

Education Report

1. **Teachers' professional Learning and Education in Wales.** (Joseph Champion, NAW Research Service)

The Children, Young People and Education Committee undertook an **inquiry into Teachers' Professional Learning and Education in 2017**. The report is set against a context of significant reform taking place within the education system in Wales. In 2015, Huw Lewis, then Minister for Education and Skills, referred to the implementation of Professor Furlong's "**Teaching tomorrow's teachers**" report, the "**New Deal for the Education Workforce**" and Professor Donaldson's **Successful Futures report** on the school curriculum, as a programme of "**tripartite reform**".

This "tripartite reform" is itself a part of the Welsh Government's wider educational improvement policies, such as **Qualified for Life 2014-2020**. Published in October 2014, Qualified for Life was designed to raise standards in Welsh schools. The current Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, relaunched the plan in September 2017, calling it **Education in Wales: Our national mission 2017-21**. "Developing a high-quality education profession" is one of the "four enabling objectives" of the new national mission.

The Committee is engaged in **monitoring the implementation of the Donaldson review** as part of its ongoing work programme, publishing its initial observations in January 2017. However, it also wanted to review the other aspects of the tripartite reform programme, given the central role of the teaching profession. Consequently, the inquiry focused on the:

- arrangements for continuing professional development for the current workforce;
- role of initial teacher education;
- sufficiency of the future workforce; and the
- new professional standards for teachers.

The Assembly debated the Children, Young People and Education Committee's report in Plenary on 14th March 2018. Following that debate, the Committee continued to examine the Welsh Government's work on supporting and developing the teaching workforce.

2. **Estyn Chief Inspector's 2016/17 Annual Report** (Sian Hughes, NAW Research Service). This year's Annual Report is the final report in the 2010-2017 inspection framework cycle and the Report considers outcomes for 2016/17 as well as providing an overview of outcomes across the seven years. During this period, all providers of education and training have been inspected at least once.

The publication of the Estyn Annual Report 2009-2010 marked the end of the previous six-year inspection cycle and coincided with the 2009 PISA results both of which ultimately have led to the wholesale education reform that continues today. The 2016/17 Annual Report covers the period over which education reforms have begun to be implemented. The Chief Inspector, Meilyr Rowlands, states that:

Overall, a coherent education reform programme exists for compulsory education, which addresses our main challenges and avoids the dangers of unintended consequences arising from piecemeal reform.

The review of the past seven years shows that much has changed and continues to change, and the Chief Inspector is broadly positive stating '*there is much to be proud of in the Welsh education system*'. However, the report also finds that inspection findings for the academic year 2016/17 are broadly similar to those for the last seven years as a whole.

Change in culture

One of the main messages of the report is that the biggest trend in education in Wales over the past seven years has been the **move towards a culture of self-improvement and a shift towards greater collaboration**. The Welsh Government's package of education reforms –the curriculum, initial teacher education and training and teachers' professional learning are all based on the approach of a self-improving system. This is where the key players in the education system take shared responsibility for their own improvement and for the improvement of others.

Eight key policies

As is usual, the Annual Report provides a commentary on individual education sectors, such as primary and secondary schools, youth justice and teacher education. This year, the report also looks at progress in eight specific key policy areas over the seven years. Some of the report's findings are:

- **The Foundation Phase** began in 2004/05 and was rolled out across Wales in 2009/10. In the Foundation Phase, children learn through first-hand experiential activities with 'play' providing the vehicle for learning. **The Annual Report finds that its' implementation has been inconsistent.**
- Research suggests that children do not benefit from formal learning until they are aged 6 or 7. However, the report states that many schools employ more traditional teaching methods, particularly for children aged 5 to 7, especially following the introduction of reading and numeracy tests. But, the Chief Inspector reports that, where applied as intended, children make good progress.
- **Developing literacy and numeracy skills** has been one of the Welsh Government's education priorities since the beginning of the inspection cycle, and the Welsh Government introduced the **National Literacy and Numeracy Framework** which became statutory in September 2013. Pupils need good literacy to allow them to access the whole of the curriculum. Numeracy is an essential skill that enables pupils to apply numerical facts and skills to real-life problems. The Chief Inspector reports that pupil literacy has improved and have had a positive effect on standards. Numeracy has also improved, but remains a priority.
- The Welsh Government introduced the **Digital Competence Framework** in September 2016, the first aspect of curriculum reform in Wales. Digital competence is one of three cross-curricular responsibilities, alongside literacy and numeracy, although the Digital Framework is not yet statutory. Although improving ICT skills has been a Welsh Government goal since 2008, the Annual Report finds that pupil progress in ICT has not advanced at the same rate as the significant advancements in technology over the past seven years.

