

Teaching and Curriculum for Wales

Executive Summary

This thematic report focuses on how effectively schools are developing and embedding approaches to teaching within the Curriculum for Wales. Drawing on inspection evidence, visits to school settings (14 primary schools, 10 secondary schools and one all age school) and stakeholder feedback, it identifies key characteristics of successful practice and areas requiring further development. Evidence was collected only for the age range currently working within the Curriculum for Wales, which at the time of this report is up to Year 9 in secondary schools. The report highlights the pivotal role of teaching in realising the aims of the Curriculum for Wales and in securing improved outcomes for pupils. It emphasises the importance of placing pedagogy at the centre of educational improvement, calling on schools, local authorities and national partners to maintain a strong focus on high-quality teaching.

1. In many of the schools we visited, leaders have developed and communicated a clear, whole-school vision for teaching, closely aligned with their curriculum purposes. These schools have established shared frameworks for pedagogy and where these are implemented well, staff often display a consistent understanding of what effective teaching looks like. This supports teachers to apply these principles confidently, adapting them expertly across subjects and phases. However, a minority of schools have yet to develop or embed clear expectations for the quality of teaching. In these cases, classroom practice remains too variable, as teachers lack a secure understanding of what effective teaching looks like or understand its impact on pupils' learning well enough.
2. Strong teaching is underpinned by purposeful curriculum planning. In the most effective schools, teachers ensure that learning is sequenced thoughtfully to ensure progression in knowledge, skills and understanding. They revisit key concepts, and design tasks that enable pupils to apply learning in purposeful, engaging contexts. These schools ensure that medium-term plans are developed collaboratively, across year groups or departments, with sufficient structure to guide learning and enough flexibility to respond to pupils' needs. Where planning is less effective, pupils experience disjointed learning or have insufficient opportunities to develop and consolidate skills over time and across the curriculum.
3. In many schools, high quality teaching is characterised by clear intentions for learning, well-established routines, and a strong focus on formative assessment. Effective teachers explain learning intentions clearly, use questioning purposefully, and adapt teaching in response to pupils' progress and misconceptions. The strongest schools adopt formative feedback strategies that encourage pupils to reflect on their learning and take meaningful next steps. In these schools, pupils are active participants in their learning and demonstrate increasing independence. This helps create a culture where both staff and pupils are clear about what success looks like and how to improve.
4. Many schools we visited, particularly in the primary sector, use authentic and relevant learning contexts and the local community to deepen engagement and make learning more meaningful. These approaches support pupils to see the relevance of their learning, promote critical thinking and strengthen their sense of identity and belonging. In the most effective practice, teaching

fosters curiosity about Wales and the wider world, enabling pupils to make connections across areas of their learning in ways that support pupils' development towards the four purposes.

5. However, in a few schools, staff assess pupils' progress directly against the four purposes rather than focussing on the knowledge and skills that pupils need to develop over time. This leads to a superficial approach to assessment and the inappropriate use of the four purposes in individual lessons. As a result, valuable teaching time is taken up with activities that do not contribute meaningfully to pupils' learning.
6. Where high-quality professional learning has the greatest impact, it is sustained, collaborative and focused directly on improving teaching. In the best schools, staff work together to explore evidence-informed practices, reflect on pedagogy, and refine approaches in the light of classroom experience. Leaders create protected time for professional learning and ensure it aligns with whole-school goals and individual development needs. Peer coaching, enquiry groups and structured support for subject or phase-specific pedagogy are used effectively to build capacity and share responsibility for improvement.
7. However, time and budgetary constraints often limit the provision and impact of professional learning in some schools. In these cases, staff report a lack of opportunity to focus on pedagogy, with training often dominated by compliance or statutory content. This presents particular challenges for staff who would benefit from ongoing, phase or subject-specific professional learning, which is not always consistently available as part of their regular professional development.
8. Across the system, schools are increasingly recognising the value of high-quality peer collaboration in driving improvement. Effective schools embed peer support, coaching, and enquiry as part of their professional culture. Staff use these methods to explore practice, trial strategies, and reflect on impact. These approaches not only support professional growth but also promote a collaborative professional culture and a shared responsibility for improving the quality of teaching across the school.
9. In the most effective schools we visited, leaders integrate teaching and learning priorities into their self-evaluation and improvement planning processes. Staff in these schools routinely gather a wide range of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching and its impact on pupil progress. Professional dialogue is embedded across the school, and reflective conversations are used continually to identify strengths and refine practice. Importantly, self-evaluation in these schools is focused not only on the implementation of strategies, but also on their impact on learning.
10. Where self-evaluation is less effective, it tends to focus on superficial compliance with a set range of pedagogical techniques rather than an evaluation of the approaches that have the greatest impact on pupils' learning. In these cases, teaching strategies are used inconsistently and often without careful consideration, while feedback on classroom practice tends to reinforce a narrow, formulaic approach to teaching.

Our recommendations

Schools should:

- Develop and communicate a clear, whole-school vision for effective teaching that is understood and applied thoughtfully by all staff
- Ensure that curriculum planning is sequenced, coherent, and allows pupils to revisit and apply clearly identified knowledge and skills in context-rich experiences over time
- Prioritise sustained, collaborative professional learning that focuses on improving pedagogy and is

grounded in classroom practice and its impact on learning

- Ensure that self-evaluation processes focus sharply on the quality of teaching evaluated by its impact on pupil progress
- Embed ongoing and structured peer support and coaching to promote professional dialogue, reflection, and shared improvement

Local authorities and Partnerships should:

- Strengthen approaches to subject and phase specific professional learning that prioritise high-quality teaching and are tailored to schools' curriculum and pedagogical needs
- Strengthen support for the leadership of self-evaluation in schools to ensure it focuses sharply on improving teaching and its impact on pupil progress

The Welsh Government should:

- Ensure that national professional learning opportunities are grounded in high quality educational research, practically applicable in the classroom, and designed to build teachers' pedagogical expertise over time
- Consider strategies to enhance the time and flexibility available to schools for high-quality professional learning that directly supports improvements in teaching
- Strengthen opportunities for local authorities, partnerships and schools to work together to share effective practice, refine pedagogy, and understand its impact on pupils' progress
- Strengthen curriculum planning resources to ensure that teachers have a clearer understanding of progression, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and to prioritise the development of more effective and meaningful formative assessment practices.