



Summary Findings 2021-2022



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Curriculum reform

Overall, providers recognise the importance of effectively implementing the Curriculum for Wales and welcome the freedoms it offers.

What's going well

- Providers are working to maintain their momentum in adapting teaching and learning to align with the Curriculum for Wales.
- A majority of providers recognise the importance of adapting and improving their teaching.
- In non-maintained settings and primary schools, where teachers place an emphasis on engaging pupils in planning their learning, this often results in more engaging learning experiences and better progress for pupils.
- In the secondary sector, where teachers have carefully considered the benefits and pitfalls of the approach, cross-departmental working is resulting in more cohesive and engaging learning experiences for pupils.
- Practitioners across all sectors have welcomed the freedom to experiment, adapt and develop their practice.
- In the most effective providers, they have engaged with a range of stakeholders to create a clear vision for their curriculum.
- A very few primary schools used curriculum guidance confidently to develop a picture of what progress looks like through their own individual curricula.

What needs to improve

- Overall, the progress providers are making towards implementation of the Curriculum for Wales is too variable.
- Schools need to prioritise improving the quality of teaching and learning alongside their curriculum design.
- Cross-phase working to ensure continuity and progression for learners through the curriculum is too infrequent and not sufficiently effective.
- Too often the support provided by local authorities and regional consortia is not bespoke to the needs of providers and they do not evaluate the impact of their work effectively enough.
- Many leaders remain concerned about assessment and progression in the Curriculum for Wales and what progress through the curriculum should look like.



Additional learning needs reform

Overall, providers have maintained steady progress towards implementing additional learning needs reform and have welcomed many aspects to the changes in approach.

What's going well

- Generally, members of staff that lead on ALN have a good understanding of the requirements of the reform.
- Support for ALN from local authorities and regional consortia in terms of professional learning, and the establishment of new statutory roles, has been useful and well received by providers.
- Nearly all providers have begun to identify learners in need of specialised additional support and mapped out universal provision for others.
- Nearly all providers have begun to implement key elements of ALN reform, such as person-centred practices, individual development plans and one page profiles.

What needs to improve

- The understanding of individual members of staff about their responsibility in supporting pupils with ALN is variable.
- The availability of Welsh-medium resources to support pupils with ALN is limited.
- There is uncertainty regarding the future impartiality of advice and guidance for learners in special schools when considering their post-16 options.



Tackling the impact of poverty and disadvantage

In 2021-22, external research and our inspection and engagement work showed that children and young people from deprived backgrounds were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. In many cases, these learners fell behind more than their more privileged counterparts and their attendance, which was already poorer, became worse. Research also shows that child poverty in Wales is worse than in all the other UK nations, with an average of 34% of children in Wales living in poverty ([Child Poverty Statistics - End Child Poverty](#)).

Providers that are particularly effective at tackling the impact of poverty and disadvantage on their learners focus strongly on high standards and equity, as well as on mitigating the material impact of poverty.

Features of the work of these providers

- Leaders demonstrate a wholehearted commitment to inclusion and high standards, and convey a clear vision that is shared by all involved with the provider and permeates all aspects of its work.
- There is a relentless focus on high quality teaching and learning for all.
- There is a strong moral commitment and culture of high aspirations for all learners, not only broadening horizons through experiences such as trips, talks about universities, competitions and so on but through everyday experiences, such as the level of challenge in lessons, expectations of behaviour and engagement, and the quality of language expected in day-to-day interactions.
- The providers offer comprehensive well-being provision that is tailored to the needs of individual learners and helps to remove barriers to learning.
- There is effective multi-agency working between the provider and a range of external services within the local authority, charities and beyond. This means that all agencies have a shared understanding and collective responsibility to meet the needs of individuals, families and the community, and are pulling in the same direction to offer co-ordinated support.
- The curriculum is flexible and genuinely meets the needs of all learners, while also making all learners feel part of the provider's community.
- The provider is part of the local community and the local community is integral to the provider. The providers knows, understands and supports individual learners, their families and the community very well.
- Providers look outwards, to other providers and to research to find solutions and improve their provision, but always ensure that whatever they adopt is suitable for their context, staff, learners and families.
- The development of early language skills to prepare young children living in poverty to make a successful transition to school is a key element of provision in non-maintained settings. Where this is most successful, settings work effectively with a range of partners including health, local authority officers and primary schools to identify children's needs, plan interventions and ensure consistent approaches to children's language development.
- All learners are supported to develop the basic skills that they need, with a particular focus on literacy skills (especially reading and speaking), and basic numeracy skills.
- Providers enable all learners to see a relevant and feasible future pathway for themselves throughout their educational journey.
- Leaders consistently evaluate the impact of their work on the lives and life chances of the children and young people in their care. All partners are involved in regular opportunities to evaluate the approaches to supporting learners and their families.



Recovery from COVID-19

Across all sectors, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be felt throughout the academic year 2021-22. As the year progressed and providers returned to a more 'normal' way of operating, the full impact of the previous year and a half on learners, staff and the general work of providers became more apparent.

Positive aspects

- Most learners have welcomed the return to face-to-face provision and generally engage better than they did online, though many providers are retaining elements of remote learning.
- Many of the 'issues' affected by the pandemic, such as the decline in learners' skills, have gradually improved since the return to more 'normal' education.
- Providers across sectors have placed a strong emphasis on supporting well-being, which has resulted in increased and more wide-ranging provision.
- Leaders across all sectors have demonstrated agility and creative thinking in responding to the pandemic and have worked purposefully to re-establish experiences affected by restrictions, such as extra-curricular activities.
- Due to improved and more extensive communication over the pandemic, providers in general have a better understanding of the families and communities they serve.
- Many providers gradually returned to self-evaluation and quality assurance activities as the year progressed, resulting in a better understanding of the impact of their work.

