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Thomas, Hefin; Duggan, Brett; McAlister-Wilson, Sam; Roberts, Lois; Sinnema, Claire; Cole Jones, Nia and Glover, Alison (2023). Research with schools on the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales: Wave 1 report. Welsh Government, Cardiff, Wales.

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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2023-04/research-with-schools-on-the-early-implementation-of->

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Analysis for Policy



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER:

49/2023

PUBLICATION DATE:

27/04/2023

Research with schools on the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales: Wave 1 report

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

OGI © Crown Copyright Digital ISBN 978-1-80535-879-4

Research with schools on the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales: Wave 1 report

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Thomas, H; Duggan, B; McAlister-Wilson, S; Roberts, L; Sinnema, C; Cole-Jones, N; Glover, A (2023). *Research with schools on the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales: Wave 1 report*. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 49/2023

Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/research-schools-and-learners-early-implementation-curriculum-wales>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
ALN	Additional learning needs
All-through school	Ages 3 – 16 / 19 school
Areas/AoLEs	Areas of learning and experience
CfW	Curriculum for Wales
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
INSET	In-service Education and Training Day
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
REC(s)	Regional Education Consortia
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education

Acknowledgement

The research team is extremely grateful to all of the senior leaders who gave up valuable time to contribute to the study.

Executive summary

1. This report presents findings of the first wave (Wave 1) of qualitative research with 64 senior leaders in schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) carried out by Arad Research on behalf of the Welsh Government during November 2022 to January 2023, which examined schools' early experiences of roll-out of Curriculum for Wales (CfW). It follows on from [Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms](#) (Welsh Government, 2022b) published in January 2022. A report detailing findings of a second wave (Wave 2) of interviews with senior leaders, as well as fieldwork with learners, will be published later in 2023.

Methodology and analysis

2. A total of 64 senior leaders took part in Wave 1 interviews; 16 of them selected from among those who took part in the [Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms](#) (Welsh Government, 2022b) as well as an additional sample of 48 senior leaders. A purposive sample of interviewees were recruited to ensure regional coverage and the inclusion of a variety of settings including:
 - types of setting (primary, secondary, all-through, special, PRU)
 - language medium (Welsh-medium, English-medium).

It is important to acknowledge the risk of selection bias among the sample of schools that engaged with the research. Settings that had progressed further than others in their preparation activities may have been more likely to agree to take part in the interviews.

A description of the methodology is set out in Section 2 and the sample profile is included in Section 3.

Findings: Overall progress

3. Senior leaders reported they were content with the progress they had made to date in designing and implementing their curriculum. Concerns about progress were expressed in a small number of settings but a few senior leaders noted they had previously been concerned about the size of the task ahead of them, but now felt

they were making good progress. Schools who reported that they had been planning and developing their curriculum for 3-4 years appeared to be more confident in their approaches than those who reported being at an earlier stage of implementing their curriculum.

4. Senior leaders reported that practitioners were increasingly taking responsibility and ownership for curriculum implementation. Interviewees reported that there was an increased focus on pedagogy and collaborative activity both within settings and in their clusters. Increasing cluster-level activity facilitated by practitioners was cited as an example of increasing practitioner autonomy and ownership of the curriculum.
5. Senior leaders reported that developing and implementing their setting's curriculum had created challenges in terms of staff capacity and time, particularly in planning the curriculum and ensuring it covered the required elements set out in the CfW framework.

Planning and implementing across and within Areas

6. Senior leaders reported that practitioners in their settings were planning and mapping elements of the CfW framework against each of the Areas to ensure adequate 'coverage' and to avoid repetition where possible. A variety of approaches were described to developing links between subjects and Areas. Primary schools were more likely to be adopting a more integrated thematic or topic-based approach, while secondaries tended to report increased collaboration between subject leads, compared with the previous curriculum, and attempts to identify commonalities and links between topics in different subjects and Areas.
7. There were variations in terms of which Areas senior leaders considered were progressing well in their curriculum design and implementation. Senior leaders generally reported that Health and Wellbeing and Languages, Literacy and Communication were more developed Areas in terms of joint planning and integrated working. Interviewees tended to emphasise their setting's efforts to ensure that skills developed in Mathematics and Numeracy were mapped against and integrated effectively into other Areas. There was mixed feedback on the success of efforts to promote joint planning in the Humanities and Expressive Arts Areas. Science and

Technology appeared to be the Area senior leaders felt was most challenging in terms of encouraging joint planning.

8. Mapping progression within Areas was a focus in many settings, with senior leaders describing how cluster activity was playing a key role in developing their shared understanding of progression. However, senior leaders referred to capacity challenges in releasing staff to participate in joint planning sessions and cluster activity.

Implementing RSE

9. Many settings reported that delivery of RSE had progressed well and report they had not encountered concerns from their parents and carers, despite sometimes having anticipated that there might be issues. Some senior leaders had experienced negative responses from parents and carers in relation to RSE, but many had been able to address concerns through open and transparent communication.
10. Many senior leaders, particularly in primary schools, reported that their settings were using externally sourced (usually purchased) materials to inform and guide RSE design, planning and delivery. In some cases, senior leaders reported their settings had adapted some of these materials to ensure that they were developmentally-appropriate.
11. Some senior leaders expressed a desire for more centralised support for RSE curriculum design and concerns were raised about the ability of settings to deliver this aspect of the curriculum without financial outlay.
12. Several senior leaders reported that their setting had allocated responsibility for RSE to a specific staff member, such as appointing a Head of Wellbeing or PSE Coordinator. Senior leaders reported that RSE leads worked with other Area leads to incorporate RSE-related topics across the curriculum.

Implementing international languages

13. There were clear differences in the extent to which primary and secondary senior leaders had incorporated international languages into their curriculum. Senior leaders in primary schools reported that they were in the early stages of implementing the teaching of international languages in their schools. While a few primary schools had

already embedded international languages through other programmes, most noted that they were reliant on collaborative activity with secondary schools or external partners to implement international languages within their curriculum.

14. Senior leaders in secondary schools reported a continuation in their international languages provision in-line with curriculum developments. A few reported an increase in their activity to support their cluster primary schools.
15. Several senior leaders, in both Welsh and English-medium schools, referred to the importance of prioritising the development of Welsh language skills over international languages.

Arrangements for monitoring learner progression

16. Senior leaders reported having developed progression plans (often called 'progression maps') across Areas, with comments indicating that the principles of progression are incorporated into curriculum design. Schools are working internally and in clusters to develop a shared understanding of progression.
17. Primary and secondary school senior leaders recognised the greater emphasis on the progress made by the individual learner as part of their thinking and planning in relation to progression. Schools presented a number of examples of progression models and approaches they have developed and/or are trialling. Senior leaders recognised that the new approaches to learner progression being adopted require a change in practitioner mindset, which is likely to take some time to embed.
18. Schools expressed concerns or noted challenges in relation to several aspects linked to progression, notably a perceived risk of divergence as schools and clusters adopt different approaches to recording and reporting progression; and the increased time expended by leaders and teachers in developing and reviewing approaches to progression.
19. Senior leaders described changes in their approaches for reporting to parents and carers, including the format or medium used as well as what they report on to parents. Senior leaders expressed a reluctance among practitioners in their settings to move away from traditional styles of reporting on levels and grades, sometimes in the absence of a confirmed new approach to assessment within the school.

Assessment arrangements

20. Senior leaders reported progress in developing new approaches to assessment, with an increased focus on formative, day-by-day assessment. Senior leaders reported using formative assessment to inform planning and differentiated approaches to teaching that respond to the needs of individual learners. Senior leaders commented on the change in mindset and attitude required to realise the ambition for a new approach to assessment.
21. Many senior leaders report a reduction in the overall volume of formal assessment during the school year; however schools continue to use national personalised assessment to gauge learners' progress in reading and numeracy.
22. For many senior leaders, significant questions remain in relation to assessment: they report being unclear and concerned about the assessment data they will be required to provide as part of accountability arrangements. In a number of cases, schools are continuing to use external assessment tools alongside the new assessment methods being developed.

Supporting equity and inclusivity

23. Equity and inclusivity were viewed by senior leaders as ongoing priorities which were reinforced by the CfW framework and guidance, as well as the requirements of the ALN code. Senior leaders felt they were now more learner-centred in their approach to curriculum design, with the flexibility to tailor support according to learners' needs. An increased focus on learner voice activity which was now considered to be more central to curriculum design was felt to support a learner-centred and inclusive education.
24. More individualised approaches to monitoring learner progress were considered to be a key contributor to increasing equity and inclusivity. Senior leaders commented that a greater emphasis on each learner making appropriate progress for their own individual learning and development would support equity and inclusivity.
25. Changing their curriculum content to be more diverse and a better reflection of society was considered by senior leaders to be a positive change taking place in their setting. Senior leaders felt this aspect of the curriculum was progressing well in their

settings, with a range of resources and training opportunities available to support this.

Engaging with parents and carers to raise awareness of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

26. Schools were utilising a variety of approaches to disseminate information on the curriculum to parents. Some expressed caution in communicating CfW changes to parents and highlighted a range of methods used to 'drip-feed' updates in an effort to avoid overwhelming parents with too much information. Schools reported using their mandatory curriculum summaries to share information with parents about the reforms, setting out how the new curriculum is organised and an overview of approaches to learner progression.
27. Some senior leaders mentioned that CfW-specific events for parents and carers, such as workshops about the changes, were poorly attended. Senior leaders reported they found there was better engagement with parents and carers when putting on events which embedded CfW information, such as via presentations, celebration events and assemblies that the children also participated in. Several settings had started to include 'learning days' as a new means of reporting, inviting parents in to view and discuss their child's work.
28. Senior leaders described a variety of attempts to involve parents and carers in curriculum design. However, senior leaders tended to report limited responses from parents to methods such as surveys or meetings. There were reports of settings limiting their consultation with parents and carers until practitioners and settings had spent more time designing their curriculum and felt more confident in their approaches.

Issues for consideration

29. The following issues for consideration have been developed based on the findings set out above.
 - The Welsh Government should continue to encourage collaboration between settings, focusing on supporting joint-working among Area leads as part of

curriculum planning, and evaluation. This should include collaboration between primary and secondary schools.

- The Welsh Government should consider whether there is a case for the development of additional resources to support RSE provision, particularly in primary and special schools.
- The Welsh Government, working with regional partners, should ensure that international languages are promoted and delivered as an integral part of the new curriculum arrangements in all schools.
- During the second wave of research with senior leaders as part of this study, there should be a focus on understanding the learning points at school level from the trialling of new progression models, including how schools have refined and improved their approaches.
- The Welsh Government should continue to monitor the potential implications of divergence in settings' and clusters' approaches to monitoring progression, particularly in considering how to monitor progress at a national level.
- Senior leaders frequently referred to a desire for reassurance that the approaches they are taking to curriculum planning, progression and, particularly, assessment were appropriate (and 'on the right track'). While collaborative working between schools goes some way to providing reassurance, Welsh Government should consider whether there is a need for a role that provides external constructive challenge to schools (particularly around progression and assessment) during these early years of implementation.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This section provides an overview of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales and the purpose of the scoping study in helping to support future research and evaluation priorities.

Curriculum for Wales

- 1.2 The Curriculum for Wales (CfW) is the cornerstone of the Welsh Government's efforts to reform education in Wales and build an education system that raises educational standards and enjoys public confidence. The four purposes of the curriculum are the starting point and aspiration for every child and young person in Wales. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) *Improving Schools in Wales* report (2014)¹ and Professor Graham Donaldson's independent review (2015)² set out a rationale for the reforms as well as recommendations for how to design a new curriculum fit for modern day Wales. Under the reforms each school is developing its own curriculum, supported by national guidance, which will enable learners to embody the four purposes of the curriculum by becoming:
- **ambitious, capable learners** who are ready to learn throughout their lives
 - **enterprising, creative contributors** who are ready to play a full part in life and work
 - **ethical, informed citizens** who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
 - **healthy, confident individuals** who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.
- 1.3 Under the CfW subjects are organised around six Areas of Learning and Experience (Areas): expressive arts; health and well-being; humanities; languages, literacy and communication; mathematics and numeracy; and science and technology.

¹ [Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective \(2014\)](#)

² [Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales \(2015\)](#)

- 1.4 The CfW guidance promotes an integrated approach to learning and teaching. It encourages collaboration and cross-disciplinary planning and teaching to enable learners to make links between the different Areas and apply their learning to new situations and contexts.
- 1.5 Under the new curriculum arrangements schools support the progression of each individual learner along a continuum of learning from ages 3 to 16. The CfW guidance describes mandatory principles of progression for the curriculum and for individual Areas, and progression steps which are supported by the statements of what matters and descriptions of learning. Linked to this, assessment should be formative, learner-focused and used to inform how practitioners respond to the needs of individuals and groups. A defining characteristic of the new approach is that curriculum, assessment and pedagogy are seen as parts of an integrated whole.
- 1.6 The curriculum reforms are supported by a national approach to professional learning; new evaluation and improvement arrangements; a transformation of additional learning needs support and provision; and the development of new qualifications.
- 1.7 The Welsh Government has set out guidance to schools on how to approach curriculum design and implementation, recognising the iterative process of curriculum development. The most recent publication *Curriculum for Wales: the journey to curriculum roll-out (2023)*³ built on earlier guidance and set out the phases involved in curriculum design, which were:
- **engagement** to develop a whole-school understanding of the curriculum and a vision for the teaching and learning that supports it;
 - **design, planning and trialling** – drawing on guidance and support;
 - **evaluating and preparing for first teaching**;
 - **first teaching**, begin to implement the curriculum, reflecting on its effectiveness over time and refining its design as learners progress.

