

Report to	Performance Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	26th September 2024
Lead Member / Officer	Diane King (Lead Member for Education, Children and Young People), Geraint Davies (Head of Education)
Head of Service	Geraint Davies, Head of Education
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Title	Curriculum for Wales

1. What is the report about?

1.1. The report provides an update on the progress made by schools since the Curriculum for Wales became statutory in September 2022. The report offers information on lessons learnt from evaluations across schools during this initial implementation phase and any impact on staff and learners.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. To detail the progress made in relation to implementing and embedding the new Curriculum for Wales: in primary schools and in year 7 and 8 in secondary schools – what worked well, areas for improvement and lessons learnt by all stakeholders during the initial implementation phase; and provide an evaluation of the implementation process across all key stages, the Curriculum's impact on staff recruitment and retention, along with feedback from headteachers, teachers and school-based staff on their experiences of the implementation process and the advantages and/or disadvantages of the new Curriculum for learners.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1. Scrutiny is invited to discuss the details of this report and to identify any aspects of the Curriculum for Wales work which may benefit from detailed examination in the future.

4. Report details

- 4.1. In September 2022, the new Curriculum for Wales became statutory for all learners from Nursery to Year 6. All secondary schools and settings had started their first teaching of Curriculum for Wales in Years 7 and 8 by September 2023.
- 4.2. All primary schools have designed their curriculum in line with the Four Purposes to meet the mandatory requirements of Curriculum for Wales, with a balanced curriculum offer to meet all learners' needs. The staggered rollout in secondary schools has had a different effect to the shorter implementation of rollout in primary, with leaders and practitioners in secondary schools involved in on-going and significant change every year between 2022 and 2026. Year 9 are beginning the new curriculum in September 2024. Two further stages of implementation will follow as these learners begin the new 14-16 qualifications in 2025, and the current Year 8 learners in 2026. Curriculum summary documents have been developed by each school and made available to parents and local community as required by Welsh Government.
- 4.3. The local authority has ensured that all curriculum support aligns to the expectations and principles within Welsh Government's Journey to Curriculum Roll-out, through regular professional dialogue with each school's link Supporting Improvement Adviser (SIA) and a range of professional learning opportunities at cluster, alliance (in secondary schools) and individual school level. Networks have shared their practice through GwE's support centre and a marketplace sharing event for all regional schools where practitioners from Denbighshire schools presented and shared their work. Schools are working more effectively in clusters to develop provision and understanding across the continuum. This is stronger in some clusters than others and there is still work needed to strengthen the cluster dialogue and bring about shared improvement. Transition processes are improving but this needs further development to support pupils effectively at key points.

- 4.4. Most schools have embraced the Curriculum for Wales as a positive education reform and are continuing to develop their practice. This is taking time and some schools are still finding it difficult to change. As a result, the curriculum in some schools can seem quite packed.
- 4.5. Many teachers and schools have taken a more creative approach to the curriculum with a range of new strategies such as Big Question and inquiry-based learning. Where schools are effective, they develop pupils well as independent learners and provide them with opportunities to decide how to present their work— however, this gap is wide between the best and least effective practice.
- 4.6. Many schools have taken the opportunity to review their curriculum successfully and have developed a more local curriculum that better reflects the needs of the school, community and Wales in general. Pupils are more engaged in many schools and are enjoying a broad and balanced curriculum with more authenticity and purpose. However, this still needs to be developed further in many schools.
- 4.7. Although initially challenged by the loss of the certainty of levels and outcomes, a majority of schools have adapted successfully to assessment systems that have a range of teacher assessments. A minority of schools are still very unsure about assessment and lack confidence in some aspects in case they are not ‘doing the right thing’. Schools have engaged well with Professional Learning with generally a positive impact on standards. However, schools are concerned about their ability to continue to access this with changes to funding.
- 4.8. A consequence of the new digital competence framework, significant EdTech funding, new curriculum and pandemic is that almost all schools have improved and developed their ICT provision successfully, resulting in a greater confidence and skills in both pupils and staff.
- 4.9. Health and well-being as an Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) is one of the most significant changes in the new curriculum and nearly all schools have given it a greater focus. There has been a large increase in the number of schools who have invested in Forest Schools and outdoor learning.
- 4.10 There are a number of challenges associated with the implementation. Monitoring is needed to track and check progress but is limited by many heads needing to increase their teaching commitments due to funding challenges. This impacts on

leadership capacity. The curriculum which pupils receive is determined by what their teachers and leaders of curriculum design in their schools create, and how innovative and creative they are. The profession needs to ensure equity of experience in a system that actively promotes difference. The sector looks forward to receiving the additional exemplification and direction from Welsh Government in relation to this reform.

4.11 With so many concurrent and significant reforms to the sector, the continued challenges faced by schools as a result of the COVID pandemic, and the increasingly difficult funding situation, it is not possible to determine whether the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales is impacting teacher retention and recruitment. The authors of the report are not aware of any teachers leaving the profession due to this specific reform, despite the significant shift in practices it requires of many professionals. There is, however, anecdotal evidence that other factors and reforms are impacting on retention of staff in key positions in schools.

5 How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?

5.1 This area of work contributes towards making Denbighshire a healthier and happier place where young people want to live and work and have the skills to do so as identified within the Four Purposes. It also contributes to make Denbighshire a place where young people can learn and make good progress in their skills, learning in a fair and safe environment. This will help ensure all learners have the best start in life and can realise their full potential.

6 What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1 The Council will continue to liaise with GwE to efficiently and effectively utilise the Local Authority Education Grant to support schools implement the reform. This will have minimal impact on other services within the Council.

7 What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

7.1 The curriculum reform is a requirement in legislation which all schools must implement. The changes are directed by Welsh Government and not by the

Council and therefore a Well-being Impact Assessment has not been completed for this report.

8 What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1 Through liaison with GwE, there is regular discussion with colleagues across Wales and Welsh Government to collect feedback and identify aspects for further discussion and development. Scrutiny have previously received a report on the rollout of Curriculum for Wales

9 Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 The Council is facing significant financial challenges at present that will impact on the capacity to deliver services, projects and corporate priorities. All are aware of the significant pressures schools are under including the impact of introducing concurrent reforms such as the Curriculum for Wales as referenced in para 4.11 and are committed to minimise the financial impacts on schools as much as possible, however it is not possible to protect schools completely.

10 What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1 The implementation of the Curriculum for Wales is reviewed by Estyn as part of their inspection work. The local authority and GwE are already working in partnership to monitor and support schools with their implementation, thereby reducing the associated risks.

10.2 The Welsh Government's review of middle tier services in education carries a risk to the service provided to schools through the change of model and personnel. To mitigate this risk, wherever possible, there are minimal changes to supporting improvement advisors and bespoke support plans are in place for each school.

11 Power to make the decision

11.1 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.

11.2 Sections 7.3, 7.4.1 and 7.4.2 of the Council's Constitution.