Issues and concerns

- Cases of COVID-19 among learners and staff caused continued disruption to teaching and learning throughout the year.
- Overall, learners' skills have been negatively impacted by the pandemic. This is especially the case for numeracy and literacy skills, particularly oracy skills. The social and personal skills of a minority of learners have also been affected, especially the youngest children and those who have struggled to settle back in to more 'normal' educational routines.
- Learners' use of spoken Welsh generally declined as a result of the pandemic.
- Restrictions have had a negative impact on learning involving practical elements, including work placements, practical assessments for vocational qualifications and subjects such as music, design and technology and physical education.
- Overall, the progress providers are making towards implementation of the Curriculum for Wales is too variable.
- Across all sectors, there has been a notable increase in demand for well-being and mental health support.
- Attendance, in schools in particular, continues to be below pre-pandemic levels and persistent absence issues have increased.
- There have been significant challenges related to staffing, particularly in terms of managing COVID-related absences, sourcing supply staff and recruiting new staff.
- A few providers across all sectors have been slow to resume self-evaluation activities, resulting in an incomplete understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement.



Providers that have made rapid improvement and no longer require monitoring

When inspectors identify serious shortcomings in the quality and consistency of teaching, and the effectiveness of leadership overall at the time of the core inspection, providers are placed in follow-up. For schools and PRUs, there are two statutory categories of follow-up (requiring special measures or in need of significant improvement). Other sectors have different arrangements, but all have levels of follow-up. Inspectors then monitor the improvements that the providers make over time. We continue to monitor a provider until the improvements are robust enough to have an impact on outcomes for learners, and leaders demonstrate an improved capacity to bring about further improvements. Twenty-seven providers met these criteria and were removed from follow-up in 2021-22.

Valuable lessons can be learned from providers that have been removed from follow-up. These include lessons about how to make rapid progress and what does and doesn't work in terms of supporting improvement.

As a result of improved leadership and provision, **learner outcomes** are beginning to improve. Early signs include improvements in learners' attitudes, attendance and progress in lessons and over time.

What improvements do we identify?

- Attendance improves and exclusions decline.
- Behaviour, engagement and learners' attitudes to learning improve.
- As classroom provision improves, so learners learn more and achieve better.



In these providers, the **quality of provision** has improved. All staff understand what is expected of them. Teachers plan interesting lessons that support nearly all learners to make the progress they should.

What improvements do we identify?

- Improving providers have a shared understanding of what good practice looks like.
- Often staff work together to devise non-negotiables that everyone subscribes to.
- Leaders provide support, mentoring and professional learning that practitioners find helpful.
- Leaders focus their monitoring to identify accurately what has improved (and its impact on learner outcomes) and what still requires attention.
- The curriculum is designed carefully to meet the needs of individual learners and the local community.

What still needs to improve?

In a few instances, staff:

- do not have high enough expectations of what their learners could achieve
- do not assess learners' learning accurately enough to pinpoint and plan for their next steps
- struggle to accept that their own professional practice does not enable all learners to make the progress they should



Leadership has been strengthened in nearly all of these providers. Leaders work cohesively as a team and understand their roles. Leaders at all levels are increasingly accountable for the quality of the provision and for pupil outcomes.

What improvements do we identify?

- Leaders forge a sense of teamwork among their staff.
- Leaders are selective in deciding what to prioritise, and recognise that embedding improvements takes time and that any new strategies must be tailored to the needs of the provider.
- Leaders show resilience and tenacity, and have high expectations. They do not accept excuses or provision that isn't good enough.
- Monitoring is sharper, improvement planning is agile and responsive and leaders hold all staff (including themselves) to account.
- [Leadership is devolved and senior leaders share responsibilities appropriately across the senior leadership team and beyond in order to build capacity.](#)
- Leaders have stronger working relationship with their local authority.
- Effective support and challenge is provided by any overseeing boards such as the governing body, the EIB or the PRU management committee.
- Leaders seek and act on the views of all stakeholders.

What still needs to improve?

Leaders often need support to:

- use a breadth of evidence sharply enough to identify for themselves the right improvement priorities
- develop the role of middle leaders

On occasions, the support and challenge offered by the regions, local authorities and governing bodies to support improvement in schools and PRUs are not robust enough.

Sector based summary findings



Non-maintained settings

Nearly all settings place a strong emphasis on **care, support and guidance** and as a result most children have a high level of **well-being**.

What's going well

- Practitioners know the children well and respond to their individual needs.
- Children settle in well and enjoy attending the setting.
- Settings promote children's independence successfully, for example by encouraging them to choose their own resources and activities or dress themselves to go outside.

What needs to improve

- On occasion, settings do not follow all procedures for keeping children safe well enough. For example, they may not follow safe recruitment procedures, or routinely record accidents.
- Specialist support, such as support for children with additional learning needs, is not always available through the medium of Welsh.



Generally, practitioners **teach** effectively by providing children with valuable opportunities to **learn** and develop as they play. As a result, most children make good progress in developing their skills.

What's going well

- Overall, children make good progress during their time at settings. Practitioners focus well on developing children's speech and language skills, particularly where their development has been affected by the pandemic.
- Practitioners provide children with opportunities to play freely for extended periods while supporting them to develop new skills.
- Practitioners are developing an increased understanding of the principles of the Curriculum for Wales. For example, they provide children with beneficial opportunities to choose what they would like to learn about and what they would like to do during sessions.

What needs to improve

- On occasion, practitioners do not provide enough opportunities for children to develop skills purposefully during sessions. This is often because they do not act as effective 'enabling adults', as described in the new Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings.
- [Although settings are developing the use of observations of children in sessions as opposed to more formal assessments of children's learning, sometimes these observations do not inform future planning sufficiently.](#)



Despite the considerable challenges posed by the pandemic, on the whole **leaders** continue to run their settings effectively, adapting to the circumstances and beginning to consider curricular development.

What's going well

- In effective settings, leaders have a clear vision and foster a teamworking ethos that encourages all staff to work towards a common aim.
- Leaders ensure that children have easy access to a wide range of resources, including natural resources and equipment that helps children to develop skills.
- Leaders provide valuable professional learning opportunities for practitioners, particularly in relation to curricular reform.

