles are embedded in the school's staffing structure. Planning for the Curriculum for Wales in the foundation phase is more advanced than for other phases while, in many cases, planning for key stage 2 tends to be focused on project-based work. In a few cases, teachers miss opportunities to provide a rich enough curriculum that progresses naturally as pupils move through the school

Although schools have made advances in terms of planning experiences and have taken advantage of being an all-age school, curriculum continuity is not always strong. All-age school leaders do not always take advantage of the expertise of subject leads when planning the curriculum across the school. Even in cases where one person has the responsibility for an aspect across the whole school, they do not always understand the progression steps required by younger pupils to grasp higher levels in a subject. This means that work for pupils does not always take enough account of their prior learning, and leaders' expectations are not high enough. A few schools have more than one staff member with responsibility for an area and retain a primary and secondary split. In a few cases, schools do not take enough advantage of their facilities to enhance the experiences for younger pupils.

Cameo – Whole school approach to Areas of learning and experience (AOLEs)

Context

Tonyrefail Community School provides education for pupils from 3-19 years old. It is maintained by Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority. It has 1,592 pupils with 357 pupils in the sixth form and 320 of primary school age.

Strategy and actions

A whole school approach to grouping learning into areas of learning

experiences (AOLEs) in cross phase faculties develops a broad range of joined up learning experiences and helps support continuity and progression. This is linked to the concept of a 'home' teacher in the middle school phase. The home teacher has responsibility for a class and teaches them for most of their timetable across different subjects.

The school provides a broad range of experiences for younger pupils. They benefit from specialised learning resources, for example use of science laboratories, gymnasium and drama facilities. The school has moved away from a hierarchy of subjects. For example, literacy and numeracy do not dominate the foundation phase or middle years programme.

In Year 7, the school has adopted a more integrated approach. For example, three teachers deliver humanities, health and wellbeing, science, technology and mathematics (STEM) between them. This is much reduced from potentially 11 different subject teachers.

Outcomes

Staff have a greater understanding of how learning experiences build through a child's journey from foundation phase to senior school, although no pupil has made this complete journey at this stage.

The school identifies that the best outcome has been smoother transition for Year 6 pupils into Year 7.

Developing a curriculum for Year 5 through to Year 8 is a priority for most schools. Schools are developing their interpretation of the four purposes of Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020) and there is good co-operation between teachers within schools and with other schools. Many schools place strong emphasis on ensuring pupils input into curriculum design and to what and how they learn.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most all-age schools used the lockdown periods for staff to plan and evaluate provision. This meant that schools continued with their planning for the Curriculum for Wales and tried out new approaches with their pupils. It was also an opportunity for teachers to provide guidance and

support to others for delivery of the new curriculum. Many teachers developed programmes of distance and blended learning. They planned carefully and produced dynamic resources to support learning. This continued when pupils returned to school and has given way to teachers using a more blended approach in their teaching, using digital resources and providing work for pupils when they cannot attend school.

Most all-age schools have one teaching policy that outlines expectations in lessons and progress over time. Improving teaching and ascertaining non-negotiables is a main priority for all-age schools and is also seen as a potential strength of an all-age school model. Teachers establish consistency of classroom provision such as routines, high expectations and disciplinary boundaries that pupils understand and accept as they move through the school.

Many schools make good use of specialists to deliver discrete specialist provision in the primary phase, for example in modern foreign languages, music and mathematics. Staff collaborate within the school and with other schools. They have recognised that there are benefits for staff from a secondary background to learn from primary based colleagues and vice versa. This was particularly enhanced during the pandemic where many staff were given time to work together and develop a sense of unity within the school. In a few schools, there is not enough cross-phase working and a misplaced sense of 'secondary knows best'.

Many schools share approaches to assessment so that pupils are clear about what needs to be done to improve their work. In these schools, pupils recognise for themselves how to improve their own work as they move through the school.

Teachers report that their teaching has improved since working in an all-age school, with more careful lesson planning and sharing of ideas. Teachers appear to have a greater respect for their peers working in different age phases.

Cameo – Consistent language around pedagogy

Context

Ysgol Nantgwyn provides English medium education for pupils from 3-16 years old. It is maintained by Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority. It has

1,093 pupils with 461 of primary school age.

Strategy and actions

As a new school in 2018, the school wanted to have consistent approaches and policies from the outset. In order to achieve consistency across all phases of the curriculum and school life, a common language was developed for use across the full continuum to support professional dialogue about the school's pedagogical approaches. Collaborative work within and across teams took place throughout the school's first years, ensuring that effective practice was shared to draw out the principles that Ysgol Nantgwyn staff and pupils felt were pivotal in all classrooms in the school. Over time this has evolved into the Ysgol Nantgwyn 'Ps' and these continue to support and guide discussions about pedagogical practice. The 'Ps' are:

- Planning

- Positive relationships

- Pupil needs

- Pedagogy

- Participation

- Prompts

- Plenaries

- Proof

- Progress

Outcomes

This common language allows all staff to be clearly aware of the expectations around effective teaching, learning and experiences and are all underpinned by research informed practice, including the school's own. The common language allows for constructive feedback and professional dialogues between colleagues and supports continual in-school transition as pupils move through school. Nantgwyn's common language is a

reflection of all practice across the curriculum. The Ysgol Nantgwyn 'Ps' support how the school evaluates its work and how staff and governors hold each other to account on behalf of its pupils

Impact on wellbeing and pastoral care

The wellbeing of pupils is a main focus and real strength in all-age schools. Overall, inspection outcomes for all-age schools are positive for wellbeing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the support for learners and their families was a particular strength in these schools.

