

Assessment and recommendations

Introduction

Wales is committed to providing high-quality and inclusive education for all its citizens. However, the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results showed it was a long way from realising this commitment, sparking a national debate on the quality and future of education in Wales. In response, in 2011 Wales embarked on a large-scale school improvement reform and introduced a range of policies to improve the quality and equity of its school system. Since then, education reform has become increasingly comprehensive and is focused on the ongoing development and implementation of the new school curriculum.

Wales considers the development of schools as learning organisations (SLO) a means for realising the new curriculum (see Box 1). 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 (Kools and Stoll, 2016^[1]). Accomplishing this will require concerted efforts and means that teachers, teaching support staff, school leaders and many other people involved in bringing the new curriculum to life will need to expand their skills and learn new ones. The development of a thriving learning culture in schools across Wales is considered essential for making this happen.

This report, *Developing Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales*, aims to support Wales in realising this objective (Welsh Government, 2017^[2]). It assesses the extent to which schools in Wales have developed as learning organisations, giving an indication of schools' "readiness for change", and identifies areas for further improvement at both school and system levels. The assessment has been guided by three questions:

- To what extent do the key characteristics of a learning organisation already exist in schools in Wales? (Chapters 2 and 3)
- Are Wales' system-level policies enabling (or hindering) schools to develop as learning organisations? (Chapter 4)
- How can Wales ensure the effective implementation or "realisation" of its schools as learning organisations policy? (Chapter 5)

These last two questions stem from the knowledge that, although many of the actions proposed by Wales' SLO model are within the control of schools, local authorities, parents and communities, some warrant policy action and a conducive context to enable and empower them to make this transformation.

Box 1. The schools as learning organisations model for Wales

The SLO model for Wales focuses the efforts of school leaders, teachers, support staff, parents, (local) policy makers and all others involved into realising seven dimensions in its schools. These seven action-oriented dimensions and their underlying elements highlight both what a school should aspire to and the processes it goes through as it transforms itself into a learning organisation. All seven dimensions need to be implemented for this transformation to be complete and sustainable.

Figure 1. The schools as learning organisations model for Wales



The realisation of the “four purposes” of the new school curriculum is placed at the heart of the model. These refer to developing children and young people into “ambitious capable and lifelong learners, enterprising and creative, informed citizens and healthy and confident individuals”.

Wales’ SLO model was designed through a process of co-construction. It was developed by the School as a Learning Organisation Pilot Group, which is part of the Professional Development and Learning Pioneer Schools Network that is supporting the development and implementation of the new school curriculum (Annex B). The developmental work was shaped through a series of workshops and meetings that were facilitated by the OECD between November 2016 and July 2017. The result of this collective effort is Wales’ SLO model that was released in November 2017.

Source: Welsh Government (2017^[31]), “Schools in Wales as learning organisations”, <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales/curriculum-for-wales-curriculum-for-life/schools-in-wales-as-learning-organisations/?lang=en>.

Schools as learning organisations assessment

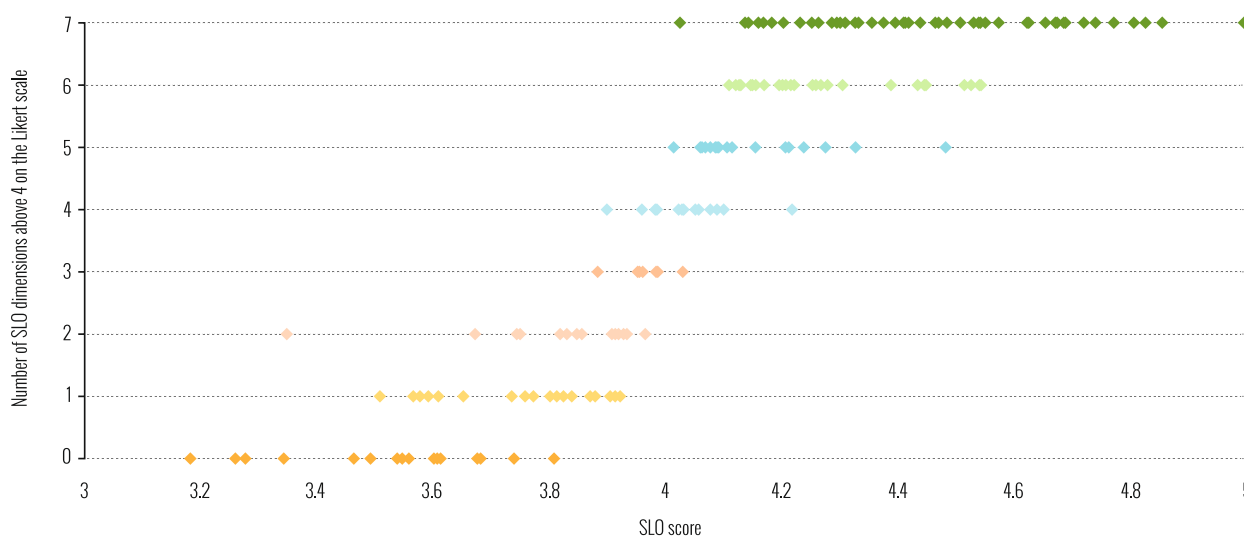
Following an introduction to Wales and its school system, this assessment report explored the extent to which the key characteristics of a learning organisation exist in schools in Wales. Using Wales' SLO model as a point of reference, a mixed-methods study design was used to identify strengths and areas for further development. The main findings of this assessment are presented below.

Key findings: Overview

The majority of schools in Wales seem well on their way towards developing as learning organisations ...

According to the views of school leaders, teachers and learning support workers (i.e. Higher Level Teaching Assistants, Teaching Assistants, Foreign language assistants, Special needs support staff) the majority of schools in Wales are well on their way in putting the schools as learning organisations model into practice. The Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) survey data (when aggregated to the school level) suggests that just under six out of ten schools (58%) in our sample had put five to seven dimensions of the learning organisation into practice. Out of these about one-third (30%) had put all seven dimensions into practice (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Schools in Wales developing as learning organisations



Note: Data were analysed at the school level. The SLO survey items were generated in the form of five-point Likert scale: 1) strongly disagree; 2) disagree; 3) neutral 4) agree; and 5) strongly agree. N: 174 schools. Four schools of the 178 were not taken into consideration as their staff had not completed the survey for all seven dimensions. An average school score of 4 or more across the survey items that make up one dimension was defined as the threshold for when a school is considered to have put the dimension into practice. Each point represents a school.

Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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The data however also suggest that a considerable proportion of schools are still far removed from realising this objective; 12% of schools had put three or four dimensions in practice, while 30% of schools has realised only two or fewer. Some 10% of schools in

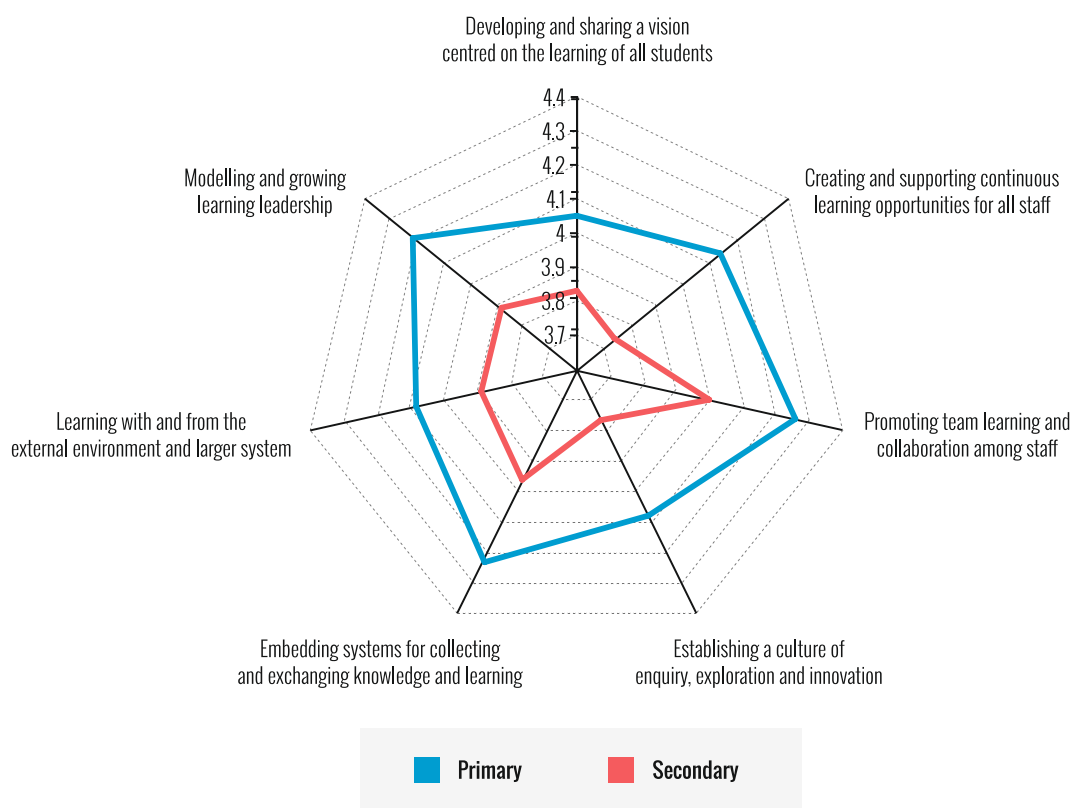
our sample seem to have made insufficient progress in developing any of the seven dimensions.

... these however are optimistic estimates. More critical reflections are needed for deep learning and sustained progress to take place

These findings should be interpreted with some caution. First, they are based on one source of self-reported data and, although satisfactory, the response rate to the SLO survey was lower than hoped for. Additional data and interviews with stakeholders by the OECD team on some occasions found discrepancies with the SLO survey data and supported the conclusion that school staff need to be more critical about their own performance and that of their schools if deep learning and sustained progress are to take place. Several of those interviewed noted that the high-stakes assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements are likely to have negatively influenced people's willingness, and in some cases even their ability, to critically reflect on their own behaviour, that of their peers and the school organisation at large.

Key findings for the seven schools as learning organisations dimensions

The assessment of the seven dimensions that make up Wales' SLO model shows schools are engaging in these to different degrees (see Figure 3). A general conclusion is that schools appear to be progressing well on the dimensions "promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff" and "embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning", while two dimensions are considerably less well developed: "developing a shared vision centred on the learning of all students (learners)" and "establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration". The text below elaborates on these and other findings.

Figure 3. Average score per SLO dimension, by school type

Note: Data are analysed at the school level. The survey items were generated in the form of five-point Likert scale: 1) strongly disagree; 2) disagree; 3) neutral; 4) agree; and 5) strongly agree. An average school score of 4 or more across the survey items that make up one dimension was defined as the threshold for when a school is considered to have put the dimension into practice. N is 151 for primary schools and 23 for secondary schools.

Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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Developing and sharing a vision that is centred on the learning of all students

About 53% of schools in our sample had developed a shared vision centred on the learning of all students (an average school score of 4 or more on the Likert scale across the survey items that make up this dimension) – the lowest proportion of the seven SLO dimensions. While 56% of primary schools would seem to have developed such a vision, this was significantly lower among secondary schools (30%). Responses on the SLO survey items that make up this dimension also varied considerably.

Nine out of ten school staff (92%) reported that their school had a vision that focuses on students' cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes, including their well-being. A similar proportion (87%) reported that their school's vision emphasised preparing students for their future in a changing world. These are encouraging findings considering the ambitions set out in Wales' new school curriculum. However, further work will be needed to make such a vision into one that is truly shared among its staff and other key stakeholders. The involvement of staff, parents and external partners in the shaping of the vision are areas for improvement. For example 72% of respondents to the SLO survey

indicated they were involved in the development of the school's vision, with significant differences by school type: 77% of primary school staff and 57% of secondary school staff.

Also, as is common in other countries, secondary schools in Wales seemingly find it more challenging to engage parents in the educational process and school organisation than primary schools (Borgonovi and Montt, 2012^[4]; Byrne and Smyth, 2010^[5]; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003^[6]). This issue is further discussed below.

Furthermore, various sources point to the conclusion that many schools in Wales are yet to put this shared vision that is centred on the learning of all students into practice. For example, PISA 2015 found that schools in Wales have relatively high levels of low performers and pointed to several areas of student well-being where further progress could be made, such as students' schoolwork-related anxiety and sense of belonging in school (OECD, 2017^[7]; OECD, 2016^[8]).

Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff

The evidence suggests that many schools in Wales have, or are in the process of developing, a culture that promotes professional learning for their staff. Around 59% of schools in our sample would seem to have created and supported continuous learning opportunities for all staff. The SLO survey data revealed some significant differences between school types: almost two-thirds of primary schools (64%) would seem to have created and supported continuous learning opportunities for all staff (as reflected by an average score of 4 or more on this dimension). Among secondary schools this was around a quarter (26%).

Various sources of data and information also showed that induction and mentoring/coaching need to be strengthened in many schools across Wales. Some 35% of respondents to the SLO survey for example disagreed or were unsure whether there were mentors or coaches available in their school to help staff develop their practice (Table 1).

Table 1. Induction and mentoring and coaching support

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
All new staff receive sufficient support to help them in their new role	2.3%	7.8%	19.6%	44.5%	25.8%
Mentors/coaches are available to help staff develop their practice	2.5%	10.8%	22.1%	42.7%	22.0%

Note: Data are analysed at the individual level. N: 1 633 and 1 634 individuals respectively for the presented SLO survey statements.

Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

As Wales has embarked on a curriculum reform, teachers and learning support workers will need to expand their pedagogical and assessment skills. This will make mentoring, coaching and other forms of continuous learning even more important.

Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff

The evidence suggests that about seven out of ten schools in our sample (71%) are promoting team learning and collaboration among all its staff. Primary schools are faring better on this dimension; 75% of primary schools in our sample appear to promote team learning and collaboration among all staff, compared to 48% of secondary schools. Schools could still do more to ensure that staff learn to work together as a team, more regularly observe each other and tackle problems together. For example, some 25% of staff disagreed or were unsure whether staff in their schools observed each other's practice and collaborate in developing it. Similarly, about 20% of staff were unsure or did not agree that staff thought through and tackled problems together. In both cases, teachers were most likely to respond critically.

This assessment pointed to further differences in perceptions across different staff categories on several of the elements that make up this dimension. For example, PISA 2015 found that 92% of head teachers in secondary schools in Wales reported that teacher peer review was used to monitor teachers, compared to an OECD average of 78% (OECD, 2016^[8]). We have to interpret this data with some caution, as the evidence from our assessment suggests that teachers and learning support workers in Wales do not always share the views of their head teachers. For example, while 92% of secondary head teachers positively responded to the SLO survey statement “staff observe each other's practice and collaborate in developing it” in their schools, only 67% of teachers responded in a similar vein. While there are bound to be some differences in perceptions between staff categories, as some staff may simply be better informed due to the nature of their work, the sometimes sizable differences reported on this dimension (and others) suggest the need for more professional dialogue and sharing of information. This is again particularly an area for improvement in secondary schools.

Establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration

The OECD team were struck by a change in attitudes compared to the OECD 2014 review. That review found an education profession that seemed less open and willing to change and innovate their practice, with some school staff reporting signs of reform fatigue (OECD, 2014^[9]). The many interviews by the OECD team with school staff, policy makers and other stakeholders suggest this situation to have changed considerably. However, the OECD team found that this general change in mindset is yet to materialise in a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration in four out of ten schools in Wales (41%).

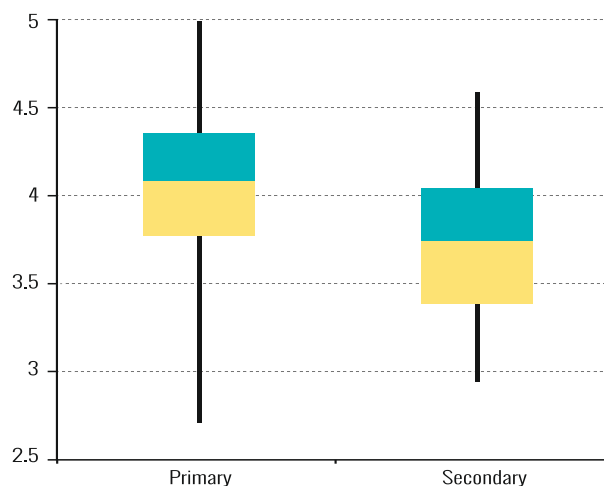
These findings may partially be explained by the high-stakes assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements that are believed to have tempered people's willingness and confidence to do things differently and innovate their practice. This would seem particularly the case for secondary schools – the SLO survey data found just 26% of secondary schools in our sample had established a culture of enquiry, exploration and innovation, compared to 63% of primary schools (see Figure 4). Other data sources corroborate this pattern.

Despite recent steps to move towards a new assessment, evaluation and accountability framework, school staff expressed uncertainties about what this framework will actually look like. Greater clarity is thus urgently needed to give all schools the confidence to engage in enquiry, innovation and exploration of the new curriculum

Exploring the individual level responses to the SLO survey data revealed some significant differences across the four regions of Wales for several of the statements that make up

this dimension, but also across the staff categories and levels of education (see Chapter 3). For example, while 96% of head teachers indicated that in their school staff were encouraged to experiment and innovate their practice, this proportion dropped to 82% among learning support workers. Interestingly this is one of the few SLO survey items on which learning support workers reported the lowest score from the different staff categories.

Figure 4. Average school scores on establishing a culture of enquiry, exploration and innovation, by school type



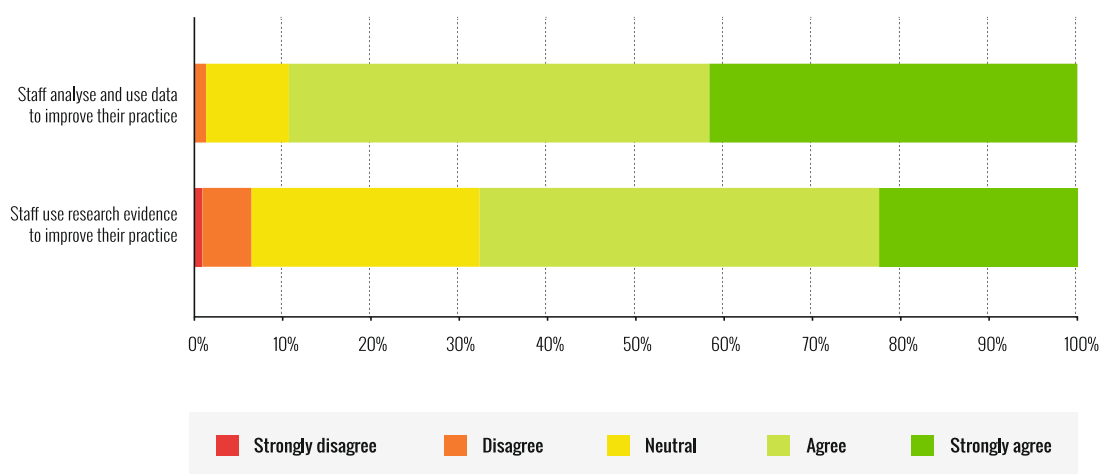
Note: Data are analysed at the school level. N: 174 schools. The box plots show the average school scores sorted into four equal sized groups, so 25% of all scores are placed in each group. The median (middle quartile) marks the mid-point of the data and is shown by the line that divides the box into two parts, in green and yellow. The middle “box”, in green and yellow, represents the middle 50% of scores for the group.

Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning

The interviews with stakeholders and findings from an earlier OECD assessment (2017_[10]) suggest that systems for measuring progress seem well established in schools. The SLO survey data suggest that 70% of schools in our sample had put this dimension into practice, with embedded systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning. Again, there were significant differences between primary and secondary schools: 76% of primary schools and 30% of secondary schools would seem to have embedded such systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning. However, while the evidence suggests that the use of data is common in many schools across Wales, considerably fewer schools seem to be using research evidence to inform practice (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Staff use of data and research evidence to improve their practice

Note: Data analysed at the individual level. N: 1 604 and 1 595 individuals respectively for the presented SLO survey statements.

Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

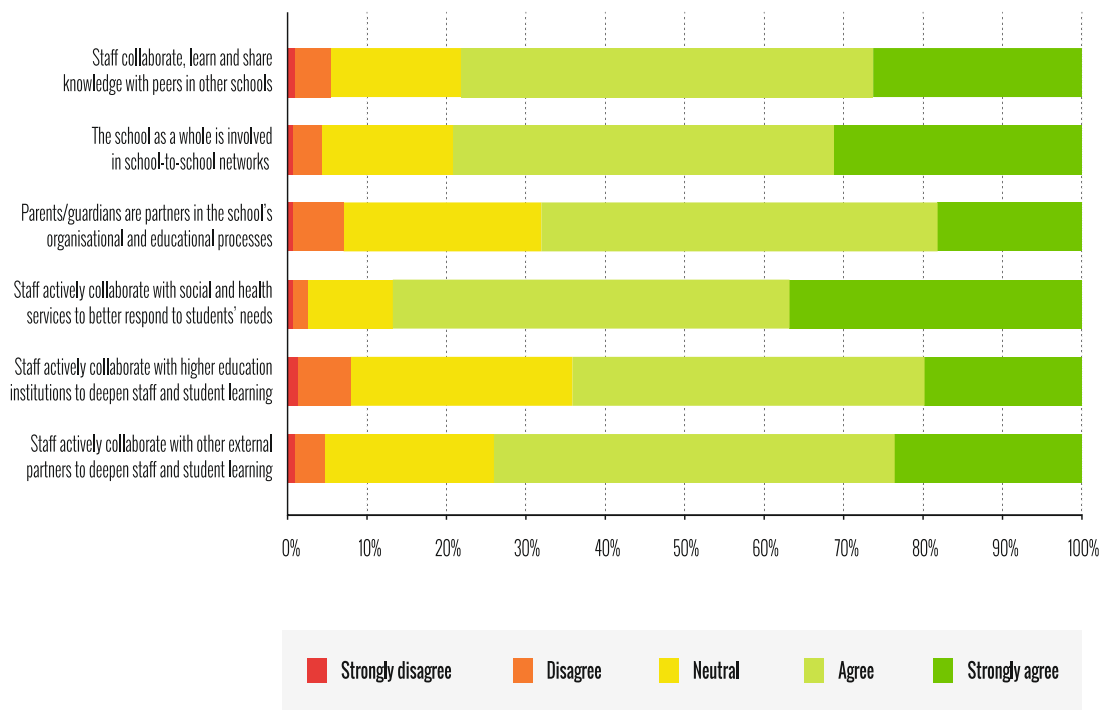
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Interviews and a review of policy documents and reports revealed that another area for improvement is the quality of school self-evaluations and development planning. Schools – as well as other parts of the system – spend considerable time and effort on analysing and upward reporting on a wide variety of mostly quantitative data, with far less attention being paid to qualitative sources, like classroom observations or peer review, for learning. The assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements, which have focused attention on quantitative performance measures, are believed to have contributed to this practice. Part of the challenge also lies in the lack of a common understanding of what good school self-evaluation and development planning entails in Wales.

Learning with and from the external environment and larger system

Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system is common practice in just over the majority of schools in our sample (55%). Differences between primary and secondary schools were relatively small for this dimension (the smallest among all dimensions) – with 57% of primary and 39% of secondary schools having an average score of at least 4.

One area for improvement is the engagement of parents and guardians in the educational process and organisation of the school (Figure 6). This is a particular challenge for secondary schools: only 57% of secondary school staff agreed that parents or guardians were partners in their schools' organisational and educational processes, compared to 71% of staff in primary schools.

Figure 6. Collaboration with external partners

Note: Data analysed at the individual level. N: 1 593, 1 597, 1 592, 1 589, 1 593 and 1 592 individuals respectively for the presented SLO survey statements.

Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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There are also differences in responses between staff categories, with teachers consistently being the most critical. PISA 2015 found that secondary head teachers in Wales in 2015 almost unanimously reported that their school created a welcoming atmosphere for parents to get involved (99%) and provided families with information and ideas for families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning (98%) (OECD, 2017^[7]). A further eight out of ten (79%) secondary head teachers reported that their school included parents in decision making (OECD average 78%). The SLO survey data and interviews provide a more critical perspective on the engagement of parents in the school's organisational and educational processes. The OECD team recognise it may be more challenging to engage parents of secondary students in the school organisation and education process, than at the primary level. However, as examples in this report show, it is possible to increase parental engagement, even at secondary level (see Chapter 3, Box 3.5).

Another area for improvement is collaboration with higher education institutions. The interviews revealed that stakeholders across the system are well aware of this challenge and are taking measures to improve the situation.

The SLO survey found that close to nine out of ten respondents (87%) reported that staff in their school actively collaborated with social and health services to better respond to students' needs. However, other data sources suggest Wales' school funding and

governance model affects schools' ability to respond to the additional learning needs of all students.

Modelling and growing learning leadership

The SLO survey data suggest that about two-thirds (67%) of schools in our sample have leaders that are modelling and growing learning leadership. Primary schools also appear to be doing better for this: 70% of primary schools seem to have leaders that are modelling and growing learning leadership, compared with 39% of secondary schools.

One area for development is coaching by leaders of those they lead and the creation of settings in which trust can develop over time so that colleagues are more likely to engage in mutual learning. For example, 38% of teachers were unsure or did not agree that in their schools, leaders coached those they led.

Similarly, 13% of primary school staff and 16% of secondary school staff did not agree that leaders in their ensured that all actions were consistent with the school's vision, rising to 19% of primary teachers and 27% of secondary teachers. PISA 2015 also found that Wales was below the OECD average for ensuring that teachers work according to the school's educational goals (OECD, 2016^[8]). This suggests that secondary head teachers in Wales could place a greater emphasis on ensuring their schools' actions reflect its vision and goals, and communicating these efforts better with their staff.

The generally high scores on this dimension were also contrasted by other data sources such as OECD team interviews and Estyn reports. The analysis of other SLO dimensions also points to several areas for further improvement. School leaders play a vital role in the promotion and strengthening of induction programmes, mentoring/coaching, peer review and creating a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration in their schools. The establishment of these and other conditions for a learning culture to develop across the whole school organisation is particularly an area of improvement for leaders in secondary schools.

Points of reflection and action for schools

The evidence suggests that the majority of schools in Wales are well on their way in developing as learning organisations. Two dimensions however are considerably less well developed and deserve particular attention: “developing a shared vision centred on the learning of all students” and “establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration”.

Although schools need to be adequately supported and enabled to develop into learning organisations, many actions are within the control of schools themselves. School leaders play a vital role in creating the conditions for a learning organisation to develop. They need to be supported in taking on this responsibility.

Teachers and learning support workers however need to also 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 external partners, and drawing from the support provided by regional consortia are some of the means that staff have at their disposal.