What needs to improve

- In a few cases, leaders have not yet re-established rigorous quality assurance procedures that were disrupted because of the pandemic. This includes staff observations and appraisals.
- Occasionally, leaders are misinterpreting pedagogical development such as responsive planning and, as a result, staff don't develop suitable strategies to support children in developing new skills.



Primary schools

Schools have worked effectively to make sure that **care, support and guidance** are good and to address any issues with pupils' **well-being** that have arisen from the pandemic.

What's going well

- Schools have introduced useful strategies to support pupils' physical and emotional well-being and to address issues arising from the pandemic.
- Frequently, pupils have a good understanding of their rights as a child, the rights of others and important issues around fairness and equality.
- Increasingly, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, such as an ability to persevere, collaborate and find alternative solutions to problems.
- Most schools are preparing well for additional learning needs (ALN) reform.

What needs to improve

- On occasion, pupils' opportunities to influence what and how they learn are limited ([Click here to see resources that School Councils and pupil groups can use to consider how they can work with staff to improve this](#)).
- [In some schools, as they prepare for the Curriculum for Wales, too often teachers make superficial reference to the four purposes rather than thinking carefully enough about how planned learning activities can allow pupils to develop and demonstrate these values in their work and social interactions.](#)



Schools are working to re-establish effective **teaching** to support pupils' **learning** and address any gaps that occurred due to pandemic experiences.

What's going well

- Staff are working well with parents, pupils and the community to establish a shared vision for the curriculum.
- Schools are focusing on improving pedagogy and, where this is most effective, the quality of teaching and learning is an ongoing and honest conversation amongst staff and leaders.
- Where schools have evaluated the effectiveness of teaching, pupils are receiving more engaging learning experiences.
- Overall, pupils' digital skills are strong in many schools.

What needs to improve

- Following the pandemic, in some schools, pupils of all abilities often make basic mistakes with grammar, spelling and punctuation and struggle to write at length.
- A few schools have prioritised designing the curriculum without enough emphasis on improving the quality of teaching.



Leaders have continued to be resilient and creative as they adapt provision to respond to the pandemic and prepare for curriculum reform.

What's going well

- Leaders have sought to strengthen partnerships with other schools, parents and outside agencies.
- As a result of the challenges of the last two years and the response by leaders and staff, there is a stronger team ethos in many schools.
- Leaders have adapted their approach to professional learning and schools now increasingly engage well with research to support improvements in teaching and learning.
- Many schools continue their important focus on improving teaching as a key driver to improve pupils' standards and their curriculum delivery.

What needs to improve

- In a few schools, leaders haven't yet re-established their self-evaluation arrangements. This means that some important areas of their work, such as effective foundation phase learning, are not as successful as they could be.
- A few schools are only just beginning to think about their vision for teaching and their curriculum in preparation for the Curriculum for Wales.



Secondary schools

Schools have prioritised the **care, support and guidance** they offer to address any issues with pupils' **well-being** that have arisen from lockdowns.

What's going well

- Most schools offer strong support for pupils with specific emotional, health and social needs and make good use of external agencies.
- Many pupils are developing well as ethical, caring citizens who respect difference and diversity ([Click here to see resources that School Councils and pupil groups can use to consider if they learn enough about Welsh history, including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history, identity and culture](#)).
- Many schools have an effective behaviour policy and well-considered procedures for dealing with incidents of bullying and harassment.
- Many schools are developing their provision for preventing and tackling incidents of sexual harassment.
- Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is a strength in a majority of schools.

What needs to improve

- In a few cases, schools don't have sufficiently robust and secure systems for recording safeguarding concerns, including around bullying and harassment.
- Despite the best efforts of many staff, there are instances of pupils experiencing bullying or harassment as a result of their sexuality, racial characteristics or gender in all schools.
- A degree of sexual harassment is experienced by some pupils in all schools.
- Unverified data suggests that attendance is far below where it was before the pandemic, especially that of pupils who experience socio-economic disadvantage.
- A few pupils have struggled to readjust to life following the pandemic and have been unable to manage their behaviour well enough.



Schools are working to re-establish effective **teaching** to support pupils' **learning** and address any gaps that occurred due to pandemic experiences.

What's going well

- In most schools, teachers foster positive working relationships with pupils and manage their classrooms effectively.
- In the best examples, teachers know their pupils well and plan carefully to meet their needs. Teachers model approaches successfully and use information from assessment skilfully to adapt their teaching.
- In a few schools, curriculum design is research-based, relevant to the context of the school and linked to the development of teaching. Areas of learning are creating a curriculum to ensure progression from the primary to the secondary phase.

What needs to improve

- In general, pupils' oracy, writing and numeracy skills have regressed during periods of lockdown.
- During the lockdown periods, pupils did not have enough opportunities to develop their Welsh language skills. This has had a significant impact on pupils' fluency and inclination to speak Welsh in all types of schools.
- [Overall, schools' new approaches to their curriculum have not placed enough emphasis on improving the quality of teaching or on ensuring progression from the primary phase.](#)



Leaders have reacted with fortitude and resilience to keep their school communities safe and mitigate the impact of measures to control the spread of COVID-19.

What's going well

- Since returning to more usual school life and processes, senior leaders are carefully considering the balance between holding staff to account and protecting their well-being.
- In many cases, senior leaders are responding well to national and local priorities such as the additional learning needs reforms and the development of their curriculum.
- In many schools, professional learning is well planned and has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

What needs to improve

- As a result of a suspension in schools' normal self-evaluation processes, leaders do not always have a comprehensive understanding of their school's strengths and areas for improvement.
- [A common shortcoming among leaders at all levels is their lack of understanding of how to evaluate teaching in light of its impact on learning.](#)
- Leaders do not always prioritise the need to ensure pupils' progress in Welsh and ICT.
- In a few cases, professional learning does not focus strongly enough on improving teaching.



Maintained all-age schools

Pastoral care and support for **pupil well-being** are a strength in most all-age schools. These have been a priority since schools re-opened following the pandemic. Pupils' well-being is generally strong, but has been affected negatively by the pandemic.

