

National Context

Background

The Welsh Assembly Government and its local authority partners believe that throughout their lifetime everyone can learn and develop and reach their full potential, given suitable support, encouragement and conditions for learning.

Continuing to improve the outcome for learners in Wales remains a key priority for the Welsh Assembly Government. 'The Learning Country: Vision into Action' makes clear that we want to build on existing knowledge about what makes effective learning settings so as to develop and improve further our education system. 'One Wales', the progressive agenda for the Government of Wales, commits the Assembly Government to giving the children and young people of Wales a first class education and to working with education providers, practitioners and parents to create the best possible schools for the future. This requires innovative thinking and practice at all levels, national, local authority and school.

The School Effectiveness Framework is the vehicle for taking forward these commitments, by aligning policies and their implementation to secure better outcomes

The Need for Improved School Effectiveness

Many children and young people in Wales achieve well and, at the end of key stages 1 and 2, their attainments compare with their counterparts in other countries. The outcomes of the Programme for International Student Assessment, (PISA) (2006), provides an international benchmark for the performance of our school system in Wales. The PISA results confirm that we have made progress across the board in children and young people's achievement. However in relation to the age, ability, gender and socio-economic circumstances of our children and young people, this progress is uneven and needs to be advanced further.

In the case of schools that add the most value, these children and young people continue to achieve well. However, we need to do more to reduce the differences in outcomes within schools (where the greatest variation lies), between schools, between local authorities and between the primary and secondary phases of education; and to raise the levels of attainment. The fact that we can identify significant variation in performance between children and young people of similar ability and with similar backgrounds, demonstrates that children and young people across Wales are not currently offered an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential.

The Moral Purpose

This knowledge underpins the moral purpose for our education system and 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. This is a matter of social justice and equity. It is also about collective responsibility. We need to be concerned about the progress of our children and young people in other settings as well as our own.

This means that highly effective headteachers need to have opportunities to support other schools and help them to support other schools them to improve learning and well being for children and young people across the system as a whole.

A Framework for Improvement and Effectiveness

As part of the overall drive for school improvement in Wales, the Assembly Government has published a School Effectiveness Framework. This Framework's development has involved the Assembly Government, local authority partners, headteachers, academics and a range of national stakeholders.

The School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) vision for improving outcomes in learning and wellbeing for the children and young people of Wales. The SEF is based upon the principles of tri-level working and the importance of systems thinking.

- **Tri-level Working**

Evidence shows that educational reform is most effective when designed and implemented collaboratively and coherently through all levels of the system: nationally, locally and at the level of the individual learning setting – a process of tri-level reform. A tri-level endeavour enables the knowledge and experience of teaching practitioners and leaders to be drawn upon; and to engage the capacity of local authorities, the Assembly Government and schools in support of children and young people's learning.

- **Systems Thinking**

Systems thinking to effect tri-level reform, as advocated by Professor Michael Fullan, requires a different kind of flow of communication and policy development. Traditionally schools have operated within a structure where central government has developed policy directions that local authorities have been responsible for passing on to, and monitoring with schools. A compliance model of inspection and funding ensured that schools implemented national policy, but it did not enable schools to have ownership or, necessarily, the flexibility to address local circumstances.

Systems thinking requires a focus at all levels, and throughout all the organisations that work to improve outcomes for children and young people as learners, to remain on what happens in the classroom. It aligns resources to ensure that practitioners are able to support individual learner needs. It advocates that schools work in cluster groups or families of schools. Most importantly, it needs to be built up at all levels and collaboration to be the natural way that people at all levels operate

The School Effectiveness Framework

The SEF is designed to bring together existing programmes of action directed at school improvement. It will build upon the work schools are already doing to manage change better, deploy resources and respond to the needs of children and young people

Sustainable improvement is not achieved through piecemeal change. Real and lasting improvement occurs when the elements identified as instrumental in achieving the desired improvement are addressed simultaneously, and in such a way that they complement one another. The diagram below outlines the interdependent areas of activity that need to be addressed if improvement for children and young people is to happen in and through schools.

The School Effectiveness Framework consists of five “themes” in the outer circle, six “elements” in the segments of the circle, each of which is further sub-divided into three of four “aspects”.



The framework applies to schools; across classroom and whole school, local authority and Assembly Government levels. To be effective, it requires each of the levels to work together and align their efforts within the same framework. For all levels there needs to be a clear ‘line of sight’ to the desired outcome of improved learning and learner wellbeing.

The School Effectiveness Framework requires the development of professional learning communities at school, local authority and national levels to build collaborative capacity and engage leaders and practitioners at all levels in meaningful professional debate and learning.

A National Purpose for Schools

As part of the Framework, the Welsh Assembly Government and its partners have developed a statement of national purpose for schools. It describes the purpose of schools as being to:

- Enable all children and young people to develop their full potential by acquiring skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes, including personal, social and emotional skills, to enable them to become economically, socially and personally active citizens and lifelong learners;
- Promote a culture of social inclusion and respect for diversity, particularly through developing the wellbeing of learners and personalising their learning;
- Establish strong professional learning communities in schools where practitioners can develop and share their professional knowledge on learning and teaching;
- Offer children and young people a curriculum that engages and motivates them to learn and to achieve their potential;
- Provide a learning community for all engaged in school life, with children and young people and their families at the centre, and including governors, teachers, other school staff and adults training to work in schools;
- Be a key player with the other schools and partner service providers in planning and delivering integrated services for children and young people to improve their well-being; and
- Provide or facilitate education so that schools contribute to meeting the needs of the community and engage the community as partners to ensure that all schools are community focussed

The school Effectiveness Framework seeks to draw together the range of programmes which address the challenges facing schools in achieving the national purpose. It contributes to the fulfilment of the new duties on local authorities and their partners to develop integrated services through their Children and Young people's Plans (CYPPs). In time it is intended to sit alongside similar frameworks for other educational settings.

The Pilot Phase

Central to the Framework's implementation is the development of a school level programme. From September 2008 to August 2009 the Assembly Government will be piloting the school level programme of the School Effectiveness Framework in each of the four local education authority consortia. To test how this can be done and whether different delivery mechanisms are appropriate in different circumstances, the Assembly Government is working with consortia to trial two approaches.

The Approaches

The first approach will involve appointing an experienced and successful headteacher or school improvement professional as an 'associate' to work with the schools in a developmental capacity. The second approach will involve consortia developing their own programme for implementing the Framework in the pilot schools. The first approach is being piloted in the South East Wales Consortium and in the North Wales Consortium while the second approach is being piloted in the South West and Mid Wales Consortium and the Central South Consortium.

Outcomes

Each pilot will need to identify the improvements sought and the performance measures to be used to evaluate effectiveness. A research programme will track progress and improvements made during implementation of the pilot phase. The expectation is that improvements within schools should start to emerge within a year, especially in the areas of system reform, improved accountability and joined up services. This should allow improvements in learning and well being to be quickly realised.

Evaluation

At the end of the pilot phase the Assembly Government will decide, in the light of the experience of the pilot phase and of its evaluation, on arrangements for rolling out the School Effectiveness Framework to all schools over a five year period. This will involve consideration of whether to adopt the use of associates across Wales or allow for a variety of approaches to suit local circumstances.

Extracts from the School Effectiveness Framework
Welsh Assembly Government, February 2008

The full School Effectiveness Framework can be found on www.sefwales.co.uk