³ See [Curriculum for Wales: the journey to curriculum roll-out - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

1.8 In addition, the Welsh Government set out the principles that should underpin schools' curriculum preparation and design: development through **co-construction**; effective **pedagogy**; engagement with **professional learning** and networks; embedding the qualities of **schools as learning organisations**; considering the **wider school context**, including how the curriculum can support the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code, Cymraeg 2050 and the promotion of learner health and well-being.⁴

Scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales

1.9 In 2021, Welsh Government commissioned a scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales. Several reports were published as part of this study:

- A survey was carried out in June and July 2021 to gather robust information on the readiness of settings for CfW roll-out from September 2022. In January 2022 the Welsh Government published the [survey findings](#) (Welsh Government, 2022a).
- In June 2022, Welsh Government published [Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms](#) (Welsh Government, 2022b) presenting the findings of 48 follow-up interviews with senior leaders and practitioners in October and November 2021. The purpose of the interviews was to explore responses to the survey, understand the depth and detail of individual school experiences and the challenges facing them in preparing for curriculum reform.
- In July 2022 the Welsh Government published the [Scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales](#) (Welsh Government, 2022c). The scoping report recommends a comprehensive programme of research and evaluation and the Welsh Government has published a [response](#) to these recommendations (Welsh Government, 2022d).

The Welsh Government will consider the specific areas of work recommended in the scoping study and aim to publish a detailed evaluation plan in 2023. However,

⁴ The Welsh Government has published a *Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing* (Welsh Government, 2021)

to maintain an up-to-date and ongoing understanding of schools' and learners' experiences from the first years of curriculum implementation, the Welsh Government has commissioned this initial research, which is described in more detail below.

About the study

- 1.10 The Welsh Government has commissioned Arad Research, in partnership with The Open University in Wales, to conduct research with schools and learners on early implementation of CfW.
- 1.11 The aim of this research is to undertake two waves of qualitative research during academic year 2022/23 to understand how the curriculum and assessment reforms are working for practitioners and learners in schools and settings, and the barriers and facilitators to successful implementation. The research aims to inform the support that the Welsh Government and its partners are putting in place to maximise success.
- 1.12 This report presents findings of qualitative interviews with 64 senior leaders, carried out between November 2022 and January 2023, in relation to their schools' and Pupil Referral Units' (PRUs) early experiences of implementing CfW. The interviewees were recruited from the respondents to the *Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms* (Welsh Government, 2022b) who agreed to be re-contacted, as well as additional senior leaders who did not participate in this previous research.
- 1.13 A second report will be published later in 2023 which will include findings from a second wave (Wave 2) of interviews with senior leaders, alongside fieldwork with learners in these schools. Wave 2 will also include findings from fieldwork with senior leaders in secondary schools preparing to implement CfW from September 2023.
- 1.14 Section 2 of this report presents the methodology for research. Section 3 provides information on the profile of interviewees. Subsequent sections reflect the main topics used to structure discussions:
 - Section 4 presents senior leaders' views on **overall progress in implementing the new curriculum**

- Section 5 presents findings relating to planning and implementing the curriculum across and within **Areas of Learning and Experience (Areas)**
- Section 6 presents comments on settings' experiences of implementing **Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)**
- Section 7 presents views on implementing **international languages**
- Section 8 presents comments relating to arrangements for monitoring learner **progression**
- Section 9 presents senior leaders' views on **assessment** arrangements
- Section 10 presents interviewees' experiences of how implementation is supporting **equity and inclusivity**
- Section 11 presents interviewees' experiences of **engaging with parents and carers** to raise awareness of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

Conclusions and issues for consideration are set out in Section 12.

2. Methodology

2.1 This section provides detail on the research methodology. This includes detail of the research tool design process, fieldwork conducted, analysis process, challenges encountered and limitations of the methodology.

Research tool design

2.2 The focus of the interviews was on gathering senior leaders' views on their early experiences of implementing their curriculum. An interview guide was designed focused on senior leaders' views on:

- overall progress in implementing the new curriculum
- experiences of curriculum and assessment design in relation to specific elements of the CfW framework⁵
 - planning and implementing the curriculum across and within Areas
 - implementing Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)
 - implementing international languages
- arrangements for monitoring learner progression
- assessment arrangements
- how implementation is supporting equity and inclusivity
- engaging with parents and carers to raise awareness of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

The interview discussion guide is included in Annex A.

Sampling and recruitment

2.3 A central element of the research involved building on – and enhancing – the sample of settings represented in the [Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms](#) (Welsh Government, 2022b). A sampling framework was agreed with the Welsh Government, based on recruiting 64 senior leaders, to include as many as possible from this previous qualitative

⁵ Three different elements of the CfW framework will be chosen for the Wave 2 interviews.

research and supplemented with additional senior leaders. The sample achieved is set out in Section 3 which presents the profile of respondents by type, sector and language medium of setting.

- 2.4 A total of 48 senior leaders and practitioners were interviewed in the previous qualitative research (Welsh Government, 2022b) and had consented to being recontacted. The research team approached only senior leaders (i.e. not practitioners) from the previous study sample in settings that were implementing CfW from September 2022. The rationale for this was that these senior leaders would have a breadth of knowledge across the school and would be able to provide an overview of curriculum implementation. On this basis, a total of 13 practitioners and 7 senior leaders in secondary schools that were not implementing CfW until September 2023 were excluded from the list of 48 previous interviewees. Senior leaders in the remaining 28 settings were invited to participate in this research, and 16 of them were interviewed (in a few cases, interviews with a different senior leader in the same setting were arranged). An additional 48 senior leaders were recruited to take part in the research.
- 2.5 Senior leaders were invited by email to participate in an interview of around 45 to 60 minutes. The invitation provided an overview of the main discussion points and gave senior leaders the option to invite colleagues who led on relevant aspects of the curriculum to join the discussion. A small number of senior leaders invited colleagues to join the discussion, or parts of it.
- 2.6 A second wave of interviews with the sample of senior leaders is planned during the Summer of 2023. All senior leaders who participated in Wave 1 have consented to be re-contacted during Wave 2. Two complementary elements of research will be undertaken during the Spring and Summer of 2023. These are:
- discussion groups with a sample of learners from years 4-7
 - fieldwork with a sample of senior leaders in secondary schools who are implementing CfW from September 2023.

Findings from this fieldwork will be included in the Wave 2 report which will be published in the Autumn of 2023.

Qualitative analysis

- 2.7 A framework approach has been taken to analyse the qualitative interview data. This allows structured analysis of the data as well as enabling the consideration of issues that emerged from the data itself and may not have been previously considered. Evidence was initially reviewed during a briefing session which involved the researchers who conducted the interviews. This enabled the researchers to reach agreement on the key themes emerging from the evidence and informed the subsequent analysis.

Methodological challenges and limitations

- 2.8 In analysing the findings presented in this report, it is important to bear in mind some of the challenges encountered during the fieldwork.
- 2.9 The purposive sample of 64 schools was designed to include a sufficient spread of schools (by language medium and sector) to obtain a good cross section of views and experiences. The purpose of qualitative research is not to achieve full representation but to allow a broad range of issues to be identified, and deeper discussion to take place. However, the sample does not enable us to report on the statistical significance of the findings or generalise the results to the population. It is important to acknowledge the risk of selection bias among the sample of schools that engaged with the research. Settings that had progressed further than others in their preparation activities may have been more likely to agree to take part in the interviews.

3. Profile of respondents

3.1 This section sets out the profile of the qualitative interviewees. As noted in Section 2, a purposive approach was taken to sampling to ensure that the research explored the views of those who agreed that their setting was well placed to design their own curriculum as well as those who did not feel this. The sample was therefore not intended to be representative of the population of settings or survey respondents in terms of their views on their preparations for curriculum reform.

Profile of interviewees

3.2 A total of 64 senior leaders were interviewed. These comprised 42 interviewees from English-medium schools and 14 from Welsh-medium schools.⁶ The profile of the interview sample by type and medium (Table 1), and region (Table 2) of setting is set out below.

Table 1. Profile of sample of interviewees by sector and language medium

Sector	Percentage of the sample of 64 interviewees in each category				Number of interviewees			
	Welsh-medium	English-medium	NLC*	Total	Welsh-medium	English-medium	NLC*	Total
Primary and nursery**	8%	38%	0%	45%	5	24		29
All-through schools (Middle)	3%	3%	0%	6%	2	2		4
Secondary***	11%	25%	0%	36%	7	16		23
Special schools	N/A	N/A	6%	6%	N/A	N/A	4	4
PRUs	N/A	N/A	6%	6%	N/A	N/A	4	4
Total	22%	66%	13%	100%	14	42	8	64

*NLC - No language classification.

**Welsh-medium primary includes dual stream and transitional schools.

***Welsh-medium secondary includes bilingual schools.

⁶ Including dual stream primary and bilingual secondaries and all-through (3-16/3-19) schools. Four interviewees were from special schools and four from PRUs, both of which are settings that are not classified by language.

Table 2. Profile of interview sample by region

Geographic region	Number in sample	Percentage in sample
North	14	22%
Central South	16	25%
Mid and West	17	27%
South East	17	27%
Total	64	100%

4. Progress in implementing the new curriculum

4.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to overall progress in implementing the new curriculum and assessment arrangements. Interviewees were asked how they would summarise their setting's progress in implementing the new curriculum and questions on:

- what had worked well and why
- what had supported their setting's progress
- what had worked less well so far
- whether they had experienced any barriers to progress to date.

4.2 The following sections summarise comments from senior leaders on the overall progress made in implementing their new curriculum. General points made by senior leaders are set out in the first sub-section, with findings organised according to issues raised most frequently, and other issues raised by multiple interviewees. Differences in views according to type of school (primary, secondary, other settings) and language (Welsh, English-medium schools) are presented in a second sub-section.

General points

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

4.3 **Senior leaders reported they were content with the progress they had made to date in designing and implementing their curriculum.** In a few cases, senior leaders reported that they had previously been concerned about the size of the task ahead of them, but now felt they were making good progress. There was a recognition among senior leaders that the curriculum reforms are an ongoing process which will take years to embed within their setting. Senior leaders also highlighted their ongoing evaluation and review activities which would support them in refining their curriculum design and delivery over the course of the coming academic year and beyond.

'We're doing it – we're pleased with it. As with everything we need to evaluate. We have curriculum meetings regularly, focusing on rethinking pedagogy. What

should learners look like? How are we going to assess that, planning backwards?’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary

‘Initially it [CfW] was daunting, but now we see it as a way to make the children more enthusiastic about learning. Exposing children to more things that will enrich their learning experience. We needed to get away from being insecure about whether we are doing things right or not.’ English-medium all-through school

- 4.4 **Senior leaders reported that their staff were increasingly taking responsibility and ownership of curriculum implementation, and that there was a greater sense of practitioner autonomy emerging among their workforce.** This was particularly apparent among senior leaders who took part in the [qualitative research on preparations for the curriculum and assessment reforms](#) (Welsh Government, 2022) during the 2021/22 academic year. While senior leaders continued to report that some staff were uncertain and required reassurance about their approaches, they also reported that their staff increasingly recognised and welcomed the flexibility offered by the CfW. Senior leaders referred to examples of how this enabled their settings to provide a richer, learner-centred curriculum for learners with a greater focus on wellbeing.

‘Teachers are carrying the responsibility now. Some people [teachers] think we’ll get a ‘tick sheet’ at some point, but I think the fact that they [teachers] get to decide what they teach is starting to sink in, even if some of them feel uncertain’. Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary⁷

‘Staff have been invigorated to reflect on what has worked well and take ownership of what they want this to look like within their departments.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary

- 4.5 **An increased focus on pedagogy was mentioned by senior leaders when summarising their overall progress in implementing their curriculum.** Senior leaders emphasised the importance of reviewing, rethinking and strengthening their approaches to teaching and learning and achieving a shift in focus from ‘what they teach’ to ‘how they teach’. The importance of ensuring a ‘mindset shift’ among practitioners in their settings was mentioned by senior leaders, both as an enabling factor and a challenge to be overcome. Senior leaders felt they were making

⁷ Original quote in Welsh: ‘Athrawon sy’n cario’r holl gyfrifoldeb – rhai pobl yn meddwl gwyn ni ‘tick sheet’ ar rhyw ben. Dwi’n meddwl bod y ffaith na nhw sy’n cael penderfynu be l ddysgu yn dechrau sincio mewn, er bod rhai yn teimlon ansicr.’

progress in embedding this culture change among practitioners and considered this to be an important factor in realising their setting's curriculum vision.

'The change to pedagogy is the biggest change as a result of the new curriculum, as opposed to the change in content. This is to be welcomed... ..the evidence shows that it's pedagogy that has the biggest effect on the quality of teaching and learning.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school⁸

'The challenge has been winning the hearts and minds of teachers to make sure the changes happen. Getting a team of enthusiastic staff to drive this has been central.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 4.6 **Collaborative activity within schools and their clusters was considered to be developing well, particularly at practitioner level.** There was evidence of widespread school-to-school activity taking place, with senior leaders referring to regular cluster meetings taking place involving senior leaders, practitioners and, on occasion, support staff. These meetings were reported to be focused on activities such as developing a cluster vision or developing a shared understanding of progression within specific Areas (see Sections 5 and 8). Senior leaders felt the cluster activity was beneficial in providing them with reassurance about their approaches; however senior leaders also expressed some uncertainty about whether their approach to cluster activity represented good practice and felt feedback from outside their cluster (e.g. from regional education consortia (RECs) or Estyn) would be beneficial.

'We invite other cluster schools here to see practice that we've got going on. We've created a cluster vision together and we've got a school development priority that's consistent across all the schools. We've been working on learning profiles, and what good teaching and learning looks like. I don't think that's been the case before. So I think the curriculum has certainly strengthened our working relationships with the cluster schools.' Senior leader, special school

- 4.7 **Senior leaders referred to challenges in terms of managing staff capacity and the time required to develop and implement their setting's curriculum.** Challenges in releasing staff to attend meetings, arranging staff cover and ensuring adequate funding was available for this were mentioned by senior leaders. Senior leaders emphasised the need to carefully manage the amount of information about

⁸ Original quote in Welsh: 'Y newidiadau i addysgeg yw'r newid mwyaf o ganlyniad i'r cwricwlwm newydd, yn hytrach na'r newid i'r cynnwys. Mae hwn i'w groesawu, mae mwy o hyblygrwydd o fewn y cwricwlwm wedi caniatáu amser i ddatblygu dulliau newydd o addysgu. Ac mae'r dystiolaeth yn dangos mai addysgeg sy'n cael mwyaf o effaith ar safon y dysgu ac addysgu.'

the CfW they were asking their staff to read and digest. Senior leaders felt there was too much information available for their staff to read it all and described their attempts to 'distil' and 'drip feed' information to manage staff capacity and ensure their wellbeing.