What's going well

- In general, pupils are happy to be at school and show positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils show care for others in the school and are mindful of how the pandemic has affected its community.
- In many schools, provision and interventions are often effective in bringing about improvements in pupils' well-being.

What needs to improve

- Overall, pupils require more emotional and mental health support than before the pandemic.
- A few pupils' engagement with their learning and their behaviour have been adversely affected by the pandemic.
- A minority of pupils lack self-confidence and struggle to work independently.



The quality of **teaching** varies in all-age schools. Most pupils' **learning** was affected in some way by the pandemic, but they are now making suitable progress towards recovery.

What's going well

- Many teachers work together well to plan and implement a curriculum that considers progression across all phases.
- A majority of pupils are willing to contribute orally and offer extended responses when prompted.
- A few pupils display strong writing skills while writing effectively for different purposes and for different audiences.

What needs to improve

- In a few schools, there has not been enough emphasis on improving the quality of teaching when designing the curriculum.
- A few schools have not shared good practice in teaching effectively within and across schools to enhance experiences for pupils.
- External professional learning is often not specific enough to the all-age sector.
- A minority of pupils lack basic literacy skills, make frequent spelling and grammar errors and are not able to articulate their opinions fluently.



Leaders have been resilient and agile in responding to and recovering from the pandemic. The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement across the sector is variable.

What's going well

- Work to support staff and pupils to recover from the pandemic is going well.
- There is an increased focus on staff well-being.
- Team working and collaboration between staff are a particular strength, especially since the pandemic.
- Engagement and communication with parents are strong in all-age schools.
- Professional learning arrangements are particularly useful when they include the sharing of good practice in teaching internally or between schools.
- Collaborative work and mutual support between schools in the sector are a notable feature.

What needs to improve

- Often, leaders do not combine information from a range of sources to evaluate the impact of their work over time.
- [Leaders' detailed understanding of the standards of pupils' skills and the quality of teaching is too variable.](#)



Maintained special schools

Special schools have generally worked effectively to ensure good levels of **care, support and guidance** to address any issues with pupils' **well-being** that have arisen from the pandemic.

What's going well

- Pupil well-being continues to be at the heart of schools' work.
- Schools have sensitively re-introduced routines, structures and relationships that impact positively on pupils' well-being.
- Staff in special schools generally have a very secure understanding of the needs of pupils and their families.
- Families value the support schools give them.

What needs to improve

- Rates of attendance of some learners are a concern, particularly those pupils whose attendance levels have continued to deteriorate since the pandemic.
- Although the quality of support from external agencies is improving, the effectiveness of this support has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.



Schools are working to re-establish effective **teaching** to support pupils' **learning** and address any gaps arising from their experiences of the pandemic.

What's going well

- Schools have rightly recognised the need for a flexible curriculum that recognises the experiences of pupils over the past couple of years.
- Schools provide appropriate support for pupils, including increasing work in small groups and one-to-one teaching.
- Schools ensure that the skills of staff are generally very well matched to the needs of pupils.
- Many pupils are happy to be in school, have positive attitudes to learning, have re-engaged well with their classmates and show great resilience.
- Special schools are generally very well placed in implementing both ALN and the Curriculum for Wales.
- Schools are sensitively re-assessing and meeting the needs of pupils, particularly where their communication and independence skills were negatively affected by the pandemic.

What needs to improve

- On occasions, staff absence and a lack of suitably experienced replacement staff limit the pupils' progress and impact on their well-being.
- The proportion of young people with a disability, including those from special schools, that are not in education, training or employment has worsened over the past three years and there are no formal arrangements to track their outcomes or destinations over time.
- [In a very few schools, curriculum provision is neither broad nor balanced and does not prepare pupils well enough for the next stage of learning.](#)



Leaders have shown continued resilience and creativity as they adapt provision to respond to the pandemic and prepare for curriculum reform.

What's going well

- Leaders in special schools continue to show great resilience and are adaptable in the face of ongoing daily challenges.
- Leaders remain optimistic and resolute in securing provision that meets the well-being and learning needs of their pupils.
- As a result of their shared experiences over the past two years, leaders and their staff have further cemented strong team working.
- Quality assurance arrangements are being reintroduced.

What needs to improve

- Leaders continue to find it challenging to arrange suitably qualified staff to cover short and long-term absences.
- In a very few cases, wholesale and significant changes to leadership have had a very marked negative impact on learning experiences, well-being and outcomes, particularly for older pupils.



Pupil referral units

Overall, PRUs have supported children and young people through difficult times over the past year. The standard of their **care, support and guidance** is highly effective in addressing complex issues around pupils' **well-being** that were exacerbated by the pandemic and still continue to affect progress.

What's going well

- Pupil well-being continues to be a high priority across PRUs. Leaders are increasingly expanding the range of interventions available to address the social, emotional, behavioural and mental health needs of pupils. For example, there is increased use of trauma informed practices.
- Staff have a secure understanding of the needs of their pupils and barriers to their learning.
- Communication with parents and carers was strengthened during the pandemic in most PRUs, with all PRUs remaining open. These practices are continuing across PRUs.
- Generally, PRUs have positive working relationships with a range of external agencies to support the needs of their pupils.

What needs to improve

- Unverified data suggests that attendance continues to be a challenge in PRUs and remains below pre-pandemic levels.
- The persistent absenteeism of a few pupils continues to be a challenging issue.
- External agency support to address attendance issues is often not easy to access or timely.
- Access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is too variable across different areas.
- There continues to be inconsistency in arrangements across local authorities regarding 'ownership' of pupils' IDPs in PRUs.



Nearly all PRUs continue to have flexible curriculum arrangements, which help to strengthen **teaching** and, in turn, support pupils' **learning**. Staff are still addressing gaps in pupils' **learning** and social, emotional and behavioural development that arose during the pandemic.