Pupils reported that they were happy at school and felt safe at all times. They appreciated how the school provided guidance and direction in difficult times. For example, during the pandemic, nearly all schools contacted pupils regularly when they were not expected to attend school in person, checking up on their wellbeing and offering support. Schools offered support to families and an opportunity for additional vulnerable pupils to attend school if required. Schools are concerned about the long-term effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the wellbeing and mental health of pupils and report that there is already an increase in the number of referrals of older pupils to mental health professionals and also more pupils suffering from anxiety caused by uncertainty around qualifications and workload.

New buildings and high-quality facilities have an obvious positive effect on pupil wellbeing. This was evident in the respect shown by pupils to their environment and pride taken in ensuring that the building is clear of litter and pleasant for their peers.

In most schools, pupils behave well. Older pupils are good role models for younger pupils. An example of this is the way sixth form pupils visit the classrooms of younger pupils to support them with their reading and schoolwork. This fosters a sense of mutual respect between pupils and raises pupils' aspirations.

Many pupils believe that they are given suitable opportunities to voice their opinions and that these opinions are valued. School councils are inclusive of pupils from Year 3 to Year 13 and are very active in many schools. In schools that are on multiple sites, school councils meet virtually, which ensures the best use

of time and prevents unnecessary travel. Through the school council, pupils have taken part in consultations and have put forward suggestions for improving their life in school. For example, one school provided new sports equipment following a request by the school council and another school made changes to the school day.

Pastoral care and support are strong in most all-age schools. To a large extent, they fulfil their potential of caring for their pupils and getting to know them and their families from an early age. As a result, leaders and teachers have a sound understanding of the needs of pupils and time to address concerns. Although pre-pandemic attendance levels were low in a very few schools, most have effective attendance and wellbeing officers that track pupils' attendance closely. This was especially effective during the pandemic where these officers contacted families and pupils regularly and identified vulnerable families early. They visited pupils' homes and worked with other agencies to provide relevant support.

Cameo – Continuity of wellbeing during a pandemic

Context

Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg is a designated Welsh-medium school that is maintained by Vale of Glamorgan local authority. Ysgol Gyfun Bro Morgannwg merged with Ysgol Nant Talwg in September 2015 to create a school that provides education for pupils from 3 to 19 years old. There are 1,346 pupils on roll, including 252 pupils in the primary sector. There are 171 pupils in the sixth form.

Actions

The school has benefited from its status as an all-age school, with many of the strategies that were particularly effective for supporting primary age pupils being utilised with older pupils. There has been an increase in the number of Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) trained staff that work across the whole age range. All staff have received 'Trauma informed schools' training and a few staff in both the primary and secondary phases are following diploma courses. The mindset 'Tough on poor behaviour, gentle on the child' has been successfully shared, leading to a co-ordinated approach to the support of pupils who have behavioural

difficulties.

The school adapted its provision for supporting pupils with social, emotional and health needs so that this provision could continue while maintaining class and year bubbles during COVID-19 restrictions. The support was timetabled, with additional rooms being available to deal with any urgent cases.

The school has identified social skills and working with other pupils as the areas that have deteriorated most during the pandemic, particularly for younger pupils. Leaders have encouraged teachers across the school to include strategies that allow pupils to develop these skills during lessons. All classes in the primary phase have a daily session that focuses on developing pupils' communication and interpersonal skills.

The school has a positive relationship with parents. Effective communication systems ensure that the school and parents work in partnership in order to support pupils. Following lockdown, the school used a range of communication methods, including social media to ensure that parents were fully informed about the strategies that the school had put in place to ensure that their children were safe to return to school.

The school canvasses pupil and parent opinions regularly to evaluate the provision for supporting the wellbeing of pupils.

Outcomes

The strengthening of pastoral care and provision for wellbeing has meant that most pupils settled back well to school after every period of disruption due to the pandemic. The school is now in a stronger position to support the wellbeing, and personal and social skills of all pupils, especially the most vulnerable, and those pupils who have developed anxiety during the pandemic period.

Pupils state that they feel safe at school and that there is strong provision in place to support their wellbeing, should they require such support.

Schools place high importance on family and parental engagement. Many work in

teams around the family to achieve a holistic view of a pupil's needs. A few schools are heavily involved with community projects that further support pupils and their families.