'We're working with the cluster but the time commitment is difficult, to find the staff [to attend meetings]. The worry is that there is not enough time for staff to plan the curriculum. One extra day of training [INSET] is not enough. There is so much to do, and having time to think is important'. Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary⁹

- 4.8 **Senior leaders described their processes for planning their curriculum content and ensuring it covered the required aspects of CfW.** This included settings that had adopted a thematic or topic-based approach to planning the curriculum and settings' processes of mapping curriculum elements, such as cross-cutting themes and skills, against their curriculum content. This mapping process was described as an important part of planning within settings to ensure they were sufficiently covering curriculum elements as part of their design. The challenge of ensuring their curriculum provided adequate 'coverage' of all elements set out in the CfW guidance was frequently mentioned by those interviewed. A few senior leaders described how this process had revealed to them the scale of the task and the number of elements they had to include in their curriculum.

'There is more in this curriculum than the old one really. While we've got more freedom in theory to design it ourselves, there's loads we have to include – so it's a bit like [trying to] put a 50 pence piece in a 1 penny slot'. Senior leader English-medium, primary school

Other issues raised by senior leaders

- 4.9 **Senior leaders referred to their setting increasingly gathering the views of learners and parents as well as, on occasion, the wider community (e.g. employers) to inform their curriculum design.** Senior leaders referred to examples of using this type of evidence in planning topics, themes and content for their curriculum.

⁹ Original quote in Welsh: 'Ni'n gweithio gyda'r clwstwr ond mae'r ymrwymiad amser yn anodd, i ffeindio'r staff [sy'n gallu mynd i gyfarfodydd]. Y pryder yw bod dim digon o amser i staff gynllunio y cwricwlwm. Mae un diwrnod hyfforddiant [mewn swydd] arall ddim yn ddigon. Mae gymaint o waith i neud, a mae cael amser i ystyried yn bwysig.'

- 4.10 **Senior leaders mentioned professional learning they or their staff had accessed which was focused on curriculum design.** This type of professional learning was generally well received by those who mentioned it, though some felt it was more general than they would have liked at this stage (e.g. focused on principles of design) and others felt it would have been more beneficial to have taken part in this type of professional learning at an earlier stage of their planning.
- 4.11 **A need for reassurance from external sources that they were ‘on the right track’ was expressed by senior leaders.** While a few settings had been inspected by Estyn recently and some had received feedback from their REC, senior leaders explained that they were often reliant on the views of senior leaders and practitioners in their cluster to get feedback on their approach. Uncertainty around the nature of future school accountability arrangements and qualifications, both in terms of the how the content of specifications could influence teaching practices and how data based on achievement may be used in future, were a cause for concern among some senior leaders.
- ‘The idea of CfW is exciting, but deep-down teachers really like having a scaffolding. The effect is the school creates their own scaffolding, without knowing what other schools are doing, many of the teachers are sceptical and nervous – they are trialling it and taking things on board but there is a lot of uncomfortable uncertainty.’ Senior leader, Welsh-medium all-through school
- ‘We are worried that Estyn will think we are doing it wrong’. Senior leader, Special school
- ‘The major sticking point is what will GSCEs and A-Levels look like – if these are going to just stay the same, then we will end up reverting back to fit with this’. English-medium primary
- 4.12 **Senior leaders felt they were at an early stage of planning and implementing their curriculum.** Senior leaders noted that collaborative work relating to the curriculum was in its infancy in their cluster. A few senior leaders felt they required more support, particularly in relation to progression and assessment (See sections 8 and 9), and a small number were concerned about the progress they had made to date.

Variations in views according to type and language of setting

4.13 **The challenges of achieving a ‘mindset shift’ among all practitioners in their setting was highlighted by senior leaders in larger settings, particularly those in larger secondary schools.** Senior leaders perceived this to be one of the challenges of disseminating information and ensuring a shared understanding among a large workforce, particularly in the context of a continuously evolving curriculum. This would appear to reinforce findings from the [qualitative research on preparations for the curriculum and assessment reforms](#) (Welsh Government, 2022) which found that some practitioners in secondary schools indicated they were not aware of all the activities that were taking place in their school. A few secondary senior leaders felt it was more challenging to change mindsets, including those of learners and parents, in secondary settings because of the focus on achieving qualifications.

‘The challenge is changing the mindsets of staff who are used to the old way of working.’ Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school¹⁰

4.14 **Senior leaders in smaller schools highlighted the challenges of ensuring they had capacity and time to plan and design their curriculum.** In these settings, senior leaders were more likely to refer to difficulties in releasing staff from their teaching responsibilities to participate in design and collaborative activity (e.g. cluster or network meetings, professional learning). This suggests that accessing the type of activities that support curriculum change is a greater challenge in smaller settings.

4.15 **Senior leaders in special schools and PRUs particularly valued the increased flexibility and autonomy offered by the CfW.** In these settings, senior leaders highlighted the importance of focusing on learner health and wellbeing and experiential learning opportunities, and referred to examples of how the CfW had enabled them to achieve this.

‘Something we’ve always had to do in special schools is be creative. And that’s where the new curriculum actually works wonders for us. Because we’ve always had to be creative. So it’s nothing really new to us.’ Senior leader, special school

¹⁰ Original quote in Welsh: ‘Yr her yw newid meddylfryd staff sydd wedi arfer a’r hen ffordd o weithio.’

'We have lots of learners with limited external experiences and we have free rein now to give them more variety and introduce them to more hands on teaching – practical activities and trips make a lasting impact on them. CfW gives us the flexibility to be child-centred and how to make learning appropriate for them and delivered in a style which best suits them.' Senior leader, PRU

5. Planning and implementing the curriculum across and within areas of learning and experience

5.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to interviewees' experiences of **planning and implementing the curriculum across and within areas of learning and experience (Areas)**. Interviewees were asked about:

- whether arrangements were working effectively or as anticipated
- whether they had faced any challenges
- whether additional support was required with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. professional learning, guidance, resources, support to enhance leadership or professional practice).

5.2 The following sections summarise comments on implementing across areas of learning and experience from senior leaders in primary schools, secondary schools and other settings. As in the previous section, findings are organised according to issues raised most frequently, and other issues raised by multiple interviewees.

General points

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

5.3 **Senior leaders described their settings' approach to mapping elements of the CfW framework against each of the Areas to ensure adequate 'coverage' and to avoid repetition where possible.** This included mapping the content of statements of what matters, descriptions of learning and cross-curricular themes and skills against Areas to ensure all aspects were sufficiently covered in their curriculum.

'Coverage is a big consideration. Our AoLE (Area of learning and experience) leads are planning the curriculum from nursery to Year 6, looking at coverage a lot across their Areas. They will go through all of those things [elements of CfW framework] to make sure they are covered.' Senior leader, English-medium primary

'Mapping is important to help us to take stock of where more of our attention goes; it's an important method to reflect on what is important. We find it hard to give each of the six Areas a fair amount of time – there is so much emphasis on

numeracy and digital, but I worry we don't have enough time allocated to Science.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium primary¹¹

'We mapped all of the topics across Years 7 to 9 – we found that we did war a lot, particularly World War I. We looked at repetition across English, History, Drama, Art to see... where can we change things or ensure progression and look at increased breadth and depth, for example through looking at civilisation. We've already adapted things so there is less repetition.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 5.4 **Settings reported that they were adopting various approaches to planning their curricula and ensuring links between subjects and Areas.** Senior leaders gave examples of whole year groups or specific Areas adopting a thematic or topic-based approach to try and make more meaningful links between subject areas, and to make these more explicit for learners. These topics or themes were often based around key questions they were seeking to address during a term or were linked to projects or experiences they had planned for learners. In some settings, senior leaders had not adopted a thematic or topic-based approach but were nevertheless seeking to identify specific links between particular topics in different subject areas. In a few cases, settings had developed 'concept maps' as a way of capturing the ways in which skills and ideas were being introduced in different subjects and at different stages of learning.

'We try and build across subjects, so knowing when one subject is covering a topic, so that other subject areas can build on this with authentic links. Not necessarily teach in tandem but building connections.' Welsh-medium all-through school¹²

'Learning sequencing is so important to the absorption of knowledge, this needs to happen before we make these inter-disciplinary links. How we do this is a challenge. We are making curriculum maps to identify links across the departments.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary

- 5.5 **Mapping progression within Areas was a focus in many settings, with senior leaders describing how cluster activity was playing a key role in developing a shared understanding of progression.** Senior leaders felt that mapping

¹¹ Original quote in Welsh: 'Mae mapio yn bwysig i ni bwyso a mesur lle ma mwy o'n sylw ni yn mynd; mae'n ddull bwysig i bwyso beth sy'n bwysig. Ni'n gweld hi'n anodd bod y chwech maes dysgu yn cael tegwch o ran amser; mae gymaint o pwyslais ar rhifedd, a digidol, ond dwi'n poeni fod na ddim digon o amser i neud Gwyddoniaeth'.

¹² Original quote in Welsh: 'Ni'n trio adeiladu ar draws pynciau, felly gwybod pan mae un pwnc yn gwneud testun, fel bod pynciau eraill yn gallu adeiladu ar hynny gyda chysylltiadau go iawn; nid o reidrwydd dysgu ar yr un pryd ond adeiladu cysylltiadau.'

progression within, and across, Areas was a key focus of their design activity and important for ensuring that their curriculum was coherent. Senior leaders described how this process was helpful in ensuring that skills and concepts were being introduced in a sequential way (e.g. ensuring graphing skills were being covered in Maths before introducing them in Science). Further detail on settings' activities relating to progression is set out in Section 8.

'We put everything out on the table and identified links between all the AoLEs and did everything chronologically, making sure everything was consistent. For example, ensuring no one was learning how to do graphs before they learnt it initially in Maths.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary

- 5.6 **Increased collaboration between subject disciplines within settings was reported by senior leaders.** This included regular staff Area meetings taking place within settings to develop a shared understanding of curriculum content and progression among staff from different subject disciplines. In many cases, these meetings were being led by dedicated Area leads. Senior leaders also described Area cluster meetings taking place, involving Area leads and other staff; these were typically termly meetings, though sometimes reported to be more frequent. These types of meetings were felt to be important by senior leaders in fostering a sense of ownership among practitioners and in providing some external reassurance on design and implementation activity within settings (e.g. through sharing ideas and experiences, getting feedback from peers and learning from each other).

'Each AOLE has an 'Area Leader' – has had since the start. Staff still work in subject disciplines but do meet more often as AOLEs than as subjects.' Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school

'We have calendared meetings for AoLEs to discuss cross-curricular themes. These have been on the calendar for two years which ensures collaboration. Initially people thought in terms of projects but people gradually realised that this wasn't the case. It's more about ensuring a joint understanding of what's being delivered across that AOLE.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 5.7 **There were variations in terms of which Areas senior leaders considered were progressing well in their curriculum design and implementation.**

- Senior leaders were more likely to report that curriculum implementation had progressed well in the **Health and Wellbeing** and the **Languages, Literacy and Communication** Areas compared with others.

- Senior leaders tended to note that good progress had been made in implementing **Humanities**, though there were also examples where senior leaders reported this had not progressed as well as had been hoped.
- Senior leaders tended to emphasise their setting's efforts to ensure that skills developed in **Mathematics and Numeracy** were integrated effectively into other Areas (e.g. analysing Science experiment data during Maths lessons). Senior leaders typically mentioned this Area when describing their planning and 'concept mapping' processes.
- There were mixed views on progress in the **Science and Technology** and **Expressive Arts** Areas. Senior leaders were more likely to note that progress had been slower, or more challenging, in these Areas compared with others. However, there were also settings where senior leaders felt good progress had been made in these Areas.

'Maths and numeracy needs space to stand alone whereas Humanities come together more naturally. Subjects which are more hierarchical in nature, like Maths, are more difficult to reimagine in a different structure – you need pre-requisite knowledge to get from one stage to the next, like travelling along a tube map. History is a bit more like a jigsaw, you can build the picture in different ways and in a different order.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

'We've stuck with individual subjects within Science and Technology but there is more collaboration. It's a more difficult Area because of the need to focus on factual knowledge before understanding the concepts and links between them' Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school¹³

5.8 **Senior leaders referred to challenges they were facing in terms of ensuring staff capacity to participate in joint planning sessions and cluster activity.**

These issues mirrored those discussed in Section 4.7.

Other issues raised by senior leaders

5.9 **Settings had made adaptations to their timetables to focus on particular Areas, and to place a greater emphasis on the linkages between subjects.**

Examples included dedicating half a day per week in their timetable to lessons focused on Health and Wellbeing or Expressive Arts.

¹³ Original quote in Welsh: 'Ni di cadw at bynciau unigol o fewn Gwyddoniaeth a Thechnoleg ond mae mwy o gydweithio. Mae'n faes anoddach oherwydd yr angen i ffocysu ar ddealltwriaeth ffeithiol cyn deall y cysyniadau a'r cyswllt rhyngddynt.'

- 5.10 **Senior leaders described taking a sequential approach to their curriculum design.** This involved focusing on curriculum design in one Area first, before reviewing the process and applying lessons learnt to other Areas.
- 5.11 **A minority of senior leaders commented that they required more support, that the professional learning they had received was too general or that there was too much information available.** These issues were similar to those set out in sections 4.11 and 4.12.