What's going well

- Many pupils are re-engaging well in their learning, helped by the flexibility in the curriculum. For example, PRUs have been flexible in adapting their curriculum offer to allow pupils to gain a range of worthwhile qualifications and accreditations in Year 11.
- As pupils' well-being needs are addressed, they improve their engagement with more formal learning experiences.
- Staff use comprehensive assessment packages to clearly understand gaps in pupils' learning and to provide appropriate interventions to address these.
- Generally, PRUs support pupils' additional learning needs appropriately.
- Pupil transition into PRUs is well supported with robust entry assessments to help pupils to settle quickly.
- Staff quickly re-established effective transition planning for pupils' post-PRU placements. Very few pupils leave PRUs and become not employed, in education or training (NEET).

What needs to improve

- Variability in the quality of teaching impacts on pupil progress.
- [There is too much variability in the preparedness of PRUs for the Curriculum for Wales.](#)



Leaders' resilience, perseverance and creativity continues to support pupils and staff. As PRUs prepare for curriculum and ALN changes, leaders have continued to be flexible and responsive to the highly complex needs of pupils, parents and carers.

What's going well

- There is a strong commitment from leaders to provide high quality provision for pupils.
- Quality assurance systems are improving, which is giving leaders an increasingly accurate understanding of PRUs' strengths and areas for improvement.
- Generally, the professional learning opportunities for staff align to PRU priorities effectively. This provides staff with the skills they need to support the complex needs of the pupils more successfully.
- Management committees have improved how they support and challenge staff.

What needs to improve

- Continued staff absence and vacancies, and leaders' ongoing ability to address these issues, remain a challenge.
- Across local authorities, there is too much variation in how PRUs are organised. This includes inconsistencies in budget arrangements and different levels of responsibility managing additional services such as home tuition.



Local government education services

We were unable to provide a full evaluation of outcomes in our inspections during the last year because the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic caused the suspension of inspections of schools and most other education providers since March 2020.

It is also due to the lack of data about outcomes that can be compared over time as the pandemic caused changes to the way that qualifications were awarded and affected most other data that we consider when making evaluations, such as school attendance, school exclusions and post-16 learner destinations.

Our evaluations provided a context by reporting on outcomes before the pandemic or related to more recent outcomes where the evidence base is valid and reliable.

What's going well

- In many local authorities, pupils have valuable opportunities to influence the work of education services.
- In many local authorities, pupils' standards in primary school inspections between 2017 and 2020 were judged to be good or better in many of the schools inspected.
- Our inspections of schools between 2017 and 2020 show that pupils' well-being and attitudes to learning were good or better in most schools in three of the local authorities we inspected this year.

What needs to improve

- In a few local authorities, the standards that pupils in secondary schools achieve are too low.
- Unverified data suggests that there is an increasing trend in persistent absence in secondary schools in many local authorities, following several years of decrease.



Local government **education services** are generally effective in supporting children and young people.

What's going well

- Many local authorities collaborate well with regional consortia to support the work of schools and other providers.
- Local authority youth work services provide valuable support for young people through targeted, outreach, and open access provision and this is effective in providing safe spaces for young people that do not always exist within formal education settings.

What needs to improve

- Many local authorities need to improve aspects of their work to support pupils with additional learning needs.
- In a few local authorities, the pace of improvement in schools in statutory categories is too slow.



Leadership and management of local government education services is sound in many cases.

What's going well

- All local authorities have a clear vision for improving outcomes for children and young people.
- In many local authorities, officers provide good opportunities for pupils to influence the work of education services.
- Local authorities have placed a high importance on ensuring adequate funding for education services.
- Good progress was made by one local authority that had been causing significant concern, and it no longer requires follow-up monitoring from Estyn.
- In many local authorities, the safeguarding of children and young people is a high priority.
- A few local authorities have developed ambitious and aspirational Welsh in education strategic plans.

What needs to improve

- [Self-evaluation and improvement planning processes are not sufficiently robust in many of the local authorities inspected this year, particularly at service area level.](#)
- Many local authorities need to do further work to ensure that Welsh-medium education meets the needs of learners.
- In a minority of local authorities, scrutiny of education services needs to improve.



Initial teacher education

Schools and their university partners together supported students' **personal and professional development** during the pandemic and have continued to do so effectively.

What's going well

- Most students are positive about entering the teaching profession. They particularly enjoy their school experiences and develop good working relationships with pupils and school staff.
- Partnership staff feel that students have developed resilience and adaptability by having to work within the pandemic restrictions.
- Partnerships have beneficial strategies to support students' well-being. Regular 'check-ins' with university tutors and peers help students to discuss any issues and to focus on their progress.
- As pandemic restrictions eased, students valued the opportunity to meet tutors and their peers face-to-face. This helped them to develop positive professional relationships.
- Overall, partnerships use their tracking systems helpfully to support students who fall behind in their progress.

What needs to improve

- In some instances, students struggle to manage their workload, especially when balancing the demands of assignments and preparing for teaching.
- Some students regard their academic assignments as a necessity to pass the programme, rather than a way to enhance their skills, knowledge and understanding of teaching.
- There is a significant variability in students' lesson planning.



In all partnerships, schools and universities have co-constructed programmes of ITE that offer a valuable range of **learning experiences** for students.

What's going well

- All partnerships have designed ITE programmes with a clear rationale based on curriculum reform in Wales. As a result, students are developing their knowledge and understanding of the key features of the Curriculum for Wales well.
- There are valuable opportunities for primary and secondary students to work across phases to explore cross-curricular work and to develop different teaching and learning approaches.
- In the best examples, programme content is aligned well to make effective links between theory and practice. This is most effective where there is clear communication about programme content across the partnership.
- All partnerships are developing helpful electronic systems to track students' progress and to help students take ownership of their own development.