- **Tackling the effects of disadvantage** has also been a Welsh Government priority and there have been a number of initiatives and strategies to support this. The Annual Report finds that schools have a stronger focus on tackling the effects of disadvantage than at the start of the inspection cycle. However, it finds that there is still a need to raise standards for pupils living in poverty as they still do not achieve as well as their peers. The most recent Welsh Government statistics (December 2017) show that at Key Stage 4, 41.3 per cent of pupils who are eligible for free school meals achieved the Level 2 threshold (the Level 2 threshold measure equals 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C or the vocational equivalent) compared to 73.6 per cent who are not eligible for free school meals. Estyn have also submitted written evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's Targeted Funding to Improve Educational Outcomes inquiry.
- As mentioned above, **the shift towards collaboration** is one of the biggest trends over the last seven years. According to the OECD, school to school working provides the means of circulating knowledge around the system. It provides an alternative way of supporting struggling schools and develops collective responsibility. Estyn's Annual Report found that **nearly all schools are involved in some form of partnership working with other schools. However, the majority of schools were unable to identify whether, or how, school to school working had an impact on pupil standards.**
- The Welsh Government's **Welsh-medium education strategy** was published in 2010. The Chief Inspector reports on Welsh-medium education across all sectors. He found that, from a low starting point, there has been an increase in the number of Welsh or bilingual learning activities in further education in recent years. However, too few Welsh learners continue their studies in Welsh or bilingually in further education or work-based learning. A shortage of Welsh speaking staff is a significant obstruction to expanding provision in the majority of colleges.
- The Chief Inspector's report states that **leadership** is the key factor in achieving the best possible learner outcomes. Its importance has also been recognized by the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams' announcement in November 2016 of the establishment of a new, arms-length **National Academy for Leadership**. Estyn's overall **judgements on leadership have been good or better in around 75 per cent of primary schools and around half of secondary schools. This has changed little over the cycle.** In a quarter of primary schools and four in ten secondary schools, leadership requires improvement.

Other observations

- Similarly to previous years, the Chief Inspector reports that although there are many strengths in some areas (nursery settings, maintained special schools and further education colleges) variability remains a challenge in most other sectors;
- Over the seven years, 77 per cent of inspection judgements have been good or better (71 per cent good and 6 per cent excellent). Twenty three per cent of judgements have been less than good (20 per cent adequate and 3 per cent unsatisfactory);
- The strongest areas of education across most sectors are in relation to learner well-being, care support and guidance and learner environment;
- Standards, teaching and learning experience and improving quality are relatively weaker;

- As reported in last year's Annual Report, on average, outcomes are better in primary schools than secondary schools. One of the main differences is the effect of external exams which are strongly linked to accountability systems such as school categorisation and school performance measures. The Report suggests that there is a danger that exam entry policy and advice given to pupils on the qualifications they study may be driven by accountability. This may also result in 'teaching to the test' focussing too much on exam technique rather than providing a broad education;
- In further education and work-based learning, mergers have resulted in a smaller number of large providers. Over the past seven years, the number of further education colleges have reduced from 22 to 13 and the number of work-based learning providers has reduced from 78 to 19. The resulting new leadership teams have benefited from the strengths of the constituent institutions and built on the advantages of the critical mass provided by the large institutions. Inspection outcomes have improved overall in these sectors over the cycle.

What does Estyn actually look at when it inspects schools and other settings?

Estyn uses a Common Inspection Framework, which was introduced at the start of the current cycle in September 2010. This framework consists of three key questions on 'how good' are outcomes, provision, and leadership and management. Estyn then forms two overall judgements about the current performance and prospects for improvement of each setting according to a four-point scale: Excellent; Good; Adequate; Unsatisfactory.

Estyn publishes data on its inspection outcomes. This provides details of all inspection judgements since the start of the current inspection framework cycle in September 2010.

Changes to the inspection system and Estyn too?

Estyn introduced a new inspection approach in September 2017. Schools, independent specialist colleges, pupil referral units and work-based learning providers will be judged under five inspection areas:

- Standards
- Wellbeing and attitudes to learning
- Teaching and learning experiences
- Care, support and guidance
- Leadership and management.