‘The consortium is always a couple of steps behind the schools. By the time guidance does come out, schools have already moved on to the next step or tried something already.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 5.12 **A few senior leaders commented that their school/setting was still at an early stage of designing and implementing the curriculum.**

Variations in views according to type and language of setting

- 5.13 **Primary schools were more likely than secondary schools to have adopted a thematic or topic-based approach to planning their curriculum.** Senior leaders considered that planning in this way was a more ‘organic’ process in primary schools, where staff were more accustomed to integrated working across Areas. This was therefore considered to be more practicable and manageable for them.
- 5.14 **Senior leaders in primary schools were more likely than others to emphasise their activity mapping elements of the CfW against their own curricula.** This reflected a more integrated approach to curriculum planning in primary schools, compared with secondary schools.
- 5.15 **Senior leaders in primary schools were more likely than those in secondary schools to mention that teachers were working with colleagues from schools in their cluster focusing on plans for specific curriculum Areas.**
- 5.16 **Senior leaders in secondary schools were more likely than those in primary schools to note that they had maintained a focus on subject disciplines within their school, rather than adapt their structure to an Area or faculty-based model.** Senior leaders reported that the main reasons for this was a desire to continue to draw on practitioners’ subject specialisms (to better support learners) and also a reluctance to move towards arrangements which may not reflect the

suite of qualifications at age 16 and post-16. While secondary senior leaders reported that more joint planning was taking place between departmental leads and staff, their approach to curriculum planning and design was reported to be less integrated than that of primary schools.

- 5.17 **Secondary senior leaders were more likely than those in primary schools to refer to their progress or challenges relating to specific Areas.** These are described by Area in section 5.7 above.

'Teachers are still teaching Maths and Welsh discretely. Lots of models that they've taken has been taken into AoLE groups. Science and technology teachers are so keen to teach those in a specific way, they are finding it hard to bring in humanities to this. A big culture change.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary

- 5.18 **Senior leaders in PRUs welcomed the focus on learner wellbeing and the flexibility to work across Areas.** However, smaller PRUs also referred to challenges they were facing in planning across areas because they did not always have subject specialists within their setting.

6. Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)

6.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to interviewees' experiences of **implementing RSE within their school's or setting's new curriculum arrangements**. Interviewees were asked about:

- how settings have started to implement RSE
- whether arrangements were working effectively or as anticipated
- whether settings have faced any challenges to date
- whether any additional support was required to implement this aspect of the curriculum.

6.2 The following sections summarise comments on implementing RSE as part of the new curriculum arrangements from senior leaders in primary schools, secondary schools and other settings. As in previous sections, findings are organised according to issues raised most frequently, and other issues raised by multiple interviewees.

General points

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

6.3 **Many settings did not report concerns regarding RSE from their parents and carers, sometimes despite having anticipated that there might be issues.** The importance of transparent and open communication, and the sharing of information and specific-RSE resources were highlighted by those interviewed. Furthermore, some schools found integrating RSE into other areas of the curriculum was beneficial to alleviating the concerns of parents.

'We held a workshop for parents which was well received. The RSE resources were shown to parents, and we haven't had any issues other than initial comments. RSE just pulls together strands which were already being taught before the changes.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

'We haven't had any issues in particular with developing this from parents. We have integrated with other elements – like Health and Wellbeing survey. RSE seems to have been accepted by the parents.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

6.4 **Many settings reported using externally sourced materials to inform and guide RSE design, planning and delivery.** Most commonly this meant procuring resources from third party providers, such as Jigsaw and Ten Ten (used by some faith-based schools). Secondary schools and PRUs did not appear to buy-in materials, this was more widely reported by primaries and just one special school. Other external resources were acquired from the local authority or cluster network. Although several senior leaders reported that the RSE changes were in fact closely aligned to the provision already in place, many seemed to seek out support and reassurance for their approaches via procuring and utilising these third-party resources. This enabled them to use frameworks that were externally validated, giving confidence to teachers over the content and potential need to address parental concerns.

‘School has funding across the cluster and have bought in Jigsaw. It has given staff reassurance in delivering RSE, allays concerns staff have about coverage and parents raising questions.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

6.5 **Some settings had experienced negative responses from parents regarding the RSE aspect of the curriculum.** Several senior leaders explained there was a lot of misinformation circulating among parents, often fuelled by the media, and that this had on occasion led to complaints and challenges. In a minority of cases some senior leaders reported a ‘backlash’ from parents over perceived changes to the content of RSE and what was to be delivered, affecting teacher confidence and requiring focused efforts by the school to address concerns. These senior leaders emphasised the importance of early communication with parents to dispel misinformation.

‘There are challenges to RSE, misunderstanding from the community. Parents have expressed concern about themes that are not actually on the agenda. Gossip has caused an issue. We had phone calls and parents want to come in and have chats about it. We have overcome this, invited parents in to discuss ‘celebrating learning’ and this has helped to stop the gossip.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school.

6.6 **Senior leaders reported that practitioners in their settings had adapted externally sourced materials to ensure developmental-appropriateness:** there was a sense that some resources were not pitched at the right level for learners and needed to be modified by staff to ensure suitability. Others mentioned dipping in

and out of resources as and when required, to help build teacher confidence in this area of the curriculum.

‘We have purchased Jigsaw which gave some guidance on parameters of RSE, which was lacking from Welsh Government. Jigsaw has also helped the teachers to feel confident delivering RSE, the school has changed the age levels it is pitched at.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 6.7 Others expressed the need for more centralised support for RSE curriculum design and **concerns were raised about the ability of settings to deliver this aspect of the curriculum without financial outlay.**

‘It would be good to get more professional learning and support, we wouldn’t have been able to deliver this aspect of the curriculum without buying in a package.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 6.8 **Several senior leaders reported they had allocated responsibility for RSE to a specific staff member, such as appointing a Head of Wellbeing.** This approach was more common in primary schools than secondaries. These designated staff members were sometimes a newly appointed role, or an existing staff member tasked with leading on RSE, often in line with more general health and wellbeing considerations. Senior leaders reported tasking the dedicated RSE leads with a number of responsibilities including the design of RSE curriculum content, external RSE networking in the Cluster or with other schools, and organising / overseeing staff training. Appointing specific staff members appeared to be an approach designed to both build confidence within schools over implementing this area of the curriculum, as well as providing a central point of contact within the school for teachers to utilise.

- 6.9 Senior leaders reported that **RSE leads worked with other Area leads to incorporate RSE-related topics across the curriculum.** This allowed these settings to integrate RSE into existing topics and also reflected the notion, which several senior leaders reported, that many elements of RSE were already being covered in existing provision, prior to CfW changes.

‘Our RSE lead is also the Health and Wellbeing lead. They mapped RSE into the HWB curriculum so staff can see where the mandatory elements are.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

‘Our expert in the school identified opportunities for subject areas to implement RSE. We’re in a good place with this - did an audit and findings show that we

already cover a lot of RSE areas.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

Other issues raised by senior leaders

- 6.10 **Concern over low teacher confidence in delivering RSE content to learners was reported by some settings.** Senior leaders reported teachers being uncomfortable and concerned about inadvertently causing problems due to delivering an area of the curriculum they are unfamiliar with. This was often against the backdrop of negative media coverage and fears of parental challenges. Some senior leaders reported the loss of external providers who would previously deliver aspects of RSE, such as nurses and charities, and highlighted that this had now fallen to internal members of staff who were not specialists.

‘Teachers don’t want to do anything that might cause issues - so we follow a scheme [resources] that has been agreed. Trainers would come in a few years ago to show different resources but hasn’t happened since Covid.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 6.11 As highlighted in the quote above, schools referred to the usefulness of external resources in providing a framework to follow and a sense of reassurance that their RSE content had been externally tested or validated, which in turn bolstered teacher confidence.

- 6.12 **A minority of senior leaders reported investing in staff training to improve staff knowledge and confidence when designing and delivering RSE.** This was mentioned across all school settings, but not PRUs or special schools. Training was delivered by the RSE appointed lead or local authority in relation using the procured resources, or in order to build staff confidence in delivering material to their learners.

‘We have been using the Jigsaw programme across all years. It is a package of resources, and have done in-house training for staff who were not confident to teach it.’ Senior leader, Welsh-medium all-through school

- 6.13 **Open and transparent communication with parents about RSE was reported as being important by a number of settings, particularly primaries.** This was in relation to communicating the RSE contents and requirements of the new curriculum, as well as alleviating concerns and providing reassurance to parents

over the changes. Settings communicated in a variety of ways including placing information on the school website, providing workshops to parents, holding online meetings, and answering individual enquires from parents and carers.

- 6.14 Senior leaders reported being aware of the need to be transparent in showing parents what would be taught to learners, often making RSE lesson plans available via online workshops or specific information being sent out from school to parents and carers. **Several schools indicated that open communication early on was key to dispelling misinformation and reassuring parents.**

‘When RSE was picked up by the press we ran a lot of parent information evenings and started to put our RSE lesson plans up on the website. We worked transparently and have communicated clearly with parents to dispel misunderstandings about this area of the curriculum.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 6.15 **Some senior leaders suggested that more could be done to counter misunderstandings amongst parent groups**, and that such an approach at both regional and national levels by the Welsh Government and stakeholders would be welcomed.

‘We have shared our approach with learners and parents but some of the documentation in the public domain is damaging and not enough support is being given from Welsh Government to counter-this.’ Senior leader, English-medium all-through school

- 6.16 Some senior leaders reported that a minority of parents had concerns about the use of the word ‘Sexuality’ in the title of RSE. This was experienced by a small minority of settings and schools, with one instance of a secondary school’s Pride day being boycotted by some parents.

- 6.17 A few senior leaders felt that one mandated resource / scheme across Wales would be useful for consistency, to provide reassurance to practitioners and to alleviate parental questions.

Variations in views according to type and language of setting

- 6.18 Senior leaders in special schools mentioned the **challenge of delivering RSE to their learners who have lower developmental learning ages** than their physical age.

- 6.19 Senior leaders in **PRUs particularly welcomed the emphasis on RSE in the new curriculum**, reporting it allowed them to openly discuss issues which are relevant to their learners' backgrounds and life experiences.
- 6.20 A potential disparity was noted in the **lack of availability of externally procured RSE resources in the Welsh language**, compared to those available in English.

7. International languages

7.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to how curriculum design has shaped and impacted the promotion and teaching of international languages. Interviewees were asked about:

- how teaching international languages has been implemented in schools
- the steps schools are taking to integrate international languages as a part of the curriculum.

7.2 This section follows a different structure to others in this report because the findings showed a clear delineation of views between respondents in primary and secondary schools. The following sub-sections summarise comments on implementing international languages as part of the new curriculum arrangements from senior leaders, firstly in primary schools then in secondary schools and other settings. As in previous sections, findings are organised according to issues raised most frequently, and other issues raised by multiple interviewees.

Primary schools

Points raised most frequently by primary school senior leaders

7.3 **Senior leaders reported that they were in the early stages of implementing the teaching of international languages in their schools.** Many senior leaders described ongoing work in planning or implementing activities relating to international languages but emphasised that they were at the early stages of putting these into practice. Approaches mentioned by senior leaders included working with external partners, working within clusters, using current staff expertise and upskilling staff.

‘It’s too early to assess the impact. It will take two or three years before we can observe changes.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school.

7.4 **Senior leaders noted that their work in developing international languages within their curriculum was dependent upon collaboration.** Examples of different types of collaborative activity were mentioned by senior leaders, including partnership between primary and secondary schools and working with external partners to deliver the curriculum. Senior leaders in primary schools were

considering the need to prepare pupils for some of the international language(s) that they would be studying at their local secondary school.¹⁴ Examples of collaboration between primary and secondary schools were mentioned by senior leaders, including primaries drawing on secondary practitioners' expertise to provide guidance and support (e.g. developing resources) for their staff, and in some instances secondary staff directly teaching of pupils at primary schools. Where support from the local secondary school was not available to them, senior leaders explained that the international language prioritised in primary schools was dependent upon the capacity and expertise available within their school. A few senior leaders reported that they were reliant on the international language skills of one key practitioner in their setting.

- 7.5 **A number of settings, both Welsh and English-medium, referred to the importance of balancing the development of Welsh language skills with the introduction of international languages.** Senior leaders highlighted a need to focus on ensuring Welsh-English bilingual skills, referring to a need to address a perceived deficit in Welsh language skills because of the pandemic. This was not only reported by senior leaders in Welsh-medium primaries but also by a number of senior leaders in the English-medium sector.

'I want children to be speaking Welsh first before I want them to be picking up other languages, and if we can tie the whole thing in together that's great. But it's a tough one, especially to do it properly.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

Other issues raised by primary school senior leaders

- 7.6 **A number of schools were implementing or considering the implementation of BSL as their chosen international language.** Senior leaders expressed a desire to introduce the teaching of BSL and a number had considered this as an option. However, it was also noted that there was not enough capacity to integrate this as a part of the curriculum currently.

'Our school decided to focus on French in key stage 2 [terminology formerly used to describe Years 3-6] after initially considering BSL as, unfortunately, there was

¹⁴ The CfW guidance includes considerations for settings in designing their curriculum in this Area. See [Languages, Literacy and Communication: Designing your curriculum - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

not enough capacity and time to upskill staff in BSL.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 7.7 **A few senior leaders in primary schools reported that an international language was already embedded in their setting, but that this had been driven by activity supported through the Welsh Government’s Global Futures plan, rather than CfW.¹⁵**

Secondary schools

Points raised most frequently by secondary school senior leaders

- 7.8 **Senior leaders in secondary schools reported a continuation in their international languages provision developed as part of their curriculum delivery.** A few reported that they had increased the number of international languages offered in Year 7. A few senior leaders reported that there was now an increase in joint planning activity between international languages practitioners and English and Welsh teachers in their school.

‘We have good links between Welsh and French and the focus is on students being multilingual. We have strong leadership and staffing in this area so it is a big driver in the school’. Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

Other issues raised by secondary school senior leaders

- 7.9 **Senior leaders in secondary schools noted they were working closely with their feeder primary schools to develop international languages provision in their cluster.** Examples of cluster working included using secondary teachers’ expertise or sixth-form students visiting primary schools to support provision. In the Welsh-medium secondary sector one senior leader reported that their school was pooling staff resources within the cluster to provide languages across a number of schools.