Staff also need to more critically reflect on their own and their school's performance if deep learning and sustained progress to take place – and they need to be empowered to do this. School leaders play a pivotal 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 will also be essential to narrow the gaps in perceptions between staff about their own and schools' performance. The ongoing review of assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements should be used to encourage and give people the confidence to do things differently and engage in critical reflections.

Secondary schools also clearly face more challenges in developing as learning organisations. Their more compartmentalised structure, which makes it harder to collaborate across departments and the organisation as a whole, is believed to be a factor in this. Also some leaders in secondary schools do not do enough to encourage a learning culture across the whole school organisation. This while the success of the curriculum reform will (among other things) depend on staff engaging in collective and cross-curricular learning and working, within and across schools.

However, this assessment also identified several examples of secondary schools that exhibit the dimensions of a learning organisation, demonstrating that it is possible.

Finally, although policy action will be required to reduce the variability in school funding between schools in similar circumstances, schools have the ability to take measures to ensure staff have the time and resources to engage in collaborative working and learning. The examples presented in this report show how budget pressures do not need to lead to a reduction in ambitions. Such examples should be systematically collected and shared widely to inspire and inform other schools in their change and innovation efforts. System assessment for developing schools as learning organisations

System assessment of the conditions for developing schools as learning organisations

System-level policies enabling schools to develop as learning organisations

Building on the qualitative and quantitative analysis (including the SLO survey), OECD team visits to Wales and stakeholder events, this report explored the question of whether Wales' system-level policies are enabling (or hindering) schools to develop as learning organisations. The following policy recommendations are aimed at empowering school staff, local partners and middle-tier agencies to develop their schools as learning organisations.

Policy issue 1: Promoting a shared vision centred on the learning and well-being of all students

The development of an inclusive and shared vision that promotes the learning and well-being of all students is central to the first dimension of Wales' SLO model. The realisation of the "four purposes" of the new school curriculum is also at the heart of the model. These refer to developing children and young people into "ambitious capable and lifelong learners, enterprising and creative, informed citizens and healthy and confident individuals" (Welsh Government, 2017^[11]; Donaldson, 2015^[12]).

The evidence suggests that this vision is widely shared throughout the school system. This is a strength of the curriculum reform effort. How well the four purposes are really understood by the education profession in terms of what they will actually mean for their daily practice is hard to judge. Putting them into practice will challenge practitioners' understanding and skills. This should be taken into consideration by policies supporting the development of professional capital and a thriving learning culture.

Furthermore, Wales' school system is based on equity guidelines. It has expressed a strong commitment to equity in education and student well-being (Welsh Government, 2017^[2]) and has implemented various policies such as the Pupil Deprivation Grant and free school meals to target equity challenges in the school system. However, two issues call for urgent policy attention: the school funding model and the lack of a common understanding of what student well-being entails.

Policy issue 1.1: Wales' school funding model challenges equity

The evidence suggests that differences in local funding models are causing concerns about unequal treatment of schools in similar circumstances. The Welsh Government should therefore consider reviewing its school funding model if it is to realise its ambitions for equity in education and student well-being.

Recognising that a large overhaul of the funding model may not be feasible in the short or medium term, a concrete short-term action could be to conduct an in-depth analysis of school funding in Wales to explore a funding model that promotes greater equity and efficiency. For this it could look to countries and economies like the Flemish Community of Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania and the Netherlands that have established funding formulas to promote equity while increasing efficiency (OECD, 2017^[13]; OECD, 2016^[14]). For example, Lithuania defined the maximum proportion of funding municipalities can reallocate. This was adjusted several times to ensure sufficient funding was allocated to schools.

Policy issue 1.2: Student well-being needs to be defined and measured

Another challenge to realising Wales' commitment to equity and student well-being is the lack of a common understanding of and way(s) of monitoring the well-being of children and adolescents in Wales. The lack of clarity on and measurement of the concept has been recognised in Wales' new strategic education plan. The plan states the intention of the Welsh Government to work with partners, in Wales and beyond, to develop effective measurements of student well-being (Welsh Government, 2017^[2]).

The first step will be to reach a common understanding of the concept, considering the equity and student well-being challenges in Wales. Schools will need guidance and support to respond to these challenges. The pilot of a national school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit that is scheduled to start in autumn 2018 provides a further reason to speed up this work.

Box 2. Recommendations promoting a shared vision centred on the learning of all students

Policy issue 1.1: Wales' school funding model challenges equity

Recommendation 1.1.1: Review the school funding model to realise Wales' commitment to equity and student well-being. The Welsh Government should consider conducting an in-depth analysis of school funding in Wales to explore a funding model that promotes greater equity and efficiency.

One option to explore is limiting the funding that local authorities are allowed to reallocate, excluding school transport costs to take into account the differences in population density. It should carefully monitor any such change in policy and adjust this threshold as needed to ensure sufficient funding is allocated to schools.

Policy issue 1.2: Student well-being needs to be defined and measured

Recommendation 1.2.1: Develop a national definition of student well-being and provide guidance and instrument(s) for monitoring it. This work should be fast-tracked so that the definition and supporting measurement instruments and guidance could be field tested as part of the piloting of the national school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit that is likely to start in autumn 2018 (see below). The field testing should allow for any necessary revisions to be made and the guidance and measurement instrument(s) to be shared with schools by September 2019 (i.e. the start of the academic year 2019/20).

Policy issue 2: Promoting the development of professional capital and a thriving learning culture

Schools as learning organisations reflect a central focus on professional learning of all staff, aimed at creating a sustainable learning culture in the organisation and other parts of the (learning) system. Wales has made good progress in several areas here, including the promotion of school-to-school collaborations and the clarification of professional expectations through its teaching and leadership standards.

Several issues deserve further policy attention, however, including the finding that high-quality inductions, coaching and mentoring, peer review, and enquiry-based teaching and learning are not yet well established across schools in Wales. Collaboration with higher education institutions also leaves scope for improvement. There also seem to be capacity challenges for school leaders, in particular among secondary school leaders, and those in leadership positions at other levels of the system.

Policy issue 2.1: Establishing stronger collaborations between schools and teacher education institutions

Many OECD countries have in recent years raised entry requirements for teacher education programmes (Schleicher, 2011^[15]), and this includes Wales. However, this has been limited to raising entry grades. Teaching in the 21st century is a complex and challenging profession that calls on a mix of high-level cognitive and socio-emotional skills on a daily basis. Following the examples of systems like England, Finland and the Netherlands, Wales should consider making use of intake procedures and selection options that go beyond formal degree requirements. For example, Finland selects secondary graduates based on exam results, a written test on assigned books on pedagogy, observations in school situations and interviews (Sahlberg, 2010^[16]).

Furthermore, partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools can benefit both partners but such collaborations are not common practice in Wales. One positive development is that the new accreditation requirements for higher education institutions offering initial teacher education programmes emphasise partnerships with schools. Schools should also play their part in establishing such potentially fruitful collaborations, however. The school self-evaluation process should recognise the contribution of schools to teacher education institutions more publicly. Furthermore, schools, higher education institutions, regional consortia and the Welsh Government should continue to invest in specific projects that promote such collaborations (see Chapter 3, Box 3.17).

