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Welsh Government

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Evaluating the Foundation Phase

Key Findings on Transitions and Assessment

Research Summary

The Foundation Phase (introduced in 2008) provides a developmentally appropriate experiential curriculum for children aged 3-7 in Wales. The Welsh Government commissioned independent evaluation (led by WISERD) aims to evaluate how well it is being implemented, what impact it has had, and ways in which it can be improved. The three-year evaluation utilises a range of mixed methods at a national and local scale.

This is one of four papers focused on **impact**. It draws on 239 classroom and setting observations, 341 practitioner interviews, 604 school and setting survey responses, 1,008 parent/carer survey responses, 37 Local Authority interviews and four non-maintained organisation interviews.

Social research

Number: 74/2014

Key Findings

- The vast majority of funded non-maintained setting leaders, head teachers and parents/carers are happy with the **transition arrangements into settings and schools** (from home, pre-nursery or a non-maintained setting).
- **Neither assessment nor observation was seen regularly** in our case study schools or funded non-maintained settings, and practitioners are waiting for the new **on-entry assessment** to be introduced.
- Year 3 teachers have mixed feelings regarding **Foundation Phase to Key Stage 2 transition**, and transition strategies put in place vary considerably.
- Year 3 teacher attitudes towards the Foundation Phase, time working with the Foundation Phase, whole-school ethos and training opportunities may **mediate successful Key Stage 2 transition**.
- The majority of teachers are satisfied with the **End of Foundation Phase Outcome Assessments**.
- Many practitioners and key stakeholders have concerns regarding the recent introduction of the **Year 2 reading and numeracy tests**.

Dadansodi ar gyfer Polisi



Analysis for Policy

Further Key Findings

Some funded non-maintained setting leaders think that the requirement to **share baseline on-entry assessment data** means there is now more potential for meaningful communication with schools (although this isn't always being realised).

Many funded non-maintained leaders are concerned that the **paperwork** associated with the on-entry baseline assessment is too time consuming and should correspond to a pay increase.

Whilst waiting for the new **on-entry baseline assessment** to be introduced, 11% of practitioners are still using the Child Development Assessment Profile¹ in full, 36% are using some elements of it, and 36% are using something different (17% were unsure).

Many practitioners think that the new on-entry baseline assessment should link explicitly to **outcomes**, and some practitioners think that one system should be used to track

¹ The CDAP was withdrawn by the Welsh Government in February 2012.

continuous progression from the Foundation Phase right through primary (and perhaps secondary) school.

Many different methods are currently being used to track pupil progress, and practitioners expressed their frustration at the general **uncertainty surrounding assessment**.

Many children find the dramatic **reduction in the use of Foundation Phase pedagogies** across the year groups difficult²; but children experience this in different ways and the Year 2 focus groups revealed that some children enjoy the '**additional challenges**' of harder work (provided activities are still varied and interesting).

25% of our sample of Year 3 teachers thought that the Foundation Phase was positively **preparing children for Key Stage 2**, whereas 19% thought it was having a negative impact, and the rest were unsure. Overall, 62% of

² Brought about by concerns over the 'standards agenda'; that is the change in pedagogy in response to the introduction of the reading and numeracy tests reported in the research summary on Pedagogy and Understanding.

the Year 3 teachers thought that the Foundation Phase is a good thing.

88% of the parents/carers surveyed felt that their child had **settled** well into Year 3. 46% of the parent/carer respondents reported that their child's **enjoyment of learning** had remained constant during transition into Key Stage 2, whereas 36% thought enjoyment had increased and 15% thought it had decreased (3% were unsure).

Some practitioners and head teachers are explicitly trying to extend Foundation Phase **pedagogies into Key Stage 2** in an attempt to ensure children continue to enjoy learning.

18% of teachers have concerns regarding how to communicate the **End of Foundation Phase Outcome Assessment** results to parents/carers, and several highlighted issues mapping Foundation Phase outcomes onto Key Stage 2 'levels'.

Some Foundation Phase leaders noted that the 'Personal and Social Development, Wellbeing and

Cultural Diversity' area of learning is particularly **difficult to measure** and therefore assess.

Additional practitioners were seen observing, assessing and tracking children's progress more often than teachers.

Both **assessment** and **observation** are more likely to take place during focussed than continuous or enhanced provision (and mainly during the 'Language Literacy and Communication Skills' and 'Mathematical Development' areas of learning).

Many practitioners and key stakeholders see the **format** of the reading and numeracy tests as contradicting the principles of the Foundation Phase.

85% of the parents/carers surveyed with a child in Year 2 reported being happy that the **reading and numeracy** tests had taken place.

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