¹⁵ Under the previous curriculum arrangements, a non-statutory framework for modern foreign languages at key stage 2 was in place. See [Modern foreign languages in the National Curriculum for Wales \(Welsh Assembly Government, 2008\)](#)

‘Support for provision is important but collaborative teaching and learning and joint planning is more important.’ Senior leader, Welsh-medium secondary school¹⁶

- 7.10 **Senior leaders referred to the need to meet their pupils’ needs in schools where high numbers of learners speak languages other than English or Welsh.** A number of schools raised the point that many languages are spoken in their schools and that in many cases, pupils are already bilingual. Some schools reported that they offered the opportunity to progress and gain qualifications in pupils’ home language.¹⁷

‘We need to prioritise meeting the needs of our learners, we are concerned that the curriculum changes may mean we have to change what we’ve always done and what works – i.e. the qualifications our students take for their home language seems like an add on, but culturally this is crucial to our pupils.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school.

Special schools

- 7.11 **Senior leaders in special schools were more likely than other settings to note that they were in the early stages of implementation.** Senior leaders tended to express a desire to incorporate BSL in their curricula.

PRUs

- 7.12 **Senior leaders in PRUs reported that international languages were not currently being prioritised as much as other CfW elements in their settings.** Senior leaders reported that their focus was on skills development, employability and health and wellbeing.

¹⁶ Original quote in Welsh: ‘Mae cefnogi darpariaeth yn bwysig ond mae dysgu ac addysgu ar y cyd a chyd gynllunio yn fwy pwysig.’

¹⁷ The CfW framework requires learners to show progression in Welsh, English and at least one other language from primary school. This could include learners’ home or community language if the setting delivers provision to help them progress in this language.

8. Progression

8.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to **how settings are working internally, and with other schools, to develop a shared understanding of learner progression**. Interviewees were asked about:

- whether they had worked with schools within and outside their cluster
- how their school was sharing information about learners' progress with parents, and what the response has been from parents
- how manageable is it for schools to report to parents each term on learners' progress and how much of a burden does this create
- how are settings ensuring that the curriculum challenges all learners appropriately and sets high expectations for learner attainment.

8.2 The following sections summarise comments on progression as part of the new curriculum arrangements from senior leaders in primary schools, secondary schools and other settings. As in previous sections, findings are organised according to issues raised most frequently, and other issues raised by multiple interviewees.

General points

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders in relation to progression

8.3 **Senior leaders reported having developed progression plans (often called 'progression maps') across Areas, with comments indicating that the principles of progression are incorporated into curriculum design.** Senior leaders noted that progression plans are designed to support learners to increase breadth and depth of knowledge, to consolidate and deepen understanding and to make connections and apply their learning and skills in different contexts. Senior leaders emphasised the importance of skills development, 'so that learners' work is more challenging as the year progresses across the different subjects' (Senior leader, English-medium secondary school). Schools also referred to progression being 'embedded' as part of curriculum delivery.

'Progression is baked into our curriculum design – successful delivery of the curriculum will ensure progression over time' – Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 8.4 In mapping progression across Areas, senior leaders in primary and secondary schools reported drawing on the statements of what matters and the descriptions of learning. Senior leaders noted that progression maps have been developed by Area (or more commonly by subject in secondary schools) which outline the skills learners are expected to be able to demonstrate by the end of a particular school year, progression step or even a specific topic of work. These are frequently based on or developed with reference to the statements of what matters.
- 8.5 While much of this activity is ongoing, as schools continue to develop, test, review and refine models, they do emphasise the need to be systematic and rigorous in their approaches, ensuring that standards in skills and knowledge are captured. Senior leaders frequently reported that Area and subject leads are setting learning outcome targets and are reviewing and reporting on these on a termly basis as part of individualised learner progress reports. Teachers review and record whether specific skills and knowledge are developing and embedded.
- ‘We need to know about standards in maths, spelling and the reading ages of children, so we’re exploring progression identifiers in phonics, calculation and spelling. Senior leader, English-medium primary school
- 8.6 **Schools are working internally and in clusters to develop a shared understanding of progression.** There are broadly two aspects to this work, both of which apply in primary and secondary settings: firstly, working towards a whole-school understanding of new ways of conceptualising progression ‘post levels’ that are more focused on understanding learner progression in an individualised and holistic way; secondly, ensuring a common interpretation and application of progression frameworks (or models) developed by schools to document learner progression. Many of these models involve scales to record learner progress across Areas (e.g. where teachers are required to note whether learners’ skills and knowledge are ‘embedded’, ‘secure’, or ‘developing’ in a particular Area) and school recognise the importance of a shared interpretation of terminology when reporting on learner progress.
- 8.7 Primary senior leaders reported arranging discussions between teachers about what learner progress should look like from nursery through to Year 6. These discussions informed the development of progression plans. Primary school senior

leaders and Area leads have also met as primary clusters and with secondary school partners to reach agreement on the progress and skills learners could be expected to demonstrate by the end of Year 6 in order to support transition and coherence in progression across clusters.

8.8 **There is an emphasis on cluster working more widely to support progression.**

Notable examples of collaborative working across clusters were:

- Primary schools working in clusters to examine aspects of the CfW guidance to support progression plans.

‘As AoLE leads across the cluster we are trying to break down the statements of what matters and descriptions of learning. What are the non-negotiables that we have to focus on and demonstrate progression against?’ Senior leader, primary school

‘Through the cluster, the school has developed AoLE Progression Maps for Reception to Year 6 in each. This sets out a pathway for learners and common vocabulary across the cluster. There is potential to base planning documents around this new approach.’ Senior leader, English-medium all through school

- Collaboration between primary and secondary schools to ensure continuity in curriculum planning to support learner progression.

‘We have spent several days working with primary schools to ensure commonality. We have looked at primary schools plans, thinking about how we as a secondary can follow this through. Key to this will be looking at how learners are developing in line with the principles of progression and evaluating this continually.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- Developing shared **progress models / progress trackers** used across clusters (primary and secondary) to ensure commonality in how progress is recorded.
- A number of clusters have established ‘**cluster moderation groups**’ to review learners work (from across different schools) and reach agreement on what different progression stages look like. In some examples, these are organised by Areas and in others, by year group.
- **Peer-mentoring activity** with secondary school practitioners and leaders providing support on progression (and other aspects of curriculum implementation) to year 6 teachers, who, in turn, mentor teacher of younger year groups. Senior leaders emphasised the importance of having protected

time on a regular basis to work in clusters, specifically in relation to progression.

'We set time aside each half term where as a cluster we discuss what progression looks like across the schools. We don't seek to dictate what should be included in the curriculum but we are working towards cohesiveness so that by the time children reach Year 7 there is broad commonality in their experiences and the level they have reached.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

8.9 Some primary school leaders identified challenges in working with their cluster partners: most commonly these challenges related to schools 'pulling in different directions'. Senior leaders in other schools noted that primary/secondary networks and cluster working is stronger in some Areas or subjects than others. This was typically dependent on levels of engagement between department leads in secondary schools and Area leads in primary schools.

8.10 **Primary and secondary school senior leaders recognised the greater emphasis on the progress made by the individual learner as part of their thinking and planning in relation to progression.** Schools referred frequently to developing a more 'holistic' understanding of each learner's progress, taking into account the individual's context, their strengths and motivations. Senior leaders noted that their schools have moved away from using 'banks of stock statements' to report on learner progress to more qualitative progress reports. In some schools these are supported by learner progress meetings, which enable practitioners to discuss each child's progress in a more individualised way. This, in turn, is used to inform differentiated teaching and learning to support individual learners.

"Learners' development is now measured against themselves, rather than the 'high-stakes' assessment and levels used before. This is better and more focused on individual progression, rather than assigning a level in relation to an expected level." Senior leader, English-medium primary school

8.11 **Schools presented a number of examples of progression models and approaches they have developed and/or are trialling.** Examples set out by senior leaders included:

- Narrative and qualitative accounts of individual progression:

'Our approach to tracking progression is on an individual level: every term senior staff meet with every class teacher and go through each child, setting out

strengths, weaknesses, progress against specific targets set. It is quite bespoke and ensure every child's needs are identified – it is time consuming (half a day per class per term) but will be more relevant for that learner.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- Devising frameworks and progress 'scales' to record learner progress:
 - progress in skills or in relation to statements of what matters is 'above-expected, as expected, lower than expected' (examples in primary and secondary schools);
 - skills and knowledge are 'advancing, securing, developing' (examples of similar models and terminology in primary and secondary schools);
 - learners can demonstrate their learning in 'nearly all, most, around half, less than half' of the knowledge and skills taught this term (approach to broadly quantifying how much learning is evidence were more common in secondary schools).

'We record if progression is as expected, above expected, lower than expected and colour code these for each child. This is mapped to learner targets for the short, medium and longer term.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

8.12 A number of senior leaders noted that although they have developed matrices to record progression (which using scales or codes), they also encourage practitioners to use these tools intuitively and apply their own professional judgement when thinking about progression and how this relates to their own practice.

'We have colour-coded targets so that there is a long-term vision and aspiration for each learner. However, we allow time for teachers to pause, reflect and take time to consolidate learning with individual pupils. This approach to progression has allowed teachers to appreciate how curriculum and progression go hand in hand.' Senior leader, English-medium all-through school

8.13 Other schools referred to approaches and models that record learners' attitude to learning alongside progress in knowledge and skills.

8.14 **Senior leaders recognised that the new approaches to learner progression being adopted require a change in practitioner mindset, which is likely to take some time to embed.** Primary school senior leaders noted that there are challenges in moving on from a 'culture of accountability' and that this has resulted in practitioners feeling unsettled, particularly those who lack understanding of the principles of progression. One senior leader noted:

'Levels and ticking boxes has gone, which is welcomed. But there are experienced teachers who are finding it hard to get their heads around the principles of progression.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 8.15 Another primary head teacher noted that in moving to a new progression model, there were teachers who still wanted to assign an equivalent Level to learners, so that two different progression 'models' were being delivered or referenced by practitioners simultaneously. Some of this, it was suggested, stems from uncertainty about accountability arrangements.

'Are Estyn really going to be inspecting schools based on learner progression? Many expect there to be a disconnect between what Welsh Government want schools to do and what Estyn expects.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 8.16 Comments in relation to new ways of conceptualising learner progression were more likely to be raised by secondary school senior leaders than their primary school counterparts. Senior leaders described changing mindsets as an ongoing challenge, particularly in certain Areas, including Science and Technology and Mathematics. Levels (and examination specifications) were described as having been a driver of behaviour and teaching practice for many years. Although senior leaders reported broad support for the reforms, it is likely to take time for teachers to re-think and 'feel comfortable' working under the new arrangements.

'We have talked (as a team of staff) about not teaching students to pass exams – instead the focus is on teaching them subject knowledge and the key discipline skills. This is hard as teachers are drilled into teaching to exam specs. The changes to exams being withheld has been useful as it has given space for us to think about how to make the shift to a new way of working'. Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 8.17 A further change identified by secondary school senior leaders was the shift towards a more collaborative approach to thinking about and recording learner progress. This was viewed as a positive development and reflected a general shift towards closer joint-working in relation to curriculum planning and delivery.

'One of the biggest changes is that teachers are now discussing learning progress far more frequently, where it used to be a pretty solitary task. In Areas such as expressive arts, LLC, humanities, heads of department and teachers are getting together and discussing each individual child. This is enabling them to come to a consensus on learner progress – this helps embed a shared understanding of concepts and the language used in relation to progression.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

8.18 Senior leaders described changes in how their setting was reporting information on learner progression to parents and carers. These changes were in relation to how they report to parents (i.e. the format used), as well as what they report on. Senior leaders mentioned retaining a mixture of written reports (often at the end of a term, typically once or twice a year) and face-to-face or online individual meetings with parents (often twice a year). On occasion, some had increased the number of written reports and decreased the number of face-to-face / online sessions, or vice versa. Senior leaders reported there was a welcome shift towards more personalised contact with parents and carers regarding each learner, and that their reporting was able to reflect this.

‘The school has been taking a more varied approach to discuss pupil progress – [moving] away from 10-minute progress discussion.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

8.19 Senior leaders in some settings expressed a reluctance in their settings to move away from traditional styles of reporting on levels and grades, sometimes in the absence of a confirmed new approach to assessment within the school. In settings where parents and carers were very ‘level-aware’, this raised challenges about shifting mindsets regarding progression amongst parents/carers and teachers. Senior leaders reported that their settings were using language and terms they felt would be familiar to parents, as well as incorporating new terms related to other measures (such as attitude, effort and overall progression). This approach to merging terminology was also seen in settings where there was traditionally less-awareness too.

‘Parents didn’t understand levels anyway, so we still follow our grading system which reflects the GSCE grades [A, B, C etc], and now we’re consistent across the whole school in how we report to parents. We frame it as “Your child is showing indications of progression along a C-.” It is simplistic but the parents and the children both understand it.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

‘We did end of year reports last year – covering ‘expected’, ‘under expected’, ‘above expected’. We also include details on attitude and progress and what measures learners need to do at home to support themselves. Senior leader, English-medium primary school

8.20 Several settings had started to introduce ‘learning days’ as a new means of reporting, whereby parents and carers are invited to school to view their child’s work and discuss their learning. This approach was much more prevalent in

primaries than secondaries and was considered to present further opportunities for these schools to update parents/carers on changes to the curriculum more generally, alongside discussing individual learner progress.

‘We have added a Learning Day – parents visit school and share the learning with their child, look at books and displays – this is the children sharing their progress, learner involvement.’ Senior leader, primary school

8.21 As highlighted in the quote above, these events and learning days saw children actively involved in the reporting process, with a focus on the learners showing their workbooks to parents/carers. Some senior leaders felt this approach moved the discussion beyond parents/carers and teachers only and enabled the children to take an active role in their own learning and develop understanding of their own progression.

8.22 **Schools expressed concerns or noted challenges in relation to several aspects linked to progression.** Primary school senior leaders noted:

- The risk that the variation in approaches to progression were contributing to a ‘fragmented’ system where schools can be ‘pulling in different directions’. While it acknowledged, as noted in previous sections, that schools were working in clusters in many cases to try and ensure a level of consistency the time and energy required for this collaborative work can detract from other activity, suggested some senior leaders.
- That the time and effort expended by staff in reviewing and change approaches to progression have increased the pressure on staff.