During the pandemic, all-age schools strived to maintain pastoral care and support to pupils. While pupils could not attend school, schools arranged virtual opportunities for pupils to check in and address any concerns. Many schools provided opportunities for pupils to attend and see staff face to face when required. Virtual meetings were arranged for pupils who were transferring from partner schools into Year 7.

On returning to school after lockdown, nearly all schools held wellbeing sessions to help pupils re-adjust to school life. Pupils benefited from mindfulness sessions, yoga and physical activities and were given opportunities to express their concerns and emotions. As a result, more pupils not previously deemed as vulnerable were provided with targeted support for their wellbeing.

Pupils with special educational needs are monitored carefully throughout their time in all-age schools. Usually there is one additional learning needs co-ordinator who works across all phases of the school. A few schools have retained two co-ordinators with separate expertise in primary and secondary schools. Early identification of a pupil's needs is key to providing the correct purposeful support. An all-age school has the advantage of knowing their own pupils from an early age and throughout their statutory education. Many schools focus on links with parents of primary aged pupils since they will be at the school for many years.

Many all-age schools deal well with any instances of bullying that arise. They have the added advantage of knowing the background and history of all pupils that start at nursery or reception year and can often successfully address any issues of bullying at an early stage.

Pastoral support teams tend to be larger in all-age schools than in separate sectors. Large inclusion teams can include heads of year, heads of phases, senior leaders, attendance officers and co-ordinators. These teams identify vulnerable pupils early and plan purposeful support through a coherent, well co-ordinated approach to tracking progress and wellbeing. Leaders take good account of pupil, staff, and parent voice regarding wellbeing. This collaborative approach leads to changes in how the school approaches behaviour and pastoral issues, for example in establishing systems for pupils to take time out or access support.

Communication between staff and pastoral teams is generally strong, with information provided regularly through announcements and databases.

Additional support is provided in a minority of schools through specific learning resource bases. In general, these are effective and give pupils an opportunity to address their problems with bespoke support from well qualified staff. Many pupils see these centres as a safe haven where they can rely on staff to listen and address issues that they may have in school or at home. Schools indicate that these centres are invaluable following the COVID-19 pandemic where pupils present with more mental health issues, anxiety, and reports of domestic abuse. As with other sectors, all-age schools have close and effective links with external agencies.

Cameo – Pastoral care – Hafan, Hwb and Encil

Context

Ysgol Godre'r Berwyn was formed from the amalgamation of two primary schools and one secondary school in Bala and is maintained by Gwynedd local authority. It has 545 pupils aged 3-19 with 180 of primary age and 52 in the sixth form.

Strategy

The school's vision is at the core of all the school's procedures. Its aim is to create a happy, co-operative school where all the children and staff feel valued and respected, a school where everyone is willing to support and sustain each other and anyone who is concerned or lacking confidence. The belief is that happy learners work better because they feel safe. If they have respect from their teachers and the assistants, they show respect back and are more eager to please.

The school ensures that they are always prepared to listen to children, treating each child according to their own needs and personality. Reflecting this in the staffing strategy was a priority, and two inclusion assistants were appointed to run Hafan, Hwb and Encil, a specific part of the school that offers sanctuary and a quiet haven when stress and life pressures are too much for learners.

Hafan, Hwb and Encil are the school's heartbeat. Three rooms with a very different purpose to each other, and all pupils in the school, from reception to Year 13 are invited to visit at any time during the day. At the beginning of a school year, each class visits the Hwb in turn to be reminded that there is an open invitation to visit at any time.

Hafan – a room very similar to the classroom, but on a smaller scale, where support is available to complete work, discuss concerns or seek advice. Pupils will attend the Hafan if they are struggling to concentrate in class. An increasing number of pupils suffer from over-anxiety and feel that classroom expectations are too much at times. They all carry a red card and can use it by placing it on the table if they do not feel that they are coping in class. In the Hafan, they will be helped to calm down or talk, before carrying on with her work in the quiet atmosphere.

Hwb – The Hwb has a calm, homely and comfortable environment, with bean bags, comfortable chairs, low lights, lava lamps, and quiet music playing in the background. There is always a cup of tea and conversation available, as well as an opportunity to have respite, but in the main, a member of staff is always available to listen and support, whether giving advice about personal hygiene, or providing clean clothing. They provide sanitary products and advise on safe sex and sexuality. Above all, the staff provide an ear to listen, not only to pupils but increasingly to parents and staff members. The Hwb is a safe place for everyone at Ysgol Godre'r Berwyn.

Encil – an area earmarked for learners who have difficulty following the school's code of conduct. Pupils have the opportunity to practise relaxation techniques, discuss calming-down strategies, and be reminded of the school's learning practices and personal values. Encil provides a supportive atmosphere, where staff respect and listen, encourage, and assist, and believe that there is a reason behind all behaviour. Pupils learn best by example, and so they are treated as the adults would like to be treated themselves.