What needs to improve

- In a few partnerships, students, particularly those on secondary programmes, do not have a good enough understanding of how to plan effectively to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.
- Partly due to the pandemic, students' exposure to effective curriculum design and delivery is too variable.
- Mentors are committed to supporting their students and help them to develop teaching strategies. However, too many do not engage students routinely in linking theory to practice or help them to think creatively about their teaching.
- [Work to ensure that tutors and mentors evaluate students' progress in school accurately and consistently is at an early stage of development.](#)



Schools and universities are working well together to develop joint **leadership** of the partnerships.

What's going well

- All partnerships have clear leadership structures that represent the community of the partnership well. Partners are committed to collaboration and demonstrate a genuine desire to support the reform of ITE in Wales.
- Most partnerships have developed beneficial leadership sub-groups to drive the development of important areas of the partnership's work.
- All partnerships plan regular opportunities to reflect on the quality of the programme and student outcomes based on data and first-hand evidence, including the views of students.
- All partnerships have a clear strategy to develop research and inquiry across the partnership. In the most effective instances, tutors and mentors draw on their own research to support students' learning.

What needs to improve

- [Overall, self-evaluation and planning for improvement processes are not sharp enough, particularly at identifying what needs to improve in teaching and learning experiences.](#)
- Although all partnerships collect a wealth of information on the views of students, they do not triangulate this well enough with other sources of evidence.
- The restrictions of the pandemic have meant that partnerships have not undertaken quality assurance procedures and individual mentor development as planned. As a result, students have had significantly variable experiences.



Further Education

More learners are seeking support for **well-being** issues, and so nearly all colleges have strengthened their **care, support and guidance**.

What's going well

- Most colleges have a systematic approach to initial and diagnostic assessment of literacy and numeracy skills needs for all learners.
- Nearly all colleges have strengthened their staffing and capacity for well-being support.
- Learners feel that their well-being support is improving their progress in learning.
- Transition arrangements for most learners already identified with ALN whilst at school are generally effective.
- Many colleges provide useful opportunities for learners to visit the college as part of familiarisation and preparation activities prior to formal induction programmes.

What needs to improve

- Learners' well-being and mental health have been adversely affected by the pandemic.
- Information sharing arrangements between providers are not always formalised. This means that learners and parents/carers are often asked to provide the same information on multiple occasions.



Most learners are making progress in their **learning**, though there are significant gaps in their skills and knowledge. Although **teachers** help by giving extra sessions, they often miss opportunities to develop learners' skills outside of these.

What's going well

- Most learners are making at least appropriate progress in their learning despite their initial skills and knowledge gaps being greater than those of previous years' cohorts.
- Learners particularly value additional examination and assessment preparation activities to help ease their anxiety.
- Most colleges have re-established useful face-to-face enrichment activities.
- Most teachers provide useful additional support to help the many learners whose literacy and numeracy skills are below the levels normally expected.
- Most colleges provide learners with good progression opportunities.

What needs to improve

- Many teachers miss opportunities to build literacy and numeracy skill development into classes other than specifically scheduled skills lessons.
- [Many learners do not make sufficient progress in developing their numeracy skills.](#)
- The progress of a few learners is hindered by difficulties in securing work placements.
- The rationale for online learning is not always made clear to learners.



Leaders have prioritised the well-being of learners and staff. They have also made sure that professional learning for their staff is focused on digital skills and on supporting each other.

What's going well

- College leaders have prioritised the well-being of learners and staff.
- Most colleges have strengthened their digital capacity and have upskilled staff in the effective use of technology.
- Many colleges are making greater use of peer assessment and mentoring support for staff.

What needs to improve

- Many colleges are experiencing difficulties recruiting staff across a range of roles.



Adult Learning in the Community

There are good levels of **care, support and guidance** in most providers and their courses meet a range of learners' needs.

What's going well

- Partnerships generally provide courses that are tailored well to learners with a range of learning needs or who have had interrupted, disrupted or unhappy previous experiences of formal education.
- Tutors provide useful individual learning support to meet their learners' needs.
- In planning provision, most providers take into account the need to re-engage learners following the pandemic and recognise that learners and those considering enrolling onto classes may have lost confidence during the pandemic.

What needs to improve

- Not all partnerships have well-developed websites and learners say that finding information about courses is not always straightforward.



In general, the quality of **teaching, learning and provision** is sound, but partnerships do not always ensure clear pathways to further or higher levels of study.

What's going well

- The quality of teaching is generally sound.
- Tutors plan and deliver their sessions well and develop strong professional relationships with their learners.
- In general, partnerships offer a range of provision, which aligns appropriately to Welsh Government priorities.

What needs to improve

- Partnerships do not always plan their provision with partners well enough to ensure that learners have clear progression pathways within the provision or on to further or higher-level studies or training.
- Not all partnerships provide sufficient opportunities for Welsh speaking learners to participate in adult learning in the community through bilingual or Welsh-speaking sessions.



Overall, **leaders** are not effective enough in making sure that partners work together successfully.

What's going well

- A few partnerships are making strong progress towards developing larger regional partnerships.

What needs to improve

- Overall, progress towards developing larger regional partnerships is still patchy across Wales, and a few partnerships have made little formal progress towards this.
- Where partnerships are less effective, relationships between partners are not formalised well enough and rely too much on personal contacts.
- [Occasionally, joint planning with partners for progression, to reduce duplication or to provide opportunities for bilingual or Welsh medium provision, is not effective enough.](#)



Work-based learning

Providers place a strong focus on supporting learners' **well-being** and mental health through their **care, support and guidance** provision.

What's going well

- Many learners demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and, although a few were anxious about returning, attendance is generally high in the workplace and training centres.
- Assessors give learners valuable ongoing support for their learning and well-being.
- Many providers strengthened their procedures for tracking learners' progress and well-being, for example by developing an at-risk learner register. These registers allow staff to maintain regular contact with particularly vulnerable learners and provide high levels of personal support.

What needs to improve

- Learner well-being is still a key focus for staff, particularly in helping learners to improve their resilience and to support the increased number of learners who are making well-being disclosures.



Most learners engage well and progress appropriately in their practical and theory, though high numbers of learners are still taking longer than expected to complete their programmes. The quality of **training and assessment** is generally sound and many providers have continued deliver remote **learning**.

