

## The Local Context

### The Development of the South West and Mid Wales Consortium Pilot Programme

The Assembly Government invited the South West and Mid Wales Consortium to develop an alternative approach for the pilot of the School Effectiveness Framework for schools. This was in recognition that for the Framework to be effective it must be owned locally by individual schools and their local authorities; and must build on existing work in schools and local authorities and on current Assembly Government initiatives. The South West and Mid Wales Consortium welcomed the opportunity to develop an approach that would build upon established consortium working and be effective within the local context.

The programme to be piloted in the South West and Mid Wales Consortium has been developed through Consortium working. A development group has been established comprising of 3 headteachers nominated by the Consortium Headteacher Group and senior officer from each authority, an assistant director and the consortium coordinator.

The group has developed an approach that will build upon the existing work of schools and local authorities and on current Assembly Government initiatives, and which will be appropriate to the context and circumstances of all schools across the Consortium. The model is firmly rooted in the principles outlined in the School Effectiveness Framework and referenced to the 'National Purpose for Schools' (School Effectiveness Framework, Page 8) set out within the document.

### Key Principles

The key principles on which the approach is based are:

- **Improved learning and wellbeing for all children and young people**
  - The moral purpose underpins the aim for our education system and it requires that we create the conditions that provide all children and young people with the best possible opportunities to learn, maximise their potential, and to reap the benefits. Our moral purpose must be ...'how we improve learning outcomes for all students in all settings rather than some students in some settings' (Alma Harris, 2007)
  - To reduce variations in effectiveness within and between schools across the system as a whole. To raise overall levels of attainment there is a need to address the differences in outcomes within schools, (where research indicates there is the greatest variation), between schools, between local authorities and between the primary and secondary phases.
- **Tri-level working**
  - The commitment of all levels, schools, local authorities and national government to the national purpose for education.
  - Alignment of policies and practices through genuine dialogue and system thinking at all levels, including the overcoming of barriers experienced by stakeholders through the valuing and appreciation of each others perspectives.
  - Drawing upon the knowledge and experience of teaching practitioners, professionals and leaders and engaging the capacity of schools, local authorities and the Assembly Government in support of children and young people's learning

- **The School Effectiveness Framework**

- The student is the most important unit of organisation – not the classroom, not the school, and not the school system.
- Schools cannot achieve expectations for transformation by acting alone. The success of a school depends on its capacity to join networks to share knowledge, address problems and pool resources
- Leadership is distributed across schools in networks as well as within schools.

(Caldwell, 2006)

- **Local context**

- School, Community, Local authority  
The context in which schools exist varies and across the consortium we have the full range of contexts that exist across Wales. The Consortium comprises of approximately one third of the schools in Wales. It is a balanced Consortium in terms of the mix of urban and rural; small schools and larger schools; social deprivation and affluence and language – Welsh and English. The balance in the Consortium make up is its strength.  
To achieve improvement and positive change we have to recognise the context - the community and the local authority in which the schools exist and find solutions that will be achievable within the context in which each schools exist.
- High performing schools and local authorities  
Across the Consortium we recognise that we have high performing schools, in 2007 at Key Stage 4 the six authorities were 6 of the top 8 performing authorities at A – C at GCSE and 6 of the top 9 for Core Subject Indicator. The challenge in the local context is about making every school a great school. However, we must also recognise that there are some schools that find themselves in circumstances such that intervention is need to make them good schools. Recent Estyn Inspections of the local authorities have provided evidence that the local authorities are performing well. The Children Act 2004 and the School Effectiveness Framework provide a revised context and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of schools and local authorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- **Genuine Dialogue**

- A common understanding and use of genuine dialogue that enables professional and constructive challenge between all stakeholders will support the achievement of positive outcomes from the pilot.
- Robin Alexander provides a meaningful definition of dialogue  
“dialogue requires the willingness to engage with minds, ideas and ways of thinking other than our own, it involves the ability to:-
  - question, listen, reflect, reason, explain, speculate and explore ideas
  - analyse problems, frame hypotheses and develop solutions
  - discuss, argue, examine evidence, defend, probe and assess argument
  - see through the rhetorical games that people play in order to disguise their real intentions or deny access to the truth”

(‘Education as Dialogue’, Robin Alexander (2006))

- **Bilingualism**
  - Across the consortium 48% of the schools are bilingual or Welsh medium and 52% are English medium, thus the context of the consortium is bilingual
  - We also recognise the key contribution that schools and education makes in achieving the Commitment of the Welsh Assembly Government to a truly bilingual Wales.
  
- **Collaborative working**
  - There are a number examples of successful and developing collaborative working between schools and between local authorities.
  - Key to the model is the development of consortium working between the six authorities. Consortium working has been developing since the establishment of the consortium in 2000. Since 2005 consortium working has developed and refined the governance and operation of consortium working. We have developed a continuum of consortium working that is a flexible approach to collaborative working.
  - The consortium approach to pilot has been developed through consortium working this has included the selection of the schools, the recruitment, selection and training of the Improvement Facilitators. The established governance and operational processes that have been established will support the further development throughout the pilot.
  
- **Partnership**
  - Partnership between stakeholders is an essential element. True partnership requires the development of professional respect and trust. Key partnerships to the consortium approach are those developed between schools to support the development of common solutions to improvement matters; the local authority and their schools; the link adviser and the improvement facilitator and the local authorities through consortium working with the Assembly Government.
  - The outcomes, in respect of overall pupil performance, is a result of the close partnership between the schools and their local authority with the use of effective local knowledge and context as a key element of the partnership.

## **The Approach**

The programme will be an evaluative approach that seeks to support the individual journey each school makes towards becoming more effective in adding value to the learning of all pupils in the school.

It should be an approach that is about helping good schools get better through building upon and making the most effective use of resources available to the school – at school, local and national level.

It will build on existing good practice within individual authorities and schools through effective support and challenge, embracing parallel developments such as community-focused schools, LEA/Schools Partnership Agreements and integrated delivery of services for children, young people and families.

The approach should enable schools to achieve improved effectiveness that impacts positively on standards it should focus on the deeper characteristics and values including raising the aspirations of the whole school community.