Actions

There has been considerable focus on the wellbeing of learners during the pandemic, ensuring that all children are safe and have access to education. All staff have contributed to achieving this, but the inclusion assistants have ensured that vulnerable children receive care and support

during the period. The Hwb has been very valuable and a strength in the school over the lockdown. Many vulnerable learners visited daily, some to have five minutes' rest, some to talk and get advice and others to escape the reality of life. These learners were also given a focus on life skills by receiving cooking lessons, personal care, and fitness sessions. Fruit plates and lunch were provided on a daily basis, for those who need it.

Staff visited the homes of learners and young people who were confined to their bedrooms and took them for walks to talk. There were telephone calls to the homes to remind pupils and their parents of medical or welfare appointments to ensure that everyone received the appropriate care.

There were daily phone calls to some households, not just vulnerable learners, but all those disengaging from online learning. This led to positive talking relationships being developed with parents who would not normally even consider talking to the school.

Outcomes

The vision for the Hwb has come to life by establishing a homely environment where pupils feel safe, and where everyone is welcome. The Hwb bridges strong support between emotional well-being and academic achievement for pupils of all abilities and backgrounds. The Hwb is a sanctuary and brings light to the lives of learners who often do not know where to turn for help.

Impact on leadership and management

Leadership structures vary across all-age schools in Wales. There are many models and they depend on the context of the school such as size, geographical location, and individual preference. Many models have evolved over time as the changing demands on leadership become clear. In some cases, leadership structures were initially complex but have since simplified as leaders realised what worked well for an all-age school. Examples of leadership structures can be found in Appendix 4.

When establishing a new school, a few schools faced challenges that were

inherited from the pre-existing schools. These included resistance from staff who had been in posts for a long time and were reluctant to change, for example a change to the school identity and concerns about their role in working with new leaders.

All-age schools offer valuable leadership opportunities for their staff. Those with prior leadership experience of either the secondary sector or primary sector are able to expand their experiences across all-ages. For example, a senior leader with secondary sector background would most likely have very little experience of foundation phase principles or the requirements of the key stage 2 curriculum. Likewise, leaders from the primary sector would most likely have little knowledge of qualifications and requirements of GCSE and A level courses.

In Estyn's report in June 2015 on best practice in leadership development in schools one of the main findings was that 'succession planning at all levels is often a significant strength in schools with a strong professional learning culture' and 'this is particularly important at senior and middle leadership level and allows posts to be filled internally if necessary when vacancies arise' (Estyn, 2015, p.4). By developing leaders specifically for all-age schools, leadership structures have adapted to include leaders with whole school responsibilities, for example subject leaders that co-ordinate the work from nursery to Year 11, senior pastoral leaders with overall responsibility for wellbeing for all pupils and skills co-ordinators who plan for progression across all phases. Restructuring of senior leadership teams after the school has been established has mainly occurred where leadership teams remained as in the pre-existing schools. In these instances, there has subsequently been competition for leadership roles as the amalgamation has resulted in fewer leaders being required.

Most schools developed a single vision for the school. This is usually based on the school providing the best education for pupils of all ages. However, in a few cases, schools still treat the secondary and primary phases differently and as if they were separate schools. A few schools noted that they overcame this barrier by adhering to the vision for the school when making appointments. This gave them a sound rationale for appointing the best person or persons for leadership roles in the new school.
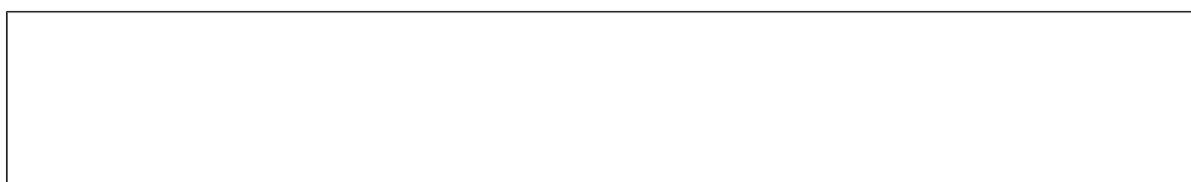
Cameo – Whole school operation

Context

Ysgol Henry Richard opened in 2014 following the amalgamation of two primary schools and a secondary school. It is maintained by Ceredigion local authority. The school is on one campus and is a 3-16 school. It has 326 pupils of which 133 are of primary school age.

Strategy

The school developed an all-age school ethos with a clear vision and leadership structured across all phases. As a small school, leaders and teachers have had to be flexible and innovative.

Actions

The school is located on one campus. The headteacher and governors and senior and middle leaders operate at a whole school level and promote the message of the benefits of an all-age school.

The school's policies are whole-school, and clearly reflect how the school operates as an all-age school. For example, the learning and teaching policy has been developed jointly and targets coherent progression and consistency across all key stages.

