

Transition and pupil progression

In September 2024, we published our thematic report on transition and pupil progression from primary to secondary school. The report was written in response to a request from the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language in Estyn's annual remit letter 2023 to 2024.

We set out to produce a report on how well schools work together to support pupils' transition from primary into secondary school. We focused on how well schools work together to ensure that their curricula and teaching develop pupils' knowledge, skills, understanding and learning behaviours effectively across transition. We also considered how schools support the well-being of learners at this important transition point. We have identified features of effective provision, highlighted where practice is less successful, and explored the reasons why.

Our report draws on evidence from our inspection and follow-up findings, and visits to 41 schools in 15 local authorities. They consisted of 23 primary schools, 13 secondary schools and 3 all-age schools. Of these, 14 were conducted through the medium of Welsh. During school visits, we met with school leaders, curriculum leaders and pupils from Year 6, Year 7 and Year 8. We looked at a range of documents, including curriculum planning, pupils' learning and transition plans. We took evidence via virtual meetings from three regional support services and three local authorities.

Our recommendations

Schools should:

- Develop a clearer shared understanding of progression within and across their clusters of schools
- Work more closely as clusters to ensure that approaches to information sharing, teaching, and the curriculum support pupils to develop knowledge, skills, experiences and learning behaviours progressively from 3 to 16 years old

The Welsh Government should:

- Provide clear guidance on the practical application of how to develop progression through and across the curriculum
- Ensure that there is sufficient support to enable leaders and teachers to develop a coherent and progressive curriculum that sets high expectations for all pupils

Local authorities and regional support partners should:

- Encourage and support stronger collaboration among clusters to address the recommendations we have identified for schools, focusing on establishing well-defined clusters with specific and clear objectives

What did our thematic say?

Our report highlights a range of different practices across Wales, and notes strengths and areas that need to be addressed to support pupils' transition and their learning.

Our findings showed that headteachers or senior leaders from most clusters of schools meet regularly to discuss Curriculum for Wales and how to support pupils' transition from primary to secondary school. However, in many cases, and for a range of reasons, transition work is not effective enough to ensure that pupils make systematic and continual progress in their knowledge, skills, understanding and learning behaviours from primary into secondary school.

In a minority of cases, clusters have set up groups of teachers to consider examples of pupils' learning, to help them begin to develop a shared understanding of progression across their schools. However, there is still not a strong understanding of what progression looks like in most clusters of schools. As a result, these practices have not improved how well learning progresses from primary into secondary schools strongly enough.

In a few cases, clusters of primary and secondary schools have worked together positively to map out knowledge, skills and experiences across all areas of learning and experience and have used this to begin to develop a shared understanding of progression. However, even where this is in place, secondary schools do not always use it to take account of pupils' prior learning well enough. In all-age schools, despite the potential of the all-age approach to learning, curriculum coherence and planning for progression were not always strong.

Many schools have provided teachers with a range of professional learning to support the introduction of Curriculum for Wales. However, in only a few cases had clusters of schools shared approaches to teaching or considered how they could ensure that teaching strategies supported pupils to make effective and continuous progress from primary into secondary school.

In nearly all cases, primary schools passed on a broad and varied range of information about pupils' learning and progress to secondary schools prior to transition. A minority of clusters were beginning to consider how to share information on pupils' progress, in line with Curriculum for Wales. However, these processes did little to support continuity in pupils' learning.

In nearly all cases, schools supported pupils' induction into secondary school well. In most cases, clusters of schools supported many aspects of pupils' well-being effectively, and primary and secondary schools worked together conscientiously to support the transition of pupils with additional learning needs.