The increased emphasis on wellbeing is a positive feature of the new inspection framework. It also features prominently in the Welsh Government's education action plan, Education in Wales: Our National Mission [PDF1.91MB], published in September 2017.

Providers will be judged using a four point scale: **Excellent; Good; Adequate and needs improvement; and Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement.**

In July 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and the Chief Inspector announced that Professor Graham Donaldson had been asked to undertake an independent review of the role of Estyn in supporting education reform. This action was proposed by Meilyr Rowlands. The Terms of Reference of the Review include establishing the ways in which Estyn's contribution to improving the quality of Welsh education could be further enhanced and outline implications for the future operational requirements of Estyn. Professor Donaldson is expected to report before June, 2018.

Estyn is also expected to report this year on the provision of RE in Wales.

3. **New publication from WASACRE: Managing The Right of Withdrawal from RE**

The Wales Association of SACREs (WASACRE) has published this valuable and comprehensive guide for schools and parents. It provides advice and information around the right of parents to withdraw their children from religious education. The guide includes helpful sections on legislation; minimising situations that might lead to requests for withdrawal; suggestions for managing requests for withdrawal; case studies; the views of different religious and non-religious groups on religious education; consideration of whether requests are based on reasons of prejudice; and requests for withdrawal from visiting places of worship.

The document is produced bilingually in English and in Welsh and costs £8.99. Copies can be obtained via Amazon or from Books at Press.

4. **Reforming the post 16 education sector.** On 5 December 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, set out the Welsh Government's response to the 'Public Good and a Prosperous Wales – Building a reformed PCET system' white paper, launched in June 2017. This white paper sets out the Welsh Government's response to the Hazelkorn Review. On the whole it seems that the Welsh Government's proposals to develop a unified post 16 sector in Wales have received 'broad support' from the sector. This unification would stem from the introduction of a new strategic body: the tertiary education and research commission for Wales. Issues for debate include whether sixth forms should be part of the PCET system and the research capacity of the sector. Discussions and consultations are still ongoing.

5. **PCW Code of Practice for Primary and Secondary school visits.** On 16 January, 2018 a Skype meeting took place between the Rev. W. Bryn Williams, Rev. Gwyn Rhydderch, Rheinallt Thomas, Ffion Williams, Nia Williams, Sarah and myself, to develop a short guidance document (enclosed) for ministers and church workers who wish to visit and present faith perspectives in a school setting. It was agreed that the document would be trialled and revised if necessary at a later stage.

6. **Wales Humanists has called for full membership on Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs),** which oversee the subject in schools. The Wales Association of SACREs said the issue stems from a governing Circular document (1994) which states only religious denominations can be full members. Humanists can currently only become co-opted members, which does not give them full voting rights. The Welsh Government said it was looking into the issue.

7. **Free Churches Council for Wales**

As the FCCW Education representative, I attended the FCEC two day residential meeting at the Westhill and Woodbrooke centres, Birmingham on 14/15 March 2018. The following agenda items were presented or discussed:

- Guest speaker presentation by Dr Cheron Byfield, Founder of the King Solomon I International Business School, Birmingham. Dr Byfield's presentation focused on her successful attempt to establish a new Free School in a deprived area of Birmingham;

- All day discussion, in pairs and plenary, of the FCG draft document: *Life in All its Fullness, The Free Churches and Schools: a report and recommendations from the FCEC*. I drew attention to the fact that the report is written from an England only perspective. Following discussion, it was agreed that I present the report and this issue to FCCW members to see what might be possible with regard to bringing a Welsh perspective to the existing document or presenting an alternative Wales focused document;
 - *REforming Christianity* – A new resource for KS 2-4. See www.freechurches.org.uk (password: education) These resources have been commissioned by the Free Churches Group and The Methodist Church, sponsored by the Westhill Endowment and produced in association with RE Today Services. We (FCCW) had previously discussed and noted our interest last year in translating and adapting these resources into Welsh for Welsh medium secondary schools. Following some discussion in Birmingham it was agreed that if FCCW members were still in favour of this development, then we would need to make a Grant Funding bid for the work. This would entail costs relating to translation and adaptation by a competent RE person.
8. I have regularly sent **Welsh Government Dysg eNewsletters and Estyn reports** to the Rev Jeff Williams.

Vaughan Salisbury