Teachers are appointed to be whole-school teachers rather than primary or secondary teachers. Secondary teachers teach primary aged pupils in several subjects. The vast majority of professional learning that takes place in the school takes place jointly. For example, line managers and other teachers co-observe to share best practice across the school.

Leaders responsible for pupils' wellbeing operate across primary and secondary phases and recognise the benefits of identifying families very early in pupils' school careers. They identify and intervene early and ensure continuity to support them.

There are consistent and valuable opportunities for pupils across the age range to work together, for example through older pupils supporting younger readers, and social activities such as the school Eisteddfod taking place at a whole-school level.

Outcomes

There is a strong sense of being part of an all-age school displayed by pupils, teachers, staff, and governors. They express the benefits of being part of an all-age school.

Pupils across the age range enjoy working together and understand well how this collaboration can empower their learning. Younger children are seen to appreciate older pupils holding regular reading sessions with them, and similarly older pupils are able to confidently outline the benefits of the leadership experiences they receive when working with the younger children.

Middle leaders are responsible for teaching and learning across the age range, and consequently develop a thorough understanding of how to develop and build on learning as pupils move through the school.

The secondary teachers who teach primary aged pupils are proud of this experience and are conscientiously committed to developing their understanding of teaching younger children, clearly setting out how this has raised pupils' standards in specialist areas. Teachers now consider themselves as all-age teachers rather than secondary or primary teachers.

Nearly all schools have clear lines of accountability. Performance management arrangements drive improvements and staff objectives are closely linked to the school's priorities. Professional learning and in-service training are relevant to improvement priorities and performance management objectives.

Most schools evaluate their work across the whole age range and have consistent approaches across the phases to quality assure processes. Schools are slowly resuming self-evaluation and improvement planning procedures after the pandemic.

Schools scrutinise pupils' work across phases and staff work together to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The findings inform the school's improvement plan. It is most common to have one improvement plan for the whole school, but they address age specific issues when required. Many make beneficial use of pupil and parent opinions to inform improvement. In a few

schools, the opinions of pupils and parents contribute well to self-evaluation and improvement planning, for example when considering the quality of homework or changes to the school day.

Schools may have specific priorities that they wish to address but there is commonality in many schools' priorities. These include improving pupils' skills, reforming the curriculum and additional learning needs. One of the most pressing priorities stated by schools is renewal and reform in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the most recently opened all-age schools, establishing themselves as an all-age school is the priority and includes developing consistent teaching policy, curriculum, and systems.

In all schools, the governing body oversees evaluation processes and outcomes. Governors monitor the school's improvement and hold leaders to account well in most cases. Most schools have a specific committee to monitor how well the school is progressing against priorities.

During our visits to schools and discussions with local authorities, it was noted that all-age schools had also faced some specific challenges. Turnover in leadership in a few schools is an issue, with several headteachers being appointed and leaving their posts after a short time. In a few schools, responsibilities are not particularly suited to an all-age school or to the changing demands of education reform, for example responsibilities that do not span the whole age range of the school or those based on a narrow range of areas. Until recently, a few schools operated as separate primary and secondary schools where they duplicated documents and ran different systems to each other. Pupils transitioned at the end of Year 6 similarly to those pupils from partner primary schools, negating the potential benefits of an all-age school.

In recent times, in many all-age schools professional learning provided internally has been refined and developed to meet the needs of staff in all-age schools. It is usual to have professional learning activities suitable for the whole school and teachers of pupils of all ages. They focus on whole school initiatives as well as national priorities. Leaders provide phase specific training as and when required.

External professional learning specific for all-age schools is rare, with consortia providing separately for primary and secondary teachers and leaders. This does not make good use of teachers' time, as the school needs to send delegates to

attend both primary and secondary learning sessions.

Many schools identify the needs of individual staff through performance review arrangements. Many schools have set up groups of three or four members of staff to work on particular aspects of teaching. Schools have also formed research groups for teaching and learning, curriculum, and skills development. Most of these groups include staff that teach across phases and who bring their own perspective to the work. As part of the research, staff from all-age schools have visited other schools and other countries. The national network of all-age schools provides a very useful platform where leaders can discuss sector specific issues and arrange to work together on common areas.

In most schools, quality assurance of professional learning activities involves all staff and focuses on the impact of the learning activity on the individual's performance. Teachers observe each other teaching and carry out evaluation activities together to gauge the impact of their training and research. Many schools are looking to develop leaders from within to support succession planning. Headteachers believe that leaders should be developed with expertise in the all-age sector, since currently, too few leaders have experience of working in other all-age providers.

Many all-age schools are in partnership with initial teacher education providers. However, currently, there is only one specific programme for training teachers for all-age schools. This means that initial teacher education (ITE) students on placement in all-age schools miss opportunities to further their training and experience though complementary support and learning.

All-age schools could benefit from more external training and support that is specific to the sector. Leaders in particular indicate that they have to attend more training and meetings than their counterparts in primary and secondary schools. There is also demand for developing leadership roles at all levels in all-age schools.