Box 3. Recommendations promoting professional capital and a thriving learning culture

Policy issue 2.1: Establishing stronger collaborations between schools and teacher education institutions

Recommendation 2.1.1: Base selection into initial teacher education on a mix of criteria and methods. In line with the teaching and leadership standards, teacher education institutions should expand and pilot more elaborate, well-rounded selection criteria and intake procedures that cover a mix of cognitive and socio-emotional skills, values, and attitudes. Attention should be paid to assessing aspiring teachers' aptitude for teaching the new curriculum and engaging in continuous professional learning.

Recommendation 2.1.2: Promote strong collaborations between schools and teacher education institutions. In addition to the new teacher education programmes' accreditation process, the ongoing reviews of school evaluation (i.e. of self-evaluations and Estyn evaluations) should be used to encourage schools to establish sustainable partnerships with teacher education institutions. Schools, higher education institutions, regional consortia and the Welsh Government should continue investing in specific projects to help realise and grow such innovations, for example for strengthening induction programmes and/or promoting enquiry-based teaching and learning.

Policy issue 2.2: Promoting learning throughout the professional lifecycle

This assessment identified three priority areas for professional learning where further policy action would seem warranted. First, is the development of the skills and mindset for engaging in enquiry, exploration and innovation. This is believed to be of great importance for putting in practice the new curriculum that is being shaped around “big ideas” (Sinnema, 2017^[17]) or, as it is often referred to in Wales, “what matters”. This is particularly a challenge for secondary schools. The high-stakes assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements are believed to have tempered people's willingness and confidence to do things differently and innovate and engage in enquiry-based practices. The implications for the ongoing review of assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements are discussed below.

Recognising that enquiry-based approaches are challenging to implement and that there are concerns about teachers' abilities to conduct quality assessments, Wales needs to make a concerted effort to develop practitioners' skills in enquiry-based teaching and learning to ensure all schools in Wales are able to develop into learning organisations and to put the curriculum into practice. The national approach to professional learning that is under development to support the curriculum reform should therefore also focus on developing practitioners' skills in enquiry-based approaches. Higher education institutions are well placed to contribute to this effort. Wales could look to the example of British Columbia, Canada where school-to-school networks promote enquiry-based approaches on a large scale, while investing in the development of leadership capacity (see Chapter 4, Box 4.4).

Second, the evidence suggests there are challenges in terms of the number and quality of induction programmes in Wales, again, particularly in secondary schools. Wales has a mandatory one-year induction period for all newly qualified teachers – although not for learning support workers, who make up a large proportion of the school workforce. The Welsh Government and the regional consortia should explore ways to strengthen

induction programmes to safeguard and enhance the quality of Wales' future education workforce. They could look to the example of the Netherlands which has piloted providing starting secondary teachers with a three-year induction programme that has been shaped in a collaboration between teacher education institutions and schools (see Chapter 4, Box 4.3) – a partnership of benefit to both partners.

Third, the evidence suggests that coaching/mentoring, classroom observations and peer review are not yet well established in schools throughout Wales. Once again the evidence points to more challenges in secondary schools. School leaders play a pivotal role in establishing the conditions for such collaborative practice to thrive and should be held to account for doing so. The OECD team learned this does not always happen in some local authorities. School leaders will need the necessary support and capacity development to take on this role. Part of the challenge is that school evaluations have insufficiently promoted coaching and mentoring, classroom observations, peer review and other forms of collaborative practice. The ongoing review of school evaluation processes should take these findings into consideration. The integration of Wales' SLO model into the national school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit will be important for promoting such collaborative practices.

Box 4. Recommendations promoting professional capital and a thriving learning culture

Policy issue 2.2: Promoting learning throughout the professional lifecycle

Recommendation 2.2.1: Prioritise the following areas for professional learning:

- Investing in the skills and mindset for enquiry, exploration and innovation to thrive and putting the new curriculum into practice. The national approach to professional learning that is being developed to support schools in putting the curriculum into practice should include developing teachers' and learning support workers' skills in enquiry-based approaches. Higher education/teacher education institutions are well placed to contribute to these efforts. The new assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements (see below) should also encourage schools to explore new ways of doing things, engage in enquiry and innovate their practice.
- **Strengthening induction programmes.** The Welsh Government and the regional consortia should explore ways to strengthen induction programmes. Partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools should be promoted because of the benefits to both partners. Learning support workers should not be overlooked.
- **Promoting mentoring and coaching, observations and peer review.** School leaders play a pivotal role in promoting such collaborative practices and should be held accountable for this. However, they also need to be adequately supported in taking on this responsibility. Regional consortia should review their support services in light of these findings and prioritise support for secondary schools. The integration of Wales' SLO model into the national school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit will be important for promoting such collaborative practice.

Policy issue 2.3: Developing learning leadership in schools and other parts of the system

The need to invest in present and future school leaders and leaders at other levels of the system is well recognised in Wales. Wales has taken several steps recently to support their capacity development, some of which relate directly to the development of SLOs. These include the launch of the National Academy for Educational Leadership, the decision to integrate Wales' SLO model into all leadership development programmes (e.g. through the Academy for Educational Leadership endorsement process) and the commitments made by the Welsh Government's Education Directorate (and possibly other directorates) and several middle-tier organisations to themselves develop into learning organisations.

However, one finding that deserves policy attention is that many secondary schools are clearly finding it more challenging to develop into a learning organisation than primary schools. The recently established National Academy for Educational Leadership, which oversees the roll-out of support and development of education leaders in Wales, should pay particular attention to secondary school leaders. The regional consortia need to focus their efforts more strongly on the secondary sector and review their support services accordingly, and promote school-to-school collaboration not only between secondary schools but also with primary schools. The latter would seem relevant as significantly more primary schools appear to have developed as learning organisations, and it may also facilitate the transition of students between one level of education to the next.

Many governors are not doing enough to effectively fulfil their role as critical friend and often do not exert sufficient influence on school self-evaluation and development planning. The ongoing review of school self-evaluation and development planning provides an opportunity to revisit governors' roles and identify their development needs. In addition, many local authorities have undergone high levels of staff turnover in leadership positions. The evidence points to the need for further investments in the capacity of middle leaders and challenge advisors in the regional consortia.

These findings support earlier OECD findings that a concerted effort is needed to develop the leadership capacity across all levels of the system and to make leadership a driver of the reform effort (OECD, 2017^[10]). Although some progress has been made recently, leadership development is yet to become the driving force behind the curriculum reform in Wales. The National Academy for Educational Leadership and other stakeholders may therefore look to education systems like Ontario, British Columbia in Canada, and Scotland, that have made significant investments in developing the capacity of school and system-level leaders, including those of middle-tier agencies.