Strengths

- Since their full return to their workplaces and face-to-face activity off-the-job in September 2021, most learners are engaging particularly well in their practical and theory activities and make at least appropriate progress; a few make strong progress.
- Providers are continuing to develop the delivery of remote learning, building well on their experiences of using e-portfolios.
- Providers deliver a wide range of programmes at different levels to meet the needs of employers and learners.
- A high number of new learners have been recruited onto most apprenticeship programmes.
- All providers use their well-established e-portfolios and further develop their digital resources to support and track learner progress effectively.

Areas for development

- The number of learners on-programme who are beyond their expected end date remains high, especially in the health and care sectors. This is due to a range of reasons with the most common being the restricted access that assessors have had to learners' workplaces.
- The health and care sector has been under significant pressure during and post-pandemic, leading to high learner drop-out rates and slower learner progress and achievement.
- The rationale for using remote learning is not always clear. Providers do not always clearly define the reasons why units, modules or other activities are delivered remotely.



Leaders in the new apprenticeship providers have quickly established well-defined working relationships with subcontractors and partners. Building on work during the pandemic, senior leaders strengthened their communication and placed a strong focus on supporting professional learning.

What's going well

- Leaders have strengthened and improved their communication with all staff and key partners.
- Leaders place a strong focus on supporting their staff to develop their digital skills to help learners maintain their engagement and make progress.
- During the initial year of the contract, working relationships with subcontractors have been well defined and are settling down.

What needs to improve

- Providers are continuing with many aspects of their quality assurance processes. Leaders have found the assessment and training arrangements for vocational and technical qualifications particularly complex and this limited how well they could review the effectiveness of teaching, training and assessment.



Welsh for adults

Care, support and guidance is an area of strength in all providers. Many learners found that continuing to be able to learn Welsh online during the pandemic was beneficial to their mental health and well-being.

What's going well

- Despite nearly all learning taking place online, providers succeed in creating close-knit, caring communities of learners.
- Nearly all learners enjoy their lessons. They practise and contribute to lessons, without fear of making mistakes, while improving their skills alongside learners from across the world.
- Providers offer effective support and guidance to learners, including learners with additional learning needs.

What needs to improve

- Not all providers in the sector have returned to offering learners the choice of some level of face-to-face provision. This does not meet the needs of the few learners who were unwilling or unable, often due to poor connectivity, to continue with their courses online.



The quality of **teaching** is excellent in two providers inspected and adequate in one. Where teaching is effective, tutors use a range of methods to challenge their learners. As a result, **learners** make strong progress.

What's going well

- Teaching in two of the three providers inspected is very effective and supports many learners to make strong progress.
- Many tutors ensure that learners make increasing use of the Welsh language both inside and outside of formal sessions. As a result, many learners use these skills beneficially and integrate positively within Welsh-speaking communities and networks.
- Many tutors provide valuable and interesting context to learning through enriching learners' knowledge of Welsh history and culture.

What needs to improve

- A few tutors, across providers, do not pay enough attention to correcting poor pronunciation and intonation.
- [A very few tutors across providers do not encourage learners well enough to extend their answers to questions. This means that learners' progress in speaking Welsh is slower than it could be.](#)



Leaders in all providers have a clear vision and aims that align well with national policy initiatives to increase the numbers of active Welsh speakers. They work well with the National Centre to provide professional learning opportunities to improve tutors' teaching skills.

What's going well

- Learn Welsh providers play an important role in influencing the use and development of the Welsh language within their host institutions.
- Many of the providers inspected use research to improve teaching and learning in areas such as formal and informal learning methods that help learners to integrate into Welsh language communities and networks.
- The sector offers valuable continuous professional development to their tutors, for example to improve their understanding of how learners learn and acquire language or deliver online.

What needs to improve

- National data systems do not allow providers who have overlapping responsibility for the same geographical area to track the progress of learners. This prevents providers from making effective use of data to validate the standards and progress of learners who move between them.
- In one provider, monitoring and evaluation activities do not identify strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning well enough.



Learning in the justice sector

Having access to educational activities generally supports the **well-being** of prisoners well, though staff understanding of complex ALN is too variable.

What's going well

- Access to resources such as art equipment and educational activities helps prisoners to cope with their confinement and supports their well-being.
- Prisons provide helpful induction sessions for learners on the educational opportunities available to them and assess their literacy and numeracy skills to ensure that they access the right courses. They track their progress carefully.

What needs to improve

- Prison staff's understanding of how to support complex additional learning needs (ALN) is too variable.
- A minority of learners struggled to engage with learning.



Most prisoners who access education make positive progress in their **learning** and benefit from a broad and relevant curriculum.

What's going well

- Through strong support from staff and peer mentors, many prisoners continued to access education during periods of COVID-19 restrictions.
- Most prisoners who access education make positive progress in their learning.
- Overall, the quality of teaching in prisons is good and peer mentors make a positive contribution to the educational progress of fellow prisoners.
- Prisons offer a broad and relevant curriculum, which is linked closely to the needs of employers.

What needs to improve

- In some cases, young people accessing YOS support do not progress to higher levels of training because of their low literacy skills. In other cases, despite improved access to education, learners have not made sufficient progress.
- Probation services do not have sufficiently clear strategies to support the development of young people's skills and do not track their progress well enough.



Leaders in prisons worked effectively to minimise the impact of the pandemic and to forge link with partners to ensure that prisoners had continued access to relevant educational opportunities, although not all leaders evaluate the impact of their work well enough.

What's going well

- Leaders in prisons worked effectively to ensure that prisoners had access to educational opportunities despite the pandemic restrictions.
- They have developed strong links with local employers to improve employment prospects for prisoners.
- Youth offending services leaders work well with partners to help learners progress onto appropriate educational or employment pathways.

What needs to improve

- Staff do not do enough to challenge prisoners who choose not to engage with education.
- Leaders in youth offending services do not evaluate the impact of interventions well enough or plan strategically to develop the skills of all young people.