Regional consortia provide support for all-age schools, as they would to all other schools in the region. Advisers from the local authorities and regional consortia have limited expertise in the all-age schools' sector. Generally, they provide support that is either secondary or primary based. This has led, in a few cases, to duplication of provision and double the expectation on all-age schools to participate or send delegates. Headteachers identify that sector specific support

would enhance the existing co-operation with other all-age schools.

Although during our study, staff or pupils did not raise any concerns around the quality and volume of resources available to them, leaders generally commented that they were having to cope with limited financial resources. This also affects a school's ability to drive improvements as they would wish.

A notable development is the all-age schools national network, which gives all-age schools an opportunity to collaborate, share good practice and learn lessons from each other. As more all-age schools become established, the importance of this network has grown. The forum meets regularly to consider developments in the sector and discuss how issues in education particularly affect all-age schools. This includes drawing together information from headteachers, teachers, local authorities and regional consortia. The forum also engages positively with Estyn through stakeholder events and conferences. Increasingly, the forum benefits from national and international research on all-age schools. Although there are inherently complex structures to set up and manage, understanding in detail how others operate can support leaders in developing their own schools. Most recently, it has developed its own website (allageschoolsforum.cymru) that contains all information relevant to all-age schools (All Age Schools Forum, 2021). The aim of the website is to offer another way to share knowledge for the benefit all. It is through this network that all-age schools have accessed visits to other all-age schools in Wales and abroad.

Glossary

All-age school	A school that combines at least two stages of a child's education (typically primary and secondary). Also classed as middle schools and defined according to the age range of pupils that they provide for. Either 3-16, 3-19, 4-16 or 4-19.
Areas of learning and experience	Successful Futures refers to the development of six areas of learning and experience as a way of organising curriculum subjects. These are expressive arts, health and wellbeing, humanities, languages, literacy and communication, mathematics and numeracy, and science and technology.
National all-age schools network	A forum for all-age schools in Wales for sharing ideas and research
Phases	Allocated year groups within an all-age school. There can be up to four phases in one school. Phase 1: Nursery to Year 4 Phase 2: Year 5 to Year 8 Phase 3: Year 9 to Year 11 Phase 4: sixth form (where present) Phases 2 and 3 span different key stages.
pedagogy	The method and practice of teaching
regional consortia	The provision set up by a group of local authorities to deliver school improvement services as set out in the Welsh Government's National Model for Regional Working (2014)

References

All Age Schools Forum (2021) *Welcome to All Age School Forum.* [Online]. Available from: https://allageschoolsforum.cymru/home/ [Accessed 12 November 2021].

Department for Education and Skills (2006) *All-Age Schooling: A Resource*. London: Innovations Unit, Department for Education and Skills. [Online]. Available from: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8642/2/A9R1CAD_Redacted.pdf [Accessed 11 April 2019].

Estyn (2015) Best practice in leadership development in schools. Cardiff: Estyn. [Online]. Available from: Leadership Development (gov.wales) [Accessed 12 November 2021].

Estyn (2021) *Official Statistics.* [Online]. Available from: https://www.estyn.gov.wales/node/14721 [Accessed 14 October 2021].

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Scotland (2011) *Learning Together: Opening up Learning in All Through Schools*. [Online]. Available from: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/997/ [Accessed 11 April 2019].

Jamaican All-Age Schools Project (2003) *Changing the Future: Impact Assessment of the Jamaica All Age Schools Project*. Telford: University of Wolverhampton. [Online]. Available from: http://cidt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/cidt_changingthefuture-impact.pdf [Accessed 12 April 2019].

Reynolds, D., et al. (2018) *All-age Schools: The Changing Landscape of Welsh Education*. Swansea University, School of Education. [Online]. Available from: https://allageschoolsforum.cymru/cy/the-changing-landscape-of-welsh-education/ [Accessed 12 April 2019].

Swidenbank, H. (2007) The Challenges and Opportunities of Leading and Managing an All-age School. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership, Research Associate Report. [Online]. Available from: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/7055/1/download%3Fid%3D17118%26filename%3Dchallen

ges-opportunities-all-age-school-full-report.pdf [Accessed 12 April 2019].

Welsh Government (n.d.) *My Local School.* [Online]. Available from: https://mylocalschool.gov.wales/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en [Accessed 14 October 2021].

Welsh Government (2014) *National Model for Regional Working.* [Online]. Cardiff: Welsh Government. Available from: https://gov.wales/national-model-regional-working [Accessed 12 April 2019].

Welsh Government (2019) *21ˢᵗ Century Schools and Colleges Programme.* [Online]. Cardiff: Welsh Government. Available from: https://gov.wales/21st-century-schools-programme [Accessed 12 April 2019].

Welsh Government (2020) *Curriculum for Wales Guidance.* [Online]. Cardiff: Welsh Government. Available from: https://hwb.gov.wales/storage/b44ad45b-ff78-430a-9423-36feb86aaf7e/curriculum-for-wales-guidance.pdf [Accessed 12 November 2021].

