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Welsh Government

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Evaluating the Foundation Phase

Key findings on Training, Support and Guidance

Research Summary

Social research

Number: 54/2014

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 **implementation**. It draws on 341 practitioner interviews, 604 school and setting survey responses, 37 Local Authority interviews and four non-maintained organisation interviews.

Key Findings

- Overall, head teachers and funded non-maintained leaders were **generally satisfied with the training, support and guidance** given, although when asked what they would most like to change about the Foundation Phase with hindsight, 'support materials' and 'training' were ranked highly in both cases.
- Case study observations revealed that teachers who reported completing more Foundation Phase training modules had a **better understanding and more positive views** of the Foundation Phase.
- With the exception of Year 1, 66% of all observed **teachers** and 100% **funded non-maintained leaders** reported completing all 8 Welsh Government Foundation Phase training modules.
- It was generally felt that **mixed messages** from Welsh Government are leading to Foundation Phase practitioners calling for more frequent, structured and tailored guidance, whilst stakeholders called for better exemplification materials and clearer terminology.

Further Key Findings

Training

Overall, the vast majority of leaders thought the training provided by their Local Authority was **'very useful'**.

The minority who *would* change the training noted that **mixed messages**, for example the initial focus on play, which has now shifted to teaching basic skills, led to a **misunderstanding among Foundation Phase practitioners about how to deliver the Foundation Phase as it was intended**.

Overall, Foundation Phase leaders would have appreciated **more follow-up visits** after the initial training, as well as **more on-going training**.

An average of 37% of school and 60% of funded non-maintained additional practitioners **reported completing all 8 Foundation Phase modules**.

More teachers in Nursery, Reception, and mixed-age

classrooms reported having **on-going training** compared with teachers in Years 1 and 2.

More practitioners in Final Roll

Out schools had a) reported completing all 8 Foundation Phase modules and b) reported completing a higher average number of completed modules than Early Start or Pilot Schools.

Classroom observation data revealed that **more Foundation Phase training led to more practical, physically active and outdoor activities**, but less reflection.

Support

61% of school Foundation Phase leaders and 44% of funded non-maintained leaders found the **annually held Welsh Government conferences** to be 'very useful'.

The majority of head teachers found Local Authority **Training Support Officers and Foundation Phase Advisors to be 'very welcoming'** of the new approach to the curriculum, with 40% stating they had played a 'major role' in their school's Foundation Phase

implementation.

84% of school and funded non-maintained Foundation Phase leaders found the **support and advice provided ‘very useful’**, but:

- Some head teachers noted that the initial support differed to the messages coming to them now – and that they would **prefer more school specific support** in general.
- Some funded non-maintained leaders noted that the initial level of support they received was unsatisfactory but that they had **greatly benefitted from link teachers**.
- Schools and funded non-maintained settings felt support for **outdoor learning and assessing and monitoring children** was lacking (which may be related to the role of observation).

Guidance

Guidance materials were seen as **‘very useful’** for implementation in both schools and funded non-maintained settings by *most* national survey respondents. But *some* felt that the guidance

documentation was too vague, and the wording and exemplar materials were not clear (e.g. the use of the word ‘play’), which in turn caused **inconsistency in practitioners’ implementation of the Foundation Phase**.

Some case study practitioners also commented on the guidance materials, which were said to be too cumbersome and late in arriving, **leading practitioners to feel unprepared for the Foundation Phase**.

Generally, local authority interviewees stated that they were **happy with how the Foundation Phase had been implemented in their local authority**, although they were aware of **school and funded non-maintained setting implementation variety** which they noted was down to practitioner views and understanding of the Foundation Phase.

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2 June 2014

ISBN: 978-1-4734-1473-0