Primary

Schools

1,216

No. of schools 2024

1,219

No. of schools 2023

1,225

No. of schools 2022

Pupils

258,038

All pupils

447

No. of pupils nursery age

59,717

No. of pupils under 5

197,853

No. of pupils aged 5-10

21

No. of pupils aged 11 and over

21.8%

eFSM (Aged 5-15)

19.2%

eFSM (All pupils)

7.1%

EAL A-C (Aged 5-15)

11.0%

Able to speak Welsh (Aged 5-15)

11.1%

Pupils with additional learning needs (Aged 5-15)

Follow-up

No. in FU September 2023

SM: 16 SI: 6   ER: 34

No. removed 2023-2024

SM: 9   SI: 4   ER: 17

Core inspections

No. of inspections: 259

Interim visits: 4

Welsh-medium: 92

Bilingual:

English-medium: 171

Case studies

No. of case studies requested: 44

Published on website: 39

No. went into FU after core inspection 2023-2024   Faith: 29

SM: 10   SI: 8   ER: 14

Total in FU August 2024

SM: 17   SI: 10   ER: 31

Engagement visits

No. of visits/calls: 5

Welsh-medium: 2

Bilingual:

English-medium: 3

Faith: 2

Summary

During 2023-2024, primary schools worked effectively with families to address any barriers to learning or well-being of pupils from low-income households. A majority of schools improved pupils' attendance levels. However, in schools where attendance is still below pre-pandemic figures, the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals was significantly lower than that of those who were not eligible for free school meals.

A majority of schools made strong progress with their implementation of Curriculum for Wales. Leaders and teachers trialled and revised their curriculum designs to combine knowledge, skills and experiences cohesively. Many schools continued to focus on developing their understanding of how learners should progress. However, over a third (40%) of schools did not develop a secure enough understanding of the role of progression in supporting pupils to build on their learning coherently.

Leadership was effective in many schools with leaders having a clear vision and strategies for school development. They focussed their self-evaluation activity closely on pupils' well-being and progress and invested in staff through professional learning opportunities linked to school and national improvement priorities. However, in a third of schools, self-evaluation processes did not focus clearly enough on pupil outcomes and did not identify key areas for improvement in teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning

Building on the previous year, a majority of schools made strong progress with their implementation of Curriculum for Wales, trialling and refining their curriculum designs to combine knowledge, skills and experiences. A very few schools fully embedded their curriculum during the year and began to

see its beneficial impact on pupils' learning and progress. Leaders and staff in these schools developed a strong vision that included securing high-quality teaching and assessment to ensure that pupils' learning experiences were appropriately engaging, challenging and equitable. Read how Langstone Primary School in Newport underlined responded to curriculum reform to meet the needs of learners.

In the best cases, schools planned learning experiences effectively and evaluated how well teaching supported pupils to make progress. Teachers implemented effective pedagogies to support pupils to deepen their learning, and to transfer skills and knowledge in meaningful and increasingly sophisticated ways across the curriculum. Read how Y Bont Faen Primary School in the Vale of Glamorgan used a strong creative focus to improve pupils' language and communication, creativity and independence.

Around a third of schools inspected were still at an early stage of curriculum reform. In a minority of these schools, leaders did not have a clear strategy for developing pedagogy or a curriculum that met the needs and interests of their pupils. Many of the schools in the early stages of curriculum development did not evaluate well enough the impact of teaching and assessment on pupils' outcomes. In these schools, the curriculum often focused on highly structured coverage of concepts and did not engage pupils' interests or reflect the local community well enough.

Around a third of schools inspected received a recommendation to address inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Often, in these schools, teachers did not provide purposeful feedback to pupils to help them understand the how and why of learning as well as the what. Misconceptions around progression in relation to Curriculum for Wales resulted in teachers assessing pupils too narrowly against descriptions of learning rather than planning learning that enabled pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding over time.

Pupils began to influence what they learn, often by contributing their ideas to topics. In a few instances they also influenced how they learned. Schools that placed high value on pupils' input successfully incorporated their interests into their learning, often making good use of topical issues that resonated with pupils' own experiences. They used stimulating activities to develop pupils as independent learners from a young age, ensuring that they were clear about the purpose of their learning, what they do well and what they needed to do to improve. However, in a minority of cases, schools did not provide effective opportunities for pupils to develop their independence well enough. This was often due to staff providing too much direction, stifling opportunities for pupils to make decisions, and to work things out for themselves.

A very few schools developed highly effective learning experiences for the youngest pupils. Leaders and teachers developed pedagogy based on the principles of child development and often created learning experiences aligned to *the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings*[1] Welsh Government (2022) Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. [Online]. Available from https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings , recognising the essential role of enabling adults, engaging experiences, and effective environments in high-quality early education.