‘Staff are working at home to do this [work on progression]. We want to pilot changes to the school day to build in development time for staff.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- That there was a lack of clarity in how progression steps were being used to inform curriculum planning.

‘Progression steps are very wide. Need for something more specific and consistent across schools. Need an explanation of how to use the progression steps.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- That some of the support and guidance materials provided by regional education consortia (RECs) were ‘abstract’ and did not help develop schools’ plans in relation to progression.

8.23 Secondary school senior leaders expressed some concern about how to ensure approaches to progression (and assessment) would meet statutory requirements and expectations in relation to accountability. There was also a feeling that progression steps were misunderstood (with some expressing concern that middle leaders and practitioners see progression steps as a 'framework for assessment'). Others were concerned that progression steps were 'too broad'.

Other issues raised by senior leaders

8.24 **Additional support and challenge.** Senior leaders noted that RECs provide a range of support to schools (e.g. regular network meetings for assessment and progression leads; materials to help schools develop approaches to map progression and attainment; access to expert speakers/advisers to support curriculum planning). Senior leaders reported that schools value the support provided through clusters and networks. Some felt that, while curriculum plans are further developed and implemented, there is a need for greater external constructive challenge.

'Aspects of our approach to progression and assessment will be refined by cluster work. But I still feel there is a need for someone to come and agree or disagree – probably Estyn.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

8.25 **Schools referred to the tools they are using to track progress.** Many primary schools use or have used external tools with Taith 360 the most commonly used among the sample of senior leaders interviewed. There is, however, evidence that schools are moving away from this and some other packages as they develop their own bespoke approaches. These more bespoke approaches to recording learner progress typically involve learning journals or learning portfolios that compile information on the skills and learning developed across Areas.

8.26 Linked to the above point, senior leaders in primary schools commented that the emphasis on **these more bespoke approaches to recording progress were helping learners to gain a better understanding of their own progression.**

Variations in views according to type and language of setting

- 8.27 Special school senior leaders questioned whether enough consideration had been given to issuing guidance on the early stages of progression and how settings are expected to document learner progress 'pre-progression step 1'.
- 8.28 **Senior leaders in special schools reported contrasting views in relation to the support available to them through networks.** Special schools in more urban areas reported that they benefitted from monthly meetings of a 'verification network' which over the past year has developed and shared ideas on progression and provided a moderation function as schools have produced tools and started to embed new terminology. However, a senior leader from a special school in a more rural area reported feeling isolated and that there were not enough opportunities to discuss and compare plans in relation to learner progression.
- 8.29 **Senior leaders in special schools noted that they had adapted their systems of documenting learner progress and reporting to parents.** They noted that they had moved away from collecting large volumes of paper-based evidence or examples of learners' worksheets to illustrate progress. Senior leaders noted that they had discussed the issue of progression with the special schools' network and that others were taking similar approaches.

'We're trialling a new approach to reporting to parents. In addition to parents' evenings, we produce termly learning progression reports. I've given guidance to staff to concentrate in these reports on what the child can do, what they've achieved, as a narrative, or in photos. If it's taking their coat off and hanging it on a peg, write that down, if it's taking part in a yoga class, include some photos. We also record what's changed in their standards of literacy and numeracy. The key is that it's a pupil friendly and parent friendly report.' Senior leader, special school

- 8.30 **Senior leaders in pupil referral units raised a number of points specific to their settings in relation to progression.** Key issues raised included:
- PRUs work with many mainstream schools, therefore the learners who transfer to and from the setting will have been supported through a range of progression models and approaches. This, it was suggested, complicates the process of understanding an individual learner's journey and providing

appropriate and necessary support, often when there the learner has multiple and complex support needs.

- One senior leader working in a secondary PRU reported that they would continue to use Levels (for older year 8 and 9 learners) alongside new approaches to tracking progression noting that they were 'working in a two-tier system as we transition to a new arrangement' (PRU senior leader).
- Senior leaders in PRUs noted that they have always planned teaching and learning in a differentiated way, reflecting the individual's situation and needs. This, it was said, is always more intensive and time consuming for teachers. PRUs noted that they have always fed back to learners' main school on a regular basis (usually weekly), discussing their situation and progression. The new arrangements present additional challenges on PRU teachers: in addition to working internally to establish a shared understanding of progression within the setting, they will need to understand other schools' approaches and models so that they can gauge learners' needs and how to plan learning provision.

9. Assessment

9.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to how settings are working internally, and with other schools, to design approaches to assessment under the new curriculum arrangements. Interviewees were asked about:

- what had changed in terms of their approach to assessment
- were arrangements working effectively/as anticipated to date
- whether they had faced any challenges
- was there any specific additional support they required with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. professional learning, guidance, resources or support to enhance leadership or professional practice).

9.2 The following sections summarise comments on assessment from senior leaders in primary schools, secondary schools and other settings. As in previous sections, findings are organised according to issues raised most frequently, and other issues raised by multiple interviewees.

General points

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders in relation to assessment

9.3 **Senior leaders reported progress in developing new approaches to assessment, with an increased focus on formative, day-by-day assessment.** In both primary and secondary settings senior leaders reported a deliberate shift towards embracing assessment for learning and embedding it among all staff. Many senior leaders noted that schools have for some time been aware of the value of assessment for learning, but that the curriculum reforms had been a catalyst for schools to implement changes in assessment arrangements. Teachers carry out ongoing assessment of units of work to understand if learners are secure in their knowledge or skills, which informs planning and delivery on a continuous basis.

‘Assessment is a day-by-day process – teachers look at the work completed by children and think ‘Have the learning intentions been achieved? What do I need to do next? It is a day-by-day monitoring of teaching impact on the children. The daily assessment will lead to progress. It is what you do at the end of the day to make sure what happens tomorrow makes a difference.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 9.4 Senior leaders reported that developing skills and confidence in formative assessment and day-by-day assessment methods has been developed through a blend of approaches: internal professional learning sessions; Area/departmental planning to evaluate and review assessment practices; REC-led training; and external consultants' support. Senior leaders in secondary schools highlighted the crucial role played by departmental or Area leads in ensuring that teachers assess learning constantly. Secondary school senior leaders were more likely than their primary school counterparts to indicate that additional professional learning support was needed to fully embed assessment for learning.
- 9.5 **Senior leaders reported using formative assessment to inform planning and differentiated approaches to teaching that respond to the needs of individual learners.** Formative assessment informs planning in a way described by schools as a circular process of curriculum delivery, assessment, reflection and planning. Senior leaders in all settings described how teachers use day-to-day assessment to identify learners who are less 'secure' or less 'developed' in particular skills and knowledge and differentiate their teaching to support these learners.
- 9.6 **Senior leaders commented on the change in mindset and attitude required to realise the ambition for a new approach to assessment.** One senior leader in a secondary school underlined the need for teachers to develop '*an understanding that assessment is an evaluation of progress at a moment in time... the discussion about progression that stems from regular assessment is more important*'. Indeed secondary school leaders were more likely than their primary school counterparts to comment on the challenges faced by practitioners in transitioning to new ways of thinking about assessment.

'How do we move from a system which is overly focused on summative assessment as the only way of checking if you had an impact? There needs to be an unshackling of the curriculum as a model of progression and assessment. We have relied upon assessment data and so to move away from this system which has worked so well for so long is really hard. Progression needs to be about systematically building [learners'] knowledge to get to the big ideas in the statements of what matters, assessing progress continually.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

9.7 Schools provided examples of the features given greater prominence under new assessment arrangements. These included:

- An increased emphasis on observation as part of assessment;
- Peer assessment and self-assessment methods;
- Greater collaboration and in-school moderation, helping to familiarise teachers with new language of progression and assessment;
- Assessment that is based on whether learners are achieving or progressing in line with their ability (typically supported by baseline data from national assessments or external standardised assessment tools);
- Reviewing/assessing against specific learning targets for learners, in some cases targets that pupils set for themselves on a termly or half-termly basis; interestingly, senior leaders reported a change in the way learners were talking about their own progress: ‘the children are using formative language to help understand where they are and what they need to do moving forwards’ Primary school senior leader.
- Comparative assessment methods, focusing on oracy and other aspects of the LLC Area.

9.8 **Many senior leaders report a reduction in the overall volume of formal assessment during the school year; however schools continue to use national personalised assessment to gauge learners’ progress in reading and numeracy.** In some cases, senior leaders emphasised their continued importance in benchmarking learner attainment.

‘[Personalised assessments] are the bread and butter of our understanding of where each child is.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

9.9 In other cases, senior leaders noted that the results of these assessments are used by schools to map what has or hasn’t been covered sufficiently in their curriculum delivery, rather than as a means of understanding standards or learners’ levels. This reflects a shift expressed by a number of schools (both primary and secondary) from using assessment data for accountability to using this data to support and improve curriculum planning.

9.10 **Schools are using external tools to support their assessment.** Schools cited various commercial packages being used, however some had stopped using them, noting that they were not always aligned with the progression plans and assessment arrangements schools had developed and begun to implement. A small number of primary and secondary schools referred to CAT4 tests (GL Assessments): these were sometimes used by schools as part of a blended approach to assessment that draws on test results alongside, formative assessment and teacher professional judgement or observation.^{18 19}

9.11 **In addition to reporting on the progress being made, schools also voiced a range of concerns in relation to assessment arrangements.** These are summarised below.

- Senior leaders in a number of schools feel that there is still **some way to go before they have clear and well-developed assessment arrangements in place**; this was accompanied by a sense that there are **gaps in assessment data and knowledge about learner progress outside literacy and numeracy**;
- **Differences and inconsistencies in approach** taken by schools within the same cluster, with collaborative working on assessment being less well developed than other aspects of curriculum reform; this is partly linked to challenges in finding time to release staff to convene with colleagues from cluster schools.
- Schools remain concerned about **accountability, especially the assessment data or evidence that they will be required to demonstrate.** A number of head teachers noted that the question they get asked most frequently by the school governing body is how they are able to evidence what is being reported by staff and senior leaders about standards. Schools are concerned that similar questions and issues will arise during future inspections.

¹⁸ See [CAT4 - GL Assessment \(gl-assessment.co.uk\)](http://gl-assessment.co.uk)

¹⁹ Other assessment tools and packages named by senior leaders were Pupil Progress, Go 4 Schools, Incerts, Taith 360, Salford Reading Test, Voice 21 Oracy assessment, BSquared.

- In common with points raised in earlier sections of this report, senior leaders interviewed at times demonstrated a wish for reassurance that the approaches being taken in schools are appropriate.

‘There are feelings of insecurity and we find that we’re second-guessing ourselves about whether we should be reporting or at least keeping track of levels.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

Other issues raised by senior leaders

- 9.12 **Senior leaders in some secondary schools indicated that the changes to assessment are more straightforward for newly qualified teachers who know little difference, whereas more established teachers are likely to find it more unusual to move away from a system where end of year / end of phase testing is a more established part of the system.**
- 9.13 Schools are conscious of the need to **challenge and stretch the highest ability learners** whilst also providing the appropriate support to all learners. Senior leaders in schools identified the need to further develop the skills of higher ability learners to be able to work independently.
- 9.14 Senior leaders noted that there is an emphasis on **improving the quality of regular feedback provided to learners**, helping to develop metacognition and an awareness among learners of their strengths and areas requiring development. There was acknowledgement that this can help support learner autonomy.

Variations in views according to type of setting

- 9.15 **Secondary school senior leaders were more likely to raise questions, or voice concerns, about alignment between new approaches to assessment and revised GCSE examinations.** Senior leaders frequently noted that they were still waiting for a clearer picture to emerge in order to understand how to continue to develop their curriculum and assessment plans into years 8 and 9 to ensure continuity.
- 9.16 **Primary schools senior leaders were more likely than those in secondary schools to raise concerns about increasing divergence in approaches to assessment.** Primary school senior leaders noted that within the same cluster there

are schools that use different external assessment tools. Senior leaders also commented on the variation in terms of how well-developed different schools' approaches were to assessment – including within the same cluster. It was suggested that this has impacted on the ability of some schools to collaborate.

'[There's] a danger that every school will be doing something different and there should be more consistency. The cluster work has been difficult, some schools have done a lot [on assessment] and some have done nothing.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 9.17 **Senior leaders in pupil referral units highlighted that approaches to progression and assessment in their setting need to reflect the particular contexts and challenges faced by their learners.** Academic progress is often far less predictable and can be erratic. Settings place an emphasis on measuring and supporting individuals' engagement in learning, which was described as an important indicator.

'We have always had to look for other ways to measure progress: are they engaging in lessons, what is their behaviour like - the emphasis is on engagement.' PRU senior leader

- 9.18 PRU senior leaders emphasised the importance of understanding learners' wellbeing and their needs 'in terms of social development' in order to enable them to progress in their learning. This relates to the skills integral to the four purposes, particularly 'personal effectiveness' and 'planning and organising'. One senior leader noted that supporting small steps towards improved emotional regulation can be key to learners' prospects and outcomes, pointing out that evidencing progress can be challenging.

'It's hard to track and demonstrate evidence of progress while also balancing the need to support wellbeing. Work is in progress to [develop] a robust system of tracking and evidencing. We're hoping to get the children involved so they can address the barriers they face. Key workers work to make sure children are engaged with the curriculum, their own progress.' Senior leader, PRU

- 9.19 **Senior leaders in special schools noted that there hadn't been significant changes to assessment under the new curriculum arrangements insofar as there had never been an emphasis on tests or end of year exams.**

'We use [learners'] books, what they can do verbally and practically. It's a holistic set of assessments that teachers include in their planning.' Special school senior leader

Senior leaders in special schools noted that they use BSquared as a tracking system, which enables teachers to set individual outcomes based on a learner's abilities and personal targets.²⁰

²⁰ See [B Squared Assessment Software](#)

10. Equity

10.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to interviewees' experiences of how the new curriculum arrangements are supporting **equity and inclusivity**. Interviewees were asked about a number of issues relating to this. These included questions on:

- How curriculum implementation to date is helping to raise expectations for all learners and address gaps in attainment;
- The steps schools are taking to ensure that they are inclusive places for learning.