Box 5. Recommendations promoting professional capital and a thriving learning culture

Policy issue 2.3: Developing learning leadership in schools and other parts of the system

Recommendation 2.3.1: Develop and implement a coherent leadership strategy that promotes the establishment of learning organisations across the system. Under the leadership of the National Academy for Educational Leadership, Wales should consolidate and speed up efforts to strengthen leadership capacity at all levels in the system. It should develop and implement a leadership strategy that promotes school leaders and other system leaders to develop their organisations into learning organisations.

Recommendation 2.3.2: Provide greater support to secondary school leaders and ensure they have the capacity to develop their schools as learning organisations. The National Academy for Educational Leadership should pay particular attention to the capacity development of secondary school leaders, making sure to include middle-level leaders. The regional consortia should also focus on supporting secondary school leaders. Collaborations between primary and secondary school leaders could be promoted. Future reviews of the (teaching and) leadership standards should place greater emphasis on school leaders' role in self-evaluations and development planning.

Policy issue 3: Assessment, evaluation and accountability should promote schools developing into learning organisations

Major improvements can be achieved when schools and school systems increase their collective capacity to engage in ongoing “assessment for learning”, and regularly evaluate their interventions. However, if accountability demands dominate the ability to use the evaluation of data and information for the purpose of learning, sharing knowledge to support change and innovation, and taking collective responsibility for enhancing students' learning and well-being schools are unlikely to develop into learning organisations. Assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements therefore play a pivotal role in empowering educators to do things differently and innovate their practice.

Wales' assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements are currently undergoing review. This review is essential, as the existing arrangements lack coherence and are driven by accountability demands, rather than serving the purpose of learning and improvement.

Accountability plays an important role in safeguarding the quality of schools and the system at large, so the new assessment, evaluation and accountabilities should be implemented in a careful way to prevent unintended effects and encourage schools to engage in enquiry, innovation and exploration – a particular area for improvement for many schools in Wales.

Policy issue 3.1: Student assessments should put student learning at the centre

The work of the Pioneer Schools and other measures proposed in the action plan to strengthen teachers' assessment skills are important considering long-standing concerns about the capacity of teachers to conduct quality assessment. One promising step forward is the ongoing development of adaptive online personalised assessments that will replace paper-based reading and numeracy tests and that are scheduled to be extended to other areas of the new curriculum in the coming years. Another step forward is the planned

review of qualifications which will be essential for aligning assessments and evaluations to the new curriculum.

Furthermore, the Welsh Government has indicated its plans to measure student well-being. This should start with defining the concept and developing guidelines and instruments for schools to use – see Recommendation 1.2.1.

Policy issue 3.2: School evaluations should serve the primary purpose of learning and improvement

The national school categorisation system is widely considered to be an improvement on its predecessor, but is still perceived by many as a high-stakes exercise due to the public colour coding of schools. According to those interviewed by the OECD team, this has led to “gaming” and stigmatisation of schools. The categorisation system and Estyn’s inspection framework are also not well aligned and many see school self-evaluation as something done “for Estyn”. In addition, there are a variety of self-evaluation and development guidelines and tools. The result is that schools do not have a clear picture of what is expected of them in terms of self-evaluation and development planning. This is believed to have contributed to the variable quality of these activities.

The ongoing development of a national school self-evaluation and development toolkit is an important policy response to these challenges. A working group has been charged with its development and could follow the example of many OECD countries and use the question “what is a good school?” to inform the establishment of common criteria for school self-evaluations and Estyn evaluations. For example, Scotland developed the publication *How Good is Our School?* (Education Scotland, 2015^[18]) which has inspired school evaluations in several OECD countries (OECD, 2013^[19]) could serve as a source of inspiration. Aspects to consider when developing criteria or quality indicators should include:

- **Focusing attention on student learning and well-being across the full breadth of the curriculum.** The new curriculum won’t be available until January 2020 so this transition period will have to be carefully managed. For the immediate future, the Welsh Government has proposed retaining national performance indicators for the key subjects of English/Welsh, mathematics and science, but it should go beyond these. An additional action could be to require schools to have processes in place to monitor and support students’ well-being. Such an indicator would give an important signal to schools that the new assessment, evaluation and accountability framework aims to cover the whole of the new curriculum.
- **Wales’ SLO model and its underlying dimensions:** this will be vital for promoting a learning culture in schools across Wales.
- **Staff professional learning and well-being:** the development of SLOs, the ongoing curriculum reform and reported staff workload challenges all suggest attention should be paid to the professional learning and well-being of staff.
- **Student and parental engagement:** the findings of this assessment support the establishment of criteria that focus attention on facilitating student and parental engagement in the organisation and educational processes of schools, although this might be best as a cross-cutting measure.

Wales’ SLO model also calls for school development plans to be based on learning from continuous self-evaluation that uses multiple sources of data for feedback. Contrary to common practice in many schools in Wales, self-evaluations should not just engage staff

and students, but also the broader school community including school governors, parents, other schools, and possibly others to identify strengths, challenges and priorities for improvement. Following the examples of countries like Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands (OECD, 2013^[19]), peer reviews among schools should complement this process. The variable quality of school self-evaluations and the proposed changes argue for investing in the capacity of all those involved in the process.

The regional consortia commonly review school self-evaluations and development planning as part of the national categorisation system and this should be continued. As many stakeholders the OECD team met have suggested, discontinuing the colour coding of schools would seem key to giving schools the confidence to do things differently and innovate their practice – as long as sufficient checks and balances are built into new assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements to monitor progress and identify those schools that are not faring well and/or are in need of additional support.

Furthermore, Estyn has a key role to play in promoting SLOs through its external evaluation arrangements. It should encourage schools to develop their own capacity for self-evaluation (i.e. be about learning) and focus on identifying strengths and priorities for improvement. The proposed criteria for school self-evaluations and Estyn's external evaluations will be an important means for this and could allow Estyn to focus on monitoring the rigour of the process of school self-evaluations and development planning, as is done in countries like Ireland, Scotland and New Zealand. There will still need to be sufficient checks and balances in place to safeguard the quality of schools.

In addition, the grading of schools into four categories (i.e. excellent, good, adequate and needs improvement, and unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement) by Estyn has driven many schools to focus on gathering evidence to meet the requirements of the inspection framework, rather than using self-evaluation for the purpose of learning. The proposed common criteria for school self-evaluations and Estyn evaluations will be an important response to this challenge. As recently proposed by Graham Donaldson (2018^[20]), Estyn may need to temporarily reconsider this grading system to give school staff the confidence to change and innovate their practice. These changes call for sustained investments in developing the skills and attitudes of Estyn inspectors.

The Welsh Government is considering a transition period to introduce the changes to the assessment, evaluation and accountability framework and is engaging schools and other stakeholders in defining it. The OECD team agree schools should be provided with clarity on the transition as soon as possible to unleash the energy and willingness of people to engage in enquiry, exploration and innovation.