Overall, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those from low-income households, made at least appropriate progress in the cross-curricular skills during the year. Pupils' oracy and basic reading skills, such as reading with appropriate fluency and accuracy, continued to develop well. In a few schools, pupils' language and communication skills were exceptional. In the best cases, the oldest primary pupils often used inference and deduction skilfully to develop their

understanding of a wide range of texts and to form a sophisticated knowledge of characters through their motivations, emotions and actions. However, schools do not always plan for progression in pupils' advanced reading skills well enough to enable them to respond with confidence and understanding to a range of texts. Although in many schools pupils made good progress in writing, teachers did not always provide opportunities for pupils to strengthen their work well enough, for example by addressing repeated errors or by allowing pupils the time to craft their work effectively for authentic audiences and purposes. Most schools continued to support pupils to acquire secure mathematical knowledge and understanding. In a minority of schools, teachers did not plan effective opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills well enough.

Many pupils developed positive attitudes towards improving their Welsh language skills. Overall pupils' Welsh language skills were strong in Welsh-medium schools. Read how Ysgol Brynamman in Carmarthenshire motivated pupils to speak Welsh. In a few English-medium schools, pupils developed as confident Welsh speakers. However, pupils' Welsh oracy skills remained weak in English-medium schools with just over a quarter (26%) receiving a recommendation to improve pupils' Welsh language skills. Read how Undy Primary School in Monmouthshire promoted enthusiasm for the Welsh language.

In general, schools continued to develop relationships and sexuality education (RSE) purposefully. A few began to weave RSE effectively through areas of learning and experience to support pupils' understanding. Schools began to provide opportunities for pupils to learn about the unique character of Wales. Where this work was most effective, learning experiences reflected the diverse nature of Wales including gender, disability, and race. Teachers linked learning successfully to human rights, creating meaning for pupils, for example when exploring equality through the stories of LGBTQ+ people. A few schools remained in the early stages of developing their RSE curriculum, and although they focused well on developing values and personal relationships, they did not consider a wide enough range of relevant influences. Often, their learning experiences lacked relevance and depth. Too often, pupils were not encouraged to share their lived experience or to see themselves reflected in their learning environment. Our anti-racism report contains examples of effective practice.

Care, support and well-being

During the year, inspectors found that pupils' well-being, their attitudes to learning and the quality of the care primary schools provided was strong. Most pupils developed a secure sense of belonging and were proud of their school. They were often eager to learn and engaged enthusiastically during lessons. In a few cases, pupils made choices that supported them to take responsibility for their learning. However, similarly to last year, lessons were often too structured. Over a third of schools (36%) received a recommendation related to developing pupils as effective independent learners. In these schools, teachers did not give pupils the space to develop as curious, critical and creative thinkers, able to identify the purpose of their learning and to recognise what they need to do to improve their work.

Most schools continued to embed ALN reform effectively. School leaders often demonstrated agile and flexible approaches to adapting to pupils' needs. Many schools adjusted provision in creative ways, implementing thoughtful and targeted intervention, and improving the learning environment. They created additional provision to develop pupils' ability to regulate their emotions, helping them feel ready to learn. Read about how Ysgol Cae'r Gwenyn in Wrexham identified a whole-school strategy to develop the communication skills of pre-verbal pupils.

Schools continued to develop meaningful opportunities for pupils to contribute to the life and work of the school, including evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. These contributions enabled leaders to make improvements to learning experiences in response to pupils' feedback. Pupils often used their leadership skills to benefit their local community, for example by promoting sustainable practices such as planting apple trees and protecting wildlife.

Most schools continued to create opportunities for pupils to learn about the people, places and histories that shape their personal identity. Pupils developed a good understanding of what it means to be an ethical citizen and the importance of human rights and justice, for example comparing similarities and differences between workers campaigning for equal pay in Wales and those fighting for better working conditions globally. A few schools began to develop pupils' knowledge of religion and values. However, too often, there were limited and often narrow experiences for pupils to develop a meaningful appreciation of culture and diversity in their communities, of Wales, and the wider world.

Many schools invested in family engagement, and the valuable relationships they formed helped improve outcomes for pupils in many ways. Schools were mindful of the impact of poverty on pupils' attendance and overall well-being. Many thoughtfully considered how to ensure an equitable school experience for all pupils and used the pupil development grant to reduce any barriers. In a few of the best cases, schools worked closely with a range of agencies to support pupils and their families. For example, schools ran meal planning and budgeting workshops and began the day with a 'soft start' to reduce anxiety. Our thematic report on Support, provision and transition for early education contains cameos and case studies of effective practice.