10.2 The following sections summarise comments on equity and inclusivity from senior leaders in primary schools, secondary schools and other settings. As in previous sections, findings are organised according to issues raised most frequently, and other issues raised by multiple interviewees.

General points

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

10.3 **Senior leaders emphasised that equity had always been an important focus in their settings, but they were now more learner-centred in their approach to curriculum design, with the flexibility to tailor support accordingly.** As the CfW positions the focus on the learner, senior leaders felt this was helping schools to be more flexible in how they design and deliver their curriculum.

'[We] always treated every child the same but the Curriculum for Wales has allowed us more flexibility in how and what we deliver.' Senior leader, English-medium primary School

'[The school has] always focused on equity, this is not new for us. The guidance is comprehensive and very focused, we put emphasis on equity in assemblies and teaching. The right to respect the learners and associated behaviours runs right through the school's ethos.' Senior leader, English-medium primary School

'Everyone is treated with high importance.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

10.4 **An increased focus on learner voice was reported to be contributing to curriculum development that is learner-centred and inclusive.** Engaging with learners and involving them in conversations around curriculum design was

reported to be helping to ensure that the learners' voices are heard and in helping settings to understand learner well-being. Senior leaders commented on well-established learner voice processes in schools but noted these were now more central to planning and design processes.

'It's not all change for me, it's about a curriculum that's fit for purpose and enjoyed by all children.' Senior leader, English-medium secondary school

- 10.5 **Senior leaders referred to more individualised approaches to monitoring learner progress, commenting that there is an emphasis on each learner making appropriate progress for their own individual learning and development** (See Section 8). A range of assessment methods that support this approach were mentioned (See Section 9), yet senior leaders also emphasised that profiling each learner involves much resourcing, with senior leaders reporting this as a priority to achieve equity. Senior leaders reported that learner feedback was now more tailored to individuals, and this was helping support each learner's progress appropriately and more inclusively. One school leader described a shift from focusing on learners who were 'on the C/D border' (for GCSE) to a more individualised approach focusing on everyone's individual progress. One senior leader commented on a positive outcome of adapting the curriculum meant that children who were previously working at a slower pace alongside the main class are now more integrated and 'feel part of the class'.

'We've always been an inclusive school anyway, but the curriculum has taken down the barriers that might have existed before.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

'We focus on every child making the right progress, whatever that means for them.' Senior leader, English-medium middle school

- 10.6 **Senior leaders referred to the importance of always being inclusive and meeting the requirements set out in the ALN code, commenting that the CfW is allowing them to promote and focus on inclusivity.** Senior leaders referred to ongoing work in their setting to implement the new ALN code, noting that approaches are changing for staff supporting learners; for example, shifting from short sessions with individual children to 'strategic oversight that ensures the class is inclusive' and there is positive progress in this area. Support from network groups

and allocating responsibility to staff for this area is contributing to embedding this more strongly in schools (e.g. appointing heads of wellbeing).

‘Curriculum for Wales has allowed us to promote and focus on inclusivity for ALN and vulnerable learners more than the previous curriculum has done, at a time when this is vital. This is an advantage of the Curriculum for Wales.’ Senior leader, primary School

‘This is in tandem with the ALN transformation. The ALNCo [Additional Learning Needs Coordinator] has been preparing us for this, [learners] were often previously withdrawn [from class], now we’re trying to do more to address their needs in class, with classroom support.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 10.7 **Changing their curriculum content to be more diverse and a better reflection of society was considered by senior leaders to be a positive change taking place in their setting.** Senior leaders commented on the importance of a coherent curriculum, particularly as learners from disadvantaged backgrounds will not have opportunities to ‘fill the gaps’ at home. The importance of curriculum content being able to respond to current events and embrace all learners’ cultures was emphasised by senior leaders, with this content appropriate and relevant to learners from every background. Aspects such as racism, equality, tolerance and respect were reported by senior leaders to be interwoven across Areas as opposed to being solely delivered within health and well-being activities. Senior leaders also highlighted the importance of high-quality teaching in ensuring equity and mentioned examples of tiered interventions for learners as well as their approaches to creating links between subjects.

‘[The school is] looking at quality teaching as a key to addressing equity.’ Senior leader, secondary School

‘Curriculum for Wales has helped with equity. It led to a focus on pedagogy and the quality of teaching and learning as well as the richness of learners’ experiences. All these have improved, largely driven by Curriculum for Wales reforms.’ Senior leader, English-medium secondary School

- 10.8 **Senior leaders mentioned a range of resources and training opportunities for staff that they access to support equity in their setting.** Resources to develop more diverse curriculum content were reported to be useful, along with programmes that focused on tracking and raising the attainment of learners. Senior leaders reported that using resources to upskill staff with approaches to teach and address issues relating to equity had been successful in their setting. Such external support

was reported to have improved practitioners' awareness of the most appropriate language to use when discussing particular topics such as sexuality and ethnicity. External initiatives to support learners eligible for free school meals were also being accessed by schools. Some settings reported they were funding family engagement staff roles too as part of efforts to improve equity.

'We provide universal, targeted and individual support to our parents, and we ensure that activities do not cost our parents money and they get a lot of external support with this.' Senior leader, English-medium primary School

Other issues raised by senior leaders

- 10.9 **Concerns were raised in a small number of settings regarding their ability to provide evidence relating to the raising of standards.** Although the flexibility of the CfW was viewed positively; this flexibility was also a cause of uncertainty in terms of monitoring and accountability processes. A few senior leaders were concerned about how to ensure that the needs of more able and talented learners were addressed. Senior leaders also commented on uncertainty about what Estyn's views would be on the choices their settings were making and the different approaches being adopted in schools.

'Raising expectations is a worry due to the flexibility of everything. It is hard to raise standards while changing things.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 10.10 **Senior leaders were concerned about gaps in attainment which were felt to have been exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic.** Senior leaders felt attainment gaps had been affected by the 'lockdown' periods and, in some instances, practitioners felt they were dealing with a 'two-tier' system; learners who have the required understanding and those who have gaps in their learning. Senior leaders felt there is an ongoing risk of learners in more deprived areas falling behind, and perceived that this is less of a risk in more affluent areas.

Variations in views according to type and language of setting

- 10.11 **Senior leaders in primary schools were more likely than those in secondary schools to emphasise the learner-centred approaches they were taking in implementing the curriculum.** Primary senior leaders emphasised that their

understanding of the issues that need addressing are informed by knowing the children and their home lives well. Primary senior leaders highlighted examples of individualised approaches to progression, describing how learners were deciding on the level of challenge for their learning (See Section 8).

- 10.12 **Senior leaders in secondary schools were more likely than those in primary schools to emphasise the changes they had introduced to ensure curriculum content is more diverse and reflects society.** Secondary senior leaders were more likely to refer to their large, diverse cohorts of learners and communities.
- 10.13 **Senior leaders in special schools were more likely than others to emphasise that the curriculum in their setting had always been geared towards the needs of all learners.** Equity and inclusivity were reported to have always been at the core for special schools and, as a consequence, it was reported that the CfW was less of a change for them; the pupil voice is important, with regards to designing the curriculum and understanding pupils' well-being.

'The beauty of this curriculum is we don't have to bolt it on [...] we design it to suit the needs of pupils from the outset.' Senior leader, special school

- 10.14 **Senior leaders in PRUs were more likely to highlight challenges relating to the availability of resources and facilities which would enable them to deliver the best for the most vulnerable learners.** While senior leaders in PRUs were seeking to place a greater emphasis on individual learner needs, they felt there was a widening gap in provision due to a lack of resources and infrastructure (e.g. Science labs, gymnasiums) compared with mainstream schools. Due to the vulnerable nature of learners in PRUs, senior leaders felt it was difficult for them to prepare for the curriculum, noting that they cannot predict the specific mental health disorders of learners who will join the school in the future. Yet they were mindful that the goal is for learners to return to mainstream schooling.

'Our children are the most vulnerable in the borough and they arguably deserve the best facilities but we are incredibly limited due to resourcing issues.' Senior leader, PRU

11. Parent and carer engagement

- 11.1 This section outlines the findings of the research in relation to interviewees' experiences of **engaging with parents and carers to raise awareness of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements**. Interviewees were asked about:
- how schools are communicating information about the curriculum to parents and carers
 - whether parent/carers engagement activity has added to the demands on staff capacity in the school
 - whether parents and carers being encouraged to contribute to curriculum design
 - whether additional support is needed for schools to engage parents and their local community in curriculum design.
- 11.2 The following sections summarise comments on parent and carer engagement from senior leaders in primary schools, secondary schools and other settings. As in previous sections, findings are organised according to issues raised most frequently, and other issues raised by multiple interviewees.

General points

Points raised most frequently by senior leaders

- 11.3 **Senior leaders expressed caution in their approaches to communicating CfW changes to parents/carers, and highlighted a range of methods used to 'drip-feed' updates and changes**, possibly to avoid 'overload'. Several senior leaders outlined various means of communication their setting had employed, including newsletters, apps (such as Dojo/Seesaw which parents could log in to), as well as distributing information sheets and keeping their websites updated with links to Welsh Government documents and videos.
- 11.4 Some schools reported that curriculum summaries were shared with parents. These documents, which are a legal requirement for all schools and settings, vary in terms of the level of detail they include. They typically set out information on the school/setting's curriculum vision and information on core elements of the

Curriculum for Wales framework (including the four purposes), how the curriculum has been designed and how it is organised. Curriculum summaries usually also provide an overview of approaches to learner progression.

‘Parents are aware but without being aware they’re aware! We share lots through twitter – they’re getting information on a daily basis. They’re getting a flavour of what teaching and learning looks like in school. We’ve ramped up the links to the Four Purposes.’ Senior leader, English-medium primary school

11.5 **Some senior leaders mentioned that CfW-specific events for parents and carers, such as workshops about the changes, were poorly attended,** and that they had tried other means to communicate and consult with parents with varied results (for example via online questionnaires). In some settings, senior leaders explained there was a long history of parental engagement in school activities and interviewees reported that parents were informed and aware of changes to the curriculum. However, several senior leaders reported long-term challenges in engaging with parents and carers which made communicating the curriculum changes particularly challenging. Senior leaders felt this was due to low levels of understanding amongst parents/carers group and apathy, despite settings’ efforts to increase engagement. However, senior leaders also reported high levels of trust in their settings and practitioners among their parents/carers, with this being an explanation for low levels of engagement; senior leaders highlighted that if the children are happy and attending, then parents and carers are in turn supportive, albeit less engaged.

11.6 **Senior leaders reported that they found there was better engagement with parents and carers when hosting events which embedded CfW information, such as via presentations, celebration events and assemblies that the children also participated in.** These events were used to communicate information about the curriculum content and changes in a less overt and more indirect manner. This approach was reported more widely by primary schools than secondaries.

‘We have done class services where parents come in and partake in a lesson, they then also stay for lunch. This allows the parents to learn about the curriculum.’ Senior leader, primary school

'Meet the Teacher meetings give information about content being taught and school ran a 'Heritage' topic whereby children interviewed their parents at school, with tea and coffee.' Senior leader, English-medium primary school

- 11.7 **Senior leaders reported attempts to involve parents and carers in curriculum design**, utilising a variety of methods to encourage engagement. This included surveys, discussion workshops, and information days. Response rates were varied, with some schools receiving little feedback and others reporting good levels of engagement, particularly when using questionnaires. Some settings appeared to consult on detailed elements of the curriculum, either in terms of specific content which could be developed, or they focused on more strategic aspects such as developing shared understanding of progression and expectations of parental support at home.

'Parents and learner feedback suggested basic life skills are not taught at home (like cookery skills, how to use a washing machine) – so these were integrated into the curriculum.' Senior leader, primary school

- 11.8 **There were reports of settings adopting a cautious approach in their consultation with parents and carers.** This reflected concerns in some settings around involving parents too early in the design process when schools themselves were unsure of their own approaches to curriculum design and implementation. There appeared to be a desire to limit parental and carer involvement until teachers and schools/settings had spent more time cohering and designing internally first, with an emphasis on the lengthy process involved in developing and debating approaches.

'It feels risky over involving parents in the design as curriculum is a big thing to get their head around it. Teachers have decades of experiences and they find it tricky. We're being cautious.' Senior leader, secondary school

'We waited until we felt confident about our assessment system and the measures we'd put in place before consulting. We didn't want them to be part of the discussion and debate and the messiness. It took three years for this to be clear.' Senior leader, all-through school

Other issues raised by senior leaders

- 11.9 Several senior leaders reported positive feedback from parents and carers about the CfW changes, and that focus on wellbeing and experiential learning was generally welcomed.

- 11.10 There was limited reporting of the impact of Covid on parent/carer engagement. Some senior leaders highlighted that they'd had lower levels of engagement with parents post-Covid and had therefore already changed their approach prior to the CfW changes.

Variations in views according to type and language of setting

- 11.11 As noted above, **senior leaders in primary schools were more likely than those in secondaries to have invited parents and carers to events which embedded CfW information (e.g. learning days, celebration events/assemblies).**

12. Conclusions and issues for consideration

- 12.1 The conclusions and issues for further consideration set out below have been developed based on the findings set out in Sections 4-11.

