

## *Executive summary*

Wales is committed to providing high-quality and inclusive education for all its citizens. It in 2011 embarked on a large-scale school improvement reform that has become increasingly comprehensive and focused on the ongoing development and implementation of a new, 21st century school curriculum. Wales considers the development of schools as learning organisations (SLOs) a key means for empowering them to bring the new curriculum to life.

This report supports Wales in realising this objective. It assesses the extent to which schools in Wales have developed as learning organisations, and identifies areas for further improvement – at both school and system levels. The study is part of OECD's efforts to support countries in the design and effective implementation of their education policies, grounding these efforts on evidence, and multidisciplinary tools and approaches.

### **Schools as learning organisations in Wales**

A school as a learning organisation has the capacity to change and adapt routinely to new environments and circumstances as its members, individually and together, learn their way to realising their vision. Wales has set out to develop all schools as learning organisations in support of the ongoing curriculum reform.

This assessment has shown that:

- The majority of schools in Wales seem well on their way towards developing as learning organisations ...
- ... however, a considerable proportion of schools are still far removed from realising this objective.
- Schools are engaging unequally with the seven dimensions that make up Wales' SLO model.
  - Schools appear to be progressing well on the SLO dimensions “promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff” and “embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning”.
  - Two dimensions are less well developed: “developing a shared vision centred on the learning of all students” and “establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration”. Many schools could also do more to “learn with and from the external environment and larger system”.
- Secondary schools are finding it more challenging to develop as learning organisations.
- More critical reflections are needed for deep learning and sustained progress to take place. High-stakes assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements

may have been a factor influencing people's willingness to critically reflect on their own behaviour, that of their peers and the school organisation at large.

Although schools need to be adequately supported to develop as learning organisations, many actions are within their control. There are school examples that show how budget pressures do not necessarily lead to a reduction in ambitions.

School leaders play a vital role in creating a trusting and respectful climate that allows for open discussions about problems, successful and less successful practices, and the sharing of knowledge. This is also essential for narrowing the gaps in perceptions between staff. The ongoing review of assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements in Wales should be used to encourage people to do things differently and engage in critical reflections.

Teachers and learning support workers also need to do their part to work and learn with colleagues beyond their department, subject area or school. Engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues, learning with and from staff in other schools – including between primary and secondary schools – and drawing from the support provided by regional consortia (i.e. school improvement services) are some of the means that staff have at their disposal.

### **System-level policies enabling schools to develop into learning organisations**

- Promoting a shared and future-focused vision centred on the learning of all students calls for reviewing the school funding model and developing a national definition of student well-being and ways of monitoring it.
- The development of professional capital and a learning culture in schools argues for: 1) basing selection into initial teacher education on a mix of criteria and methods; 2) promoting collaborations between schools and teacher education institutions; 3) prioritising professional learning in enquiry-based approaches to teaching and learning, strengthening inductions and promoting mentoring and coaching, observations and peer review; 4) a coherent leadership strategy promoting learning organisations across the system; and 5) greater support for secondary school leaders.
- Assessment, evaluation and accountability should promote SLOs through: 1) national criteria guiding school self-evaluations and Estyn (i.e. the education inspectorate) evaluations; 2) a participatory self-evaluation process; 3) Estyn evaluations safeguarding school quality, while focusing more on the rigour of self-evaluation processes; 4) clarifying the transition to a new system of school evaluations; 5) aligning performance measures to the ambitions of the new curriculum, and 6) system monitoring through sample-based student assessments, Estyn reports and research.

### **Realising schools as learning organisations**

To support the effective implementation or “realisation” of Wales’ SLO policy we looked at the four determinants that can facilitate or hinder this process, resulting in the following recommendations:

- Develop an easy-to-understand narrative that explains how Wales’ SLO model forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform

- Continue strengthening the capacity of regional consortia to support schools developing as learning organisations
- Estyn to monitor the progress of consortia in enhancing and streamlining their services to schools
- Enhance the collaboration and alignment between the development of assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements, and the curriculum
- Continue the SLO Implementation Group to support the realisation of Wales' SLO policy, while striving for greater policy coherence
- Expand the public dialogue generated by PISA results to align it to the ambitions of the new curriculum.

Wales has started developing an SLO implementation plan. This should form an integrated part of larger reform effort. This report has identified several issues that call for further action for which recommendations are provided. These aim to inform the development of the implementation plan.

Furthermore, attention should be paid to:

- The setting of objectives and the monitoring of progress should not become a high-stakes exercise for schools.
- Task allocation. Regional consortia play a pivotal role in supporting schools in their change and innovation journeys. Higher education institutions and other parties could complement the system infrastructure.
- The timing and sequencing of actions. One urgent action is to clarify the transition period to the new approaches to school self-evaluations and Estyn evaluations.
- A communication and engagement strategy with education stakeholders.





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