Welsh Government (2021) *Address List of Schools in Wales.* [Online]. Available from: https://gov.wales/address-list-schools [Accessed 14 October 2021].

Welsh Government (2021) *Schools' Census Results: April 2021.* [Online]. Cardiff: Welsh Government. Available from: https://gov.wales/schools-census-results-april-2021 [Accessed 14 October 2021].

Wilborg, S. (2004) Education and Social Integration: A Comparative Study of the Comprehensive School System in Scandinavia. [Online]. *London Review of Education*, 2 (2), 83-93. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/44836262_Education_and_Social_Integration_a_comparative_study_of_the_comprehensive_school_system_in_Scandinavia [Accessed 11 April 2019].

Appendices

Appendix 1: Evidence base

Appendix 2: Charts and tables

Appendix 3: Transition of pupils in all-age schools and inspection outcomes

Appendix 4: Senior Leadership structures in all-age schools

Appendix 6: Further context for schools included in cameos

Appendix 1: Evidence base

- Data considered – inspection outcomes and statistics regarding pupil numbers and models

- Schools visited:

Ysgol Cwm Brombil – Neath Port Talbot

Abertillery learning Community – Blaenau Gwent

Ysgol Bro Idris – Gwynedd

Christ the Word School – Denbighshire

Ebbw Fawr learning Community – Blaenau Gwent

Idris Davies School 3-18 – Caerphilly

Porth Community School – Rhondda Cynon Taf

St Bridgid's School – Denbighshire

Tonyrefail Community School – Rhondda Cynon Taf

Ysgol Bae Baglan – Neath Port Talbot

Ysgol Bro Hyddgen – Powys

Ysgol Bro Pedr – Ceredigion

Ysgol Bro Teifi – Ceredigion

Ysgol Caer Elen – Pembrokeshire

Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg – Vale of Glamorgan

Ysgol Ystalyfera Bro Dur – Neath Port Talbot

Ysgol Henry Richard – Ceredigion

Ysgol Llanhari - Rhondda Cynon Taf

Ysgol Nantgwyn - Rhondda Cynon Taf

Ysgol yr Eglwys yng Nghymru Penrhyn Dewi – Pembrokeshire

Ysgol Llanfyllin – Powys

Ysgol Gartholwg – Rhondda Cynon Taf

Ysgol Godre'r Berwyn – Gwynedd

- HMI talked to groups of pupils whilst visiting the provider. We sought the views of pupils from the whole age range and information fed into findings regarding standards, teaching, leadership, and wellbeing.
- Visits and calls to the following local authorities:

  Gwynedd

  Torfaen

  Blaenau Gwent

  Ceredigion

  Pembrokeshire

  Denbighshire

Rhondda Cynon Taf

Neath Port Talbot

Flintshire

Caerphilly

- Literature reviewed is as outlined in the background section and references

- Inspection evidence was considered for all the school inspected as an all-age school. This contributed to sections on standards and wellbeing.

Appendix 2: Charts and tables

Figure 2: School combinations that have resulted in all-age schools

Key: SS: secondary school; PS: primary school
Source: My local school
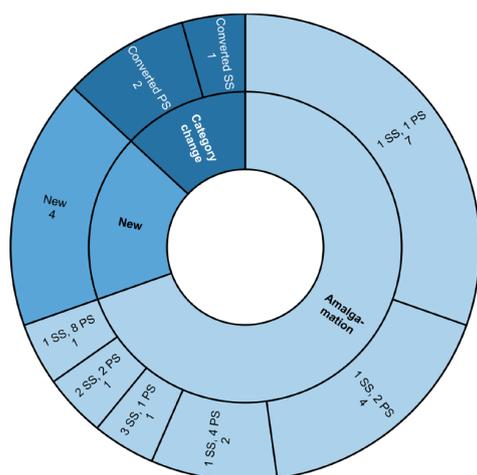
Figure 3: Number of all-age schools in Wales

Source: Pupil level annual school census, 2021
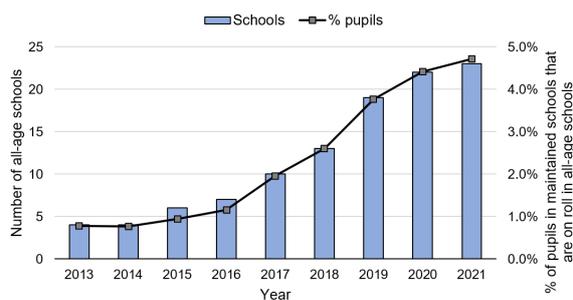
Table 1: All-age schools characteristics

	Min	Max	Average
Pupils	326	1,713	970
Primary phase pupils	133	1,007	306
Secondary phase pupils	164	1,329	664