HMI Probation used the evidence from the joint review we carried out with them on education, training and employment to produce a helpful effective practice guide. The guide contains reflective questions for practitioners the evaluate the impact of their work.

Education, Training and Employment effective practice guide ([justiceinspectorates.gov.uk](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk))



Independent specialist colleges

Generally, independent specialist colleges provide high levels of **care, support and guidance** that support learners' **well-being** successfully.

What's going well

- Overall, colleges provide calm, supportive and nurturing environments.
- Throughout the pandemic, colleges have continued to adapt their approaches flexibly to meet the needs of learners. As a result, learners have high levels of well-being and have continued to make suitable progress in their learning.

What needs to improve

- The co-ordination of specialist support to meet learners' complex needs is too variable. Staff don't consistently understand and apply communication strategies to support learners' communication needs.



Overall, colleges offer authentic **learning experiences** and their **approaches to teaching** help learners to develop their skills and understanding effectively.

What's going well

- Tutors and support staff provide attentive and caring support. They know the needs of their learners well and build strong working relationships with them.
- Generally, tutors plan carefully to provide a relevant and meaningful range of learning experiences. This helps to support the development of learners' resilience, independence and life skills.
- Tutors manage risks associated with the workplace carefully and learners develop a strong understanding of relevant health and safety considerations.

What needs to improve

- Teaching does not always meet the complex needs of learners well enough.
- There is too much variability in the quality of support provided by support staff.



Leaders continue to be resilient and flexible as they build back from the pandemic and plan for improvement.

What's going well

- College leaders have provided strong day-to-day leadership throughout the pandemic.
- They have adjusted their provision flexibly to continue to provide education and meet the changing needs of learners.
- Where leadership is particularly strong, leaders have driven long-term strategic improvements to their provision, including the development of new facilities for learning.

What needs to improve

- [Professional learning does not focus well enough on supporting learning in a specialist setting.](#)
- Self-evaluation and quality assurance processes do not consistently focus on the impact of teaching on learners' standards and progress.
- The recruitment and retention of suitably experienced and qualified teaching support staff continue to be a challenge.



Independent schools

Independent mainstream schools continue to offer strong **care, support and guidance**, particularly for pupils who experienced **well-being** issues as a result of the pandemic.

What's going well

- Pupil and staff well-being is a strong focus in nearly all schools.
- Schools are putting in place useful strategies to support pupils' mental well-being and to address emotional issues arising from the pandemic. This includes employing independent counsellors.
- Pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes towards their learning.

What needs to improve

- Personal and social education (PSE) is not always effectively delivered, particularly for pupils in key stage 4 and the sixth form. This means that pupils miss out on important learning in this subject.



Independent mainstream schools have returned to face-to-face teaching after a swift and effective move to online **teaching** during the pandemic. They are supporting pupils' **learning** and addressing any gaps that arose in this period.

What's going well

- Schools' swift and effective response to the challenge of online teaching ensures that pupils' progress and standards remain high.
- Teachers continue to use technology effectively where it supports the learning experience of pupils.

What needs to improve

- Teaching does not always challenge the most able pupils.
- Co-curricular activities and learning experiences have reduced due to the restrictions in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Leaders continue to be resilient and creative as they adapt provision after the pandemic and plan for improvement.

What's going well

- Leaders responded swiftly, creatively and effectively to the challenges of the pandemic.
- Leaders continue to develop the strong working relationship between staff and with parents that was established during the pandemic.
- Leaders work to ensure that there is a strong safeguarding culture in schools.

What needs to improve

- Professional learning opportunities for staff have decreased due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic.
- [Quality assurance processes are not always sharp enough and may not pick up on variability in provision.](#)



Independent special schools

Generally, independent special schools provide high levels of **care, support and guidance**. They address even the most complex needs of individual pupils and foster **well-being** effectively.

What's going well

- Overall, independent special schools provide an inclusive and caring ethos for their pupils.
- Where support is carefully planned, this enables pupils to develop positive attitudes and become successful learners.
- Pupils make good progress in their learning and well-being where staff have a strong understanding of the needs of their pupils and therapeutic approaches are well co-ordinated.
- Where staff follow safeguarding procedures closely and leaders monitor these rigorously, there is a strong culture of safeguarding.

What needs to improve

- Therapeutic approaches are not always co-ordinated well enough to meet the needs of pupils and staff.
- A few pupils have persistently poor attendance, and this limits their progress.
- Leaders don't monitor safeguarding procedures rigorously enough in all schools.



Overall, schools provide a broad range of **learning experiences** and teaching approaches that promote pupils' **progress in learning and well-being**.

What's going well

- Schools have generally adapted their curriculum well to meet recent challenges and are beginning to re-establish partnerships to extend the learning opportunities for pupils.
- The curriculum frequently has a strong focus on personal, social and health education and prepares pupils well for adult life.
- Where teaching is strong, teachers plan engaging activities that are well matched to pupils' abilities and interests.

What needs to improve

- There is a lack of opportunities for pupils to learn about important topics such as sexual harassment, radicalisation and exploitation.
- Teaching does not always link well enough to pupils' abilities or build in opportunities for progression.
- Staff do not always have enough knowledge and experience of working with pupils with ALN.



Leaders continue to be resilient and flexible as they build back from the pandemic and plan for improvement.

What's going well

- Leaders have shown considerable commitment and resilience in ensuring that their schools remained open for much of the pandemic.
- Leaders often provided effective management and supervision of the day-to-day work of the school through the pandemic.
- Where schools make strong progress against Estyn recommendations, leaders continue to maintain a clear strategic direction, ensuring effective professional learning and beneficial school improvement activity.

What needs to improve

- [Strategic leadership is not effective in those schools where quality assurance is more about compliance, and improvement planning is not detailed enough.](#)
- Professional learning is less effective when it does not focus on the core skills of teaching, supporting pupils with complex needs, or the role of teaching support staff.
- Leaders find it a challenge to recruit and retain suitably experienced and qualified teaching support staff.