Overall progress

- 12.2 **The overall picture across the sample of 64 schools and settings that contributed to this research is that of steady progress and commitment to the success of Curriculum for Wales reforms.** It is worth noting that September 2022 was not a precise starting point for most settings interviewed; rather it was a continuation, or the official implementation, of curriculum plans that had begun to take shape and had been trialled during previous academic years.
- 12.3 Indeed, just as this first year of formal implementation is not the beginning of the reform journey, settings recognise that it is also nowhere near being the culmination of the process: **there was a unanimous view that it would take several years for new arrangements to become fully embedded**, requiring ongoing review, evaluation and revision and improvements.
- 12.4 Research with practitioners last year into preparations for the reforms had found that practitioners tended to express lower confidence in their understanding of Curriculum for Wales and were more likely to be concerned about aspects of the reforms. During this wave of research senior leaders reported that practitioners were taking ownership of curriculum planning and delivery, noting that **many were embracing, and enthused by, the autonomy that the new arrangements give teachers to design and deliver the curriculum.**
- 12.5 It is important to note the variations that were observed – both variations in overall progress across the sample of settings and also a sense that better progress was being made in certain aspects of the curriculum than in others. Senior leaders who reported that their settings had been planning and developing their curriculum for 3-4 years appeared to be more confident in their approaches than those who reported being at earlier stages of implementation. Although settings felt that they were strengthening approaches to teaching and learning in line with the pedagogical

principles, there remained greater uncertainty about approaches to progression and assessment.

- 12.6 **The attitude and outlook of senior leaders appeared to influence their confidence in their school's approach to curriculum implementation.** Some senior leaders appeared to have embraced the process of designing their new curriculum while others expressed more caution and were more uncertain in their approach, particularly when referring to potential future arrangements relating to school accountability and qualifications.
- 12.7 Some senior leaders felt that support and guidance was not always able to keep up with the pace of change in implementation, with some referring to support being 'a couple of steps behind'. **Collaboration and cluster activity appears to have played an important role in helping to develop joint approaches, and allay some of the uncertainty felt by leaders and practitioners**, providing reassurance through discussion of approaches being developed. Senior leaders highlighted the value of networks and cluster activity between Area leads in supporting curriculum planning.

Issue for consideration:

The Welsh Government should continue to encourage collaboration between settings, focusing on supporting joint-working among Area leads as part of curriculum planning, and evaluation. This should include collaboration between primary and secondary schools.

- 12.8 Senior leaders reported that **developing and implementing their setting's curriculum had created challenges in terms of staff capacity and time**, particularly in planning the curriculum and ensuring it covered the required elements set out in the Curriculum for Wales framework.

Planning and implementing across and within Areas

- 12.9 Senior leaders reported that practitioners in their settings were drawing on aspects of the CfW framework to plan and map their school curricula. **Settings use the**

statements of what matters and descriptions of learning as a basis to design Area plans (or more frequently 'subject plans' in secondary schools), reviewing provision to ensure adequate 'coverage' and identify gaps which inform ongoing planning. There were noticeable differences between primary and secondary schools within the sample. Primary schools were more likely to be adopting a more integrated thematic or topic-based approach. Secondary schools tended to report that they had continued to organise their curriculum according to established subject disciplines in all or most Areas. Where this was the case, senior leaders in secondary schools reported increased collaboration and planning between subject specialists working within the same Area, including discussions about how various statements of what matters applied or could be supported across subjects.

- 12.10 There were variations in terms of which Areas senior leaders considered were progressing well in their curriculum design and implementation. Senior leaders generally reported that Health and Wellbeing and Languages, Literacy and Communication were more developed Areas in terms of joint planning and integrated working. There was mixed feedback on the success of efforts to promote joint planning in the Humanities and Expressive Arts Areas. Science and Technology appeared to be the Area senior leaders felt was most challenging in terms of encouraging joint planning.

Implementing RSE

- 12.11 **Many settings reported that delivery of RSE had progressed well and report they had not encountered concerns from their parents and carers**, despite sometimes having anticipated that issues may be raised. Some senior leaders had experienced negative responses from parents and carers in relation to RSE, but many had been able to address concerns by communicating information on the topics to be covered in school.
- 12.12 Many senior leaders, particularly in primary schools, reported that their **settings were using externally sourced (usually purchased) materials to inform and guide RSE design**, planning and delivery. In some cases, senior leaders reported their settings had adapted some of these materials to ensure that they were developmentally-appropriate.

- 12.13 Some senior leaders **expressed a desire for more centrally available support for RSE curriculum design**, particularly in relation to the development of classroom resources, and concerns were raised about the ability of settings to deliver this aspect of the curriculum without financial outlay.

Issue for consideration:

The Welsh Government should consider whether there is a case for the development of additional resources to support RSE provision, particularly in primary and special schools.

- 12.14 Several senior leaders reported they had allocated responsibility for RSE to a specific staff member, such as appointing a Head of Wellbeing. Senior leaders reported that their RSE leads were seeking to identify opportunities to deliver aspects of RSE within other areas of the curriculum, for example embedding some aspects of relationships within Areas, such as humanities.

Implementing international languages

- 12.15 There were clear differences in the extent to which primary and secondary senior leaders had incorporated international languages into their new curriculum arrangements. **Senior leaders in primary schools typically reported that they were in the early stages of implementing the teaching of international languages in their schools.** There were some exceptions to this, notably among schools that had received support or developed provision linked to the Welsh Government's Global Futures plan. Where new international languages provision was being developed in primary schools, senior leaders in these schools noted that they relied on support from specialist teachers in secondary schools. There were some innovative examples provided, including plans for sixth-form languages students in secondary schools to support provision in primary schools.

Issue for consideration:

The Welsh Government, working with regional partners, should ensure that international languages are promoted and delivered as an integral part of the new curriculum arrangements in all schools.

- 12.16 Senior leaders in secondary schools reported a continuation in their international languages provision in-line with curriculum developments. A few reported an increase in their activity to support their cluster primary schools.
- 12.17 Several senior leaders, in both Welsh and English-medium schools, noted that they were prioritising the development of Welsh language skills over international languages.

Arrangements for monitoring learner progression

- 12.18 Settings reported having **invested considerable time during the past 6-12 months in re-conceptualising progression, working towards a shared understanding of progression (within settings and across clusters) and developing progression plans** or maps for Areas/subjects. There is broad support for the principles of progression and senior leaders reported that middle leaders and practitioners have drawn on the statements of what matters to shape their approach to understanding, and reporting on, progression.
- 12.19 Senior leaders stated that there had been an increase in professional discussion and dialogue about learner progression, which was viewed as valuable. They reported **a greater emphasis on supporting the progress of individual learners**, recognising the background, particular strengths, aspirations, and potential of each of their pupils. Senior leaders underlined that a more nuanced and 'holistic' view of each learner's progress was helping to inform differentiated teaching and learning strategies.
- 12.20 **Much of the collaborative working between primary and secondary schools and other settings this academic year (2022/23) has focused on progression.** This has included developing shared progress models, and discussion around how

to interpret progression steps, something that a number of schools feel uncertain about.

- 12.21 Many senior leaders underlined that they were keen to review the models and approaches they had developed and to gauge the response from parents and carers to the first iteration of termly learner progress reports, many of which were being compiled at the time interviews were conducted (see 12.28 below).

Issue for consideration:

During the second wave of research with senior leaders as part of this study, there should be a focus on understanding the learning points at school level from the trialling of new progression models, including how schools have refined and improved their approaches.

- 12.22 There was also an awareness among senior leaders that, as settings and clusters develop their own distinctive approaches to progression (and assessment) – where new models, matrices and progression terminology are developed – this presents a **challenge in terms of ensuring coherence and consistency**. It was felt that significant time and effort is being invested in developing, discussing and reviewing approaches to progression.

Issue for consideration:

The Welsh Government should continue to monitor the potential implications of divergence in settings' and clusters' approaches to monitoring progression, particularly in considering how to monitor progress at a national level.

Assessment arrangements

- 12.23 Schools and settings have begun to make changes to assessment arrangements in line with the vision set out in Curriculum for Wales guidance. Across all types of setting, there is **an increased focus on assessment as a day-by-day feature of curriculum delivery**. Settings are working towards ensuring that formative

assessment – through a range of methods – informs curriculum planning and delivery continuously. Many senior leaders noted that they are developing practitioners’ skills and behaviours to support formative assessment through professional learning (in-school and external) and by building in time for teachers to trial and collaborate on new assessment strategies. This requires a different outlook and approach to assessment which is less about demonstrating ‘impact’ for accountability purposes and more about supporting progression and improving teaching and learning for individuals and groups.

- 12.24 Senior leaders in all types of settings reported that there is buy-in for this re-thinking of the purposes of assessment. And yet **assessment arrangements remain the element of the Curriculum for Wales reforms where senior leaders feel most questions remain**. Fundamentally the concerns relate to potential gaps in assessment data or evidence (under new arrangements) which schools will ultimately be required to provide. To a lesser degree, settings also reported being worried about inconsistencies in approach taken by schools.
- 12.25 These uncertainties may explain why a number schools within the sample continue to use external assessment tools alongside the new assessment methods being developed.

Issue for consideration:

Senior leaders frequently referred to a desire for reassurance that the approaches they are taking to curriculum planning, progression and, particularly, assessment were appropriate (and ‘on the right track’). While collaborative working between schools goes some way to providing reassurance, Welsh Government should consider whether there is a need for a role that provides external constructive challenge to schools (particularly around progression and assessment) during these early years of implementation.

Supporting equity and inclusivity

- 12.26 **Implementing their new curriculum, alongside other reforms such as the ALN Act, was considered by senior leaders as an opportunity to strengthen and**

reinforce their setting's efforts to ensure equity and inclusivity. Implementing the CfW, particularly the focus on more individualised approaches to monitoring progression, was considered to align well with this aim. Senior leaders felt that an increased emphasis on using learner voice and ensuring the curriculum content is more diverse could help to create a more inclusive curriculum that better reflects their learners needs.

Engaging with parents and carers to raise awareness of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements.

- 12.27 The evidence shows that settings are **considering how best to communicate with parents and carers about curriculum change and are trying a variety of approaches to engage parents.** Senior leaders indicate that eliciting views from parents and carers during the design phase can be challenging, and that embedding information about the curriculum in other activity (e.g. celebration events) can be a more effective way of reaching them.
- 12.28 Settings appear to be taking a cautious approach to changing how they report to parents and carers on learner progress. While some have added new aspects to their reporting methods (e.g. reporting on attitudes to learning), there appears to be a reluctance to move away from traditional styles of reporting on levels and grades. This may reflect some uncertainty among practitioners about their newly established approaches to monitoring learner progress, with practitioners wanting to wait until they themselves were more confident in their approaches.

Other issues raised by senior leaders

- 12.29 As was the case in the [Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms](#) report (Welsh Government, 2022b), senior leaders continued to report **a lack of time to trial new approaches, to digest CfW guidance, and to plan and map their curriculum content within and across Areas.** Related to this, senior leaders reported that a lack of sufficient funding for staff cover to release practitioners to take part in cluster meetings, professional learning and networking presented an ongoing challenge for them.

- 12.30 Senior leaders, particularly those in secondary schools, remained **concerned about how their new curriculum would align with future qualifications and accountability measures**. These uncertainties were described as examples 'external' factors which could significantly affect settings' behaviours and therefore their approach to curriculum design.
- 12.31 Senior leaders felt that their new curriculum was **providing an enriched learning experience for their learners**, with more opportunities to adapt what is taught and make lessons more relatable for learners. As a result, senior leaders felt that learners were beginning to demonstrate a more enthusiastic approach to learning, which they felt was a positive reflection of the curriculum.
- 12.32 Senior leaders expressed concerns about the **impact of increased demands on practitioner capacity on wellbeing in the workforce**, highlighting the volume of information to digest and the scale and ongoing nature of the curriculum design task.

Annex A: Interview discussion guide

OVERALL PROGRESS (5 MINS)

1. How would you summarise your school's progress in implementing the new curriculum [since we last spoke]?

- What has worked well and why? What has supported your school's progress?
- What has worked less well so far? Have you experienced any barriers to progress to date?

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

2. We are keen to hear schools' experiences of curriculum and assessment design in relation to specific elements of the CfW framework.

WORKING ACROSS AoLEs

2a) Firstly, what are your reflections on the process of planning and implementing your curriculum across and within areas of learning and experience?

- Prompts: Are arrangements working effectively/as anticipated to date? Have you faced any challenges?
- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

RSE

2b) How have you begun to implement RSE within your school's new curriculum arrangements?

- Prompts: Are arrangements working effectively/as anticipated to date? Have you faced any challenges?
- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES

2c) How has your curriculum design shaped and/or impacted the promotion and teaching of international languages?

- Prompts: Are arrangements working effectively/as anticipated to date? Have you faced any challenges?
- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

PROGRESSION

3. How is your school working internally, and with other schools, to develop a shared understanding of learner progression?

- Prompts: Have you worked with schools within your cluster?
- Have you worked with schools outside your cluster?
- How is your school sharing information about learners' progress with parents?
 - What has the response been like from parents?
 - There is a requirement for schools to report to parents each term on learners' progress. Is this manageable? How much of a burden does this create?
- How are you ensuring that the curriculum challenges all learners appropriately and sets high expectations for learner attainment?

ASSESSMENT

4. How is your school working internally, and with other schools, to design approaches to assessment?

- Prompts: What has changed in terms of your approach to assessment?
- Are arrangements working effectively/as anticipated to date? Have you faced any challenges?
- Is there any specific additional support you require with regard to this aspect of the curriculum (e.g. PL, guidance, resources)? This could involve support to enhance leadership or professional practice.

EQUITY

5. Curriculum for Wales guidance sets the expectation that the curriculum will support equity and inclusivity for all – this includes learners from all socio-economic backgrounds, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic learners and learners with additional

learning needs. How is your curriculum implementation to date helping to raise expectations for all learners and address gaps in attainment?

- Prompts: What steps are you taking to ensure that the school is an inclusive place to learn?
- What response has there been from learners and from parents to any new approaches taken as part of the new curriculum?

PARENT AND CARER ENGAGEMENT

6. How are schools engaging with parents and carers to raise awareness of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements?

- How have you communicated information about the curriculum to parents and carers?
- To what extent has parent/carers engagement activity added to the workload of staff in the school? How have practitioners responded to these additional activities? What response has there been from parents and carers?
- Are parents and carers being encouraged to contribute to curriculum design?
- Is additional support needed for schools to engage parents and their local community in curriculum design?

ANY OTHER COMMENTS

7. Are there any other comments you wish to share on the implementation of the new curriculum in your school or on the reforms more broadly?