3 year average FSM	6%	46%	20%
SEN	10%	36%	19%
EAL (A-D)	0%	14%	2%

Source: Pupil level annual school census, 2021

Appendix 3: Transition of pupils in all-age schools and inspection outcomes

Table 2: Transition of pupils in all-age schools

School number	School name	Percentage of Year 7 pupils from Year 6 in the same school
6615500	Bro Idris	80%
6775501	Abertillery Learning Community	68%
6685500	Ysgol Caer Elen	66%
6665500	Ysgol Bro Hyddgen	48%
6675500	Ysgol Bro Pedr	47%
6635901	St Brigid's School	46%
6675501	Ysgol Henry Richard	46%
6675502	Ysgol Bro Teifi	45%
6635902	Christ the Word	42%
6685900	Ysgol Penrhyn Dewi	40%
6745502	Ysgol Nantgwyn	40%
6615501	Ysgol Godre'r Berwyn	37%
6765500	Idris Davies School 3 to 18	25%
6745504	Ysgol Garth Olwg	23%
6745500	Ysgol Llanhari	23%
6745501	Porth Community School	20%
6745503	Tonyrefail Community School	18%
6775500	Ebbw Fawr Learning Community	15%
6715500	Ysgol Bae Baglan	14%
6715502	Ysgol Cwm Brombil	14%
6735500	Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg	14%
6715501	Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera Bro Dur	6%
6665501	Ysgol Llanfyllin	0% *

Source: Pupil level annual school census, 2021

*Ysgol Llanfyllin statistics show that no pupils transferred from its own cohort in Year 6. This was because the school only opened in September 2020.

Table 3: All-age inspection outcomes since 2017

Provider Name	Standards	Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Teaching and learning experiences	Care, support and guidance	Leadership and management
Ysgol Bro Idris	A	G	A	A	A
Porth Community School	U	A	U	A	A
Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg	G	E	G	E	G
Ysgol Bro Teifi	G	E	G	E	G
Ysgol Bae Baglan	A	G	G	G	G
Ysgol Henry Richard	A	G	A	G	A
Abertillery Learning Community	A	A	A	A	U
Ysgol Llanhari	G	G	G	G	G

Key: E: Excellent, G: Good, A: Adequate and needs improvement, U: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Source: Estyn, 2021

Appendix 4: Senior Leadership structures in all-age schools

Senior Leadership structures in all-age schools (sample of models)

Figure 5.Graphic as static image with long description

Senior Leadership structures in all-age schools (sample of models)

Large, multi-site all-age school
Executive Headteacher
Deputy Executive Headteacher – Business manager
Head of Learning Year 2-Year 8 – Head of Learning Year 9-Year 11
3x Assistant Headteacher (Primary Campus leads)
3 x Assistant Headteachers (Secondary Campus)

Large school on one site
Headteacher
2 x Deputy Headteachers
2 x Assistant Headteachers
Business officer
Head of lower school – Head of middle school – Head of upper school

Medium / large school on multi-site within close proximity
Headteacher
2 x Deputy Headteachers
6 x Assistant Headteachers

Small school on one site
Strategic Headteacher
Deputy Headteacher
3 x Assistant headteachers (Phase leads)

Appendix 6: Further context for schools included in cameos

Idris Davies School 3-18

The school serves the communities of Rhymney, Abertysswg and Pontlottyn. Around 32% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average. Around 28% of pupils have special educational needs. The current headteacher was appointed in October 2017

Ysgol Caer Elen

The school serves the communities of Haverfordwest and the locality. Eight per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is below the national average. Almost 93% of pupils come from non-Welsh speaking homes. Sixteen per cent of pupils have special educational needs. The current headteacher was appointed in February 2021.

Ysgol Llanhari

Around 6% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is substantially lower than the national averages for secondary and primary schools. Sixteen per cent of pupils are on the school's additional learning needs register, which is below the national average. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The headteacher was appointed in September 2014.

Tonyrefail Community School

The school opened in September 2018. Around 25% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above to the national average. Around 2% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The headteacher was appointed 18 months prior to the school opening.

Ysgol Nantgwyn

The school opened in September 2018. Around 33% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Around 1% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The headteacher was appointed 18 months prior to the school opening.

Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg

Most pupils are from white ethnic backgrounds and 7% are eligible for free school meals, which is much lower than the national average. Thirty-nine per cent of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes and most pupils speak Welsh fluently. Eleven per cent of pupils have additional learning needs, and the percentage with a statement of special educational needs is below 1%. Both figures are below the national average. The headteacher was appointed in January 2021. The current headteacher has been in post since January 2021.

Ysgol Godre'r Berwyn

Around 9% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national average. One per cent of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The school opened in September 2019 after the amalgamation of Ysgol y Berwyn, Ysgol Bro Tegid and Ysgol Beuno Sant. The headteacher was appointed around 12 months before the school opened.

Ysgol Henry Richard

The local authority has built a new primary division, and refurbished the secondary section, and one governing body has been in place since the school was established. Around 13% are eligible for free school meals. The school opened as an all-age school in 2014 and following a period as acting headteacher was appointed to the post in September 2017.