A majority of schools had returned to pre-pandemic attendance levels. Some of the most successful schools in improving attendance for all pupils were those that provided engaging learning experiences for pupils and where the quality of teaching was high.

However, in a minority of schools, attendance was still below pre-pandemic figures, and the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals was significantly lower than that of those who were not eligible for free school meals.

View resource

Leading and improving

Leadership was effective in many schools. In the best examples, leaders had a clear vision for their schools and formed coherent strategies for school improvement. They established effective leadership teams, strengthening the schools' capacity for improvement. These schools were highly responsive to their pupils' and families' needs and, as a result, functioned as an integral part of the local community. Read about how Dolau Primary in Pontyclun developed leaders at all levels to secure resilient leadership. During a year when national priorities presented new challenges to schools, successful schools demonstrated agility and flexibility in their response to reform, recruitment and the changing social climate. In the very few schools that went into a follow-up category following inspection, a common cause was that leaders were not focusing effectively on the most important areas for improvement in their schools.

Governors played an active role in school life, often using their experience and expertise well to support their schools. In a few cases they considered pupils' views when evaluating the impact of any

school improvement work. Governors allocated grant funding appropriately but did not always measure the impact of grant funding on pupils' outcomes. Whilst governors met regularly, in a few cases there was still an over-reliance by governors on information from school leaders rather than from first-hand evidence. In these schools, governors were not well informed enough to support and challenge leaders effectively when identifying and measuring school improvement priorities. Troedyrhiw Primary near Merthyr created beneficial governor improvement groups to improve their governing body's capacity to support senior leaders.

Leaders worked effectively to reduce the impact of poverty on pupils' well-being. They developed various approaches to tackling barriers to learning, making effective use of grants such as the pupil development grant. Many schools worked effectively to support families during the financial crisis, for instance providing access to food and fuel vouchers and subsidising the cost of school events and residential visits. A majority of schools recognised the vital link between attendance and learning in securing positive outcomes for pupils but, where practice was less effective, the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households remained too low.

Many schools provided a range of useful professional learning opportunities linked to school and national improvement priorities. Effective schools focused on achieving high-quality teaching through carefully planned high-quality professional learning activities, including research and collaboration. Leaders dedicated the time needed for staff to engage in purposeful enquiry that resulted in improved provision and outcomes for pupils. Schools often worked successfully with other schools to share practice and to develop and enhance their work.

Many parents were positive about the clear and timely communication between their school and home. They valued opportunities to be involved in their child's education and the sensitive way schools dealt with their queries and concerns. Staff built strong relationships with families, including the families of pupils with ALN to establish consistently effective approaches to care and support. Schools that evaluated provision accurately and shared good practice effectively supported pupils to make strong progress in their learning. Where schools provided specialist provision, staff understood pupils' complex needs and implemented highly effective strategies to meet their needs, to give them a secure sense of belonging and to support them to make strong progress towards their individual targets.

Many schools had robust arrangements in place for monitoring, evaluation and review and, in the strongest examples, leaders involved all staff in a thoughtful programme of activities that focused closely on pupils' well-being and progress. During the year, over a third of schools inspected received a recommendation to improve aspects of leadership. Often these recommendations related to self-evaluation processes that were not focused clearly enough on pupils' outcomes and did not identify key areas for improvement in teaching and learning.

Overview of recommendations from inspections

In the 2023-2024 academic year, Estyn inspected 259 primary schools.

- 83 (32%) primary schools received a recommendation related to providing or improving opportunities for pupils to develop or apply their skills, particularly numeracy, writing, reading or digital skills. Forty-six schools were given a recommendation to provide or improve opportunities to develop pupils' independent learning skills, and 21 were recommended to support pupils to be more involved in decision-making about their own learning.

- 49 (18.9%) schools were given a recommendation about development of Welsh language skills, including 13 Welsh medium schools. Out of those 49, nine received a recommendation to improve the provision of Welsh teaching.

- 47 (18.2%) were given a recommendation to ensure that teaching sufficiently challenges all pupils, and 48 (18.6%) were given a recommendation related to providing appropriate feedback, including providing opportunities for pupils to respond to feedback, ensuring that feedback helps pupils to identify and work towards the next steps in their learning, or to improve their work.

- 46 (17.8%) primary schools received a recommendation related to improving the effectiveness of self-evaluation and school improvement activities, which variously focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning, attending to the most pressing priorities for improvement, and pupils' progress.

- 26 (10%) of primary schools were given a recommendation about improving attendance. Ten of these providers had an outcome of either Estyn review, significant improvement or special measures from their inspection.

- 9 (3.5%) primary schools received a recommendation about addressing health and safety issues identified during inspection, and seven were given a recommendation to address safeguarding concerns.