Box 6. Recommendations on assessment, evaluation and accountability promoting SLOs

Policy issue 3.2: School evaluations should serve the primary purpose of learning and improvement

Recommendation 3.2.1: Develop national criteria for school quality to guide self-evaluations and Estyn evaluations. These criteria or quality indicators should promote Wales' SLO model, monitor student learning and well-being across the full breadth of the curriculum, recognise staff learning needs and their well-being in staff development plans that in turn inform school development plans, and give students and parents a voice in organisational and educational matters. These and potentially other criteria or quality indicators should encourage schools to give an account of their own strengths and priorities for improvement – and as such should be about learning and improvement, rather than primarily serving the purpose of accountability.

Recommendation 3.2.2: School self-evaluations should be shaped through a participatory process involving the wider school community. Self-evaluations should involve staff, students, school governors, parents, other schools, higher education institutions and possibly others to identify priorities. Peer reviews among schools should complement this process. Regional consortia should furthermore continue to review school self-evaluations and development planning but this process should no longer result in the public colour coding of schools. A condition for doing so is that sufficient checks and balances are built into new assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements.

These changes also call for substantial investment in the capacity of all those involved in self-evaluations and development planning. The pilot of the school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit should be used to identify the professional learning needs of all parties involved. Guidelines and tools should be part of the toolkit.

Recommendation 3.2.3: Estyn evaluations should safeguard the quality of schools, while focusing on the rigour of schools' self-evaluation processes and development planning. Estyn should promote schools' development of their own capacity for self-evaluation (i.e. be about learning) and focus on identifying strengths and priorities for improvement. It could focus more on monitoring the rigour of the process of self-evaluations and development planning in those schools that have shown to have the capacity for conducting quality self-evaluations. Sufficient checks and balances – as proposed in this report – would need to be in place, however, to monitor progress and identify those schools that are not faring well and/or are in need of additional support. These changes call for sustained investment in developing the skills and attitudes of Estyn inspectors.

Recommendation 3.2.4: Provide clarity to schools and other stakeholders on the transition to the new system of school self-evaluation and Estyn evaluations. Schools should be provided with clarity on the transition period as soon as possible to unleash the energy and willingness of people to engage in enquiry, exploration and innovation.

Policy issue 3.3: System-level monitoring and evaluation should promote learning – at all levels of the system

During the course of this assessment the Welsh Government’s Education Directorate revealed its initial ideas for system-level evaluation through a number of “quality indicators” – rather than through the current range of mostly quantitative indicators. This is a positive development but the initial proposals do not seem to align sufficiently with the ambitions of Wales’ SLO model and the new curriculum. For example, while the suggestion was made to give schools the freedom to determine key performance indicators based on local needs, national indicators for the key subjects of English/Welsh, mathematics and science would remain. These indicators are likely to continue to drive behaviour if no further actions are proposed. One option would be to consider indicators on student and staff well-being. This would underline the message that the intent is to move towards a new assessment, evaluation and accountability framework that responds to the full breadth of the curriculum, while recognising the importance of staff well-being.

Furthermore, teacher assessments of student performance at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3 are currently also used to monitor progress of schools and the system. This double purpose has made them high stakes and has challenged their reliability. Therefore, referring back to the recommendations of the *Successful Futures* report (Donaldson, 2015^[12]) and following the examples of countries and economies like the Flemish Community of Belgium, Finland and New Zealand (OECD, 2013^[19]), national monitoring of student learning and well-being should be informed by sample-based assessments instead.

In addition, Estyn could play a prominent role in the system-level monitoring of progress towards meeting the four purposes of the curriculum. Estyn’s annual and thematic reports lend themselves well for this. These should draw on a wider range of evidence rather than on school evaluations alone, including PISA, the sample-based assessments proposed above and relevant research. It may look to the example of the Dutch Education Inspectorate whose annual report, *The State of Education in The Netherlands*, draws from various sources, including school inspections, results from national and international student assessments and research evidence (Inspectorate of Education of the Netherlands, 2017^[21]).

Box 7. Recommendations on assessment, evaluation and accountability promoting schools developing into learning organisations

Policy issue 3.3: System-level monitoring and evaluation should promote learning – at all levels of the system

Recommendation 3.3.1: Performance measures should go beyond the key subjects of English/Welsh, mathematics and science – also in the transition period. The Welsh Government should consider performance measures (indicators) on student well-being and staff well-being – initially in the form of a process indicator until measurement instruments have been developed. This will be essential to align assessment, evaluation and accountability with the ambitions of the new curriculum and Wales’ SLO model.

Recommendation 3.3.2: National monitoring of student learning and well-being should be informed by a rolling programme of sample-based assessments and Estyn reports, as well as research. These assessments should replace the use of teacher assessments of student performance at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3. There could be a timetable over a period of years with a single topic of the curriculum being assessed each year. Furthermore, Estyn’s annual and thematic reports should be used to monitor progress in realising the four purposes of the curriculum. These reports should draw on a wider range of evidence, including the proposed sample based assessments, PISA and relevant research.

Realising schools as learning organisations

The strategic education action plan, *Education in Wales: Our National Mission* calls for all schools in Wales to develop as learning organisations (Welsh Government, 2017^[2]). This policy was made more concrete through the launch of Wales’ SLO model (see Box 1) that was developed through a series of stakeholder workshops and meetings facilitated by OECD. To support the effective implementation – or, as it is often referred to in Wales, its “realisation” – we looked at the four determinants that can facilitate or hinder this process: smart policy design, stakeholder engagement, a conducive context and an effective implementation strategy (Viennet and Pont, 2017^[22]).

Implementation issue 1: Policy design: Enhance the policy justification, its logic and its feasibility

To enhance a policy’s implementation potential – in this case the policy to develop all schools in Wales as learning organisations – it is important for it to be well justified, that is to be built on evidence and respond clearly to a need; to complement other policies; and to be feasible (Viennet and Pont, 2017^[22]). The evidence suggests Wales’ SLO policy has been well received by the education profession. Its justification and logic and its place in the larger curriculum reform effort is starting to be understood by parts of the education profession and other stakeholders in Wales, although there is clearly more work to be done here. Progress has also been made in recent years to strengthen the system infrastructure that is to support schools in developing as learning organisations.

Three issues call for further attention to ensure all schools are able to develop as learning organisations: better communication on the “why” and “how” of the SLO model, careful monitoring of the education budget and a review of the school funding model to ensure adequate funding for schools to develop as learning organisations, and the system infrastructure for developing schools as learning organisations.

Implementation issue 1.1: Improving the communication of the justification and logic of Wales’ SLO policy and how it forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform and relates to other policies

For several years, the Welsh Government has been striving for policy coherence. It has been increasingly successful, but has not always been that successful in communicating its achievements in this area. It needs to do more to explain to schools and others at different levels about why this model was developed, how it can guide schools in their development and how it forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform effort and relates to other policies such as the new teaching and leadership standards. An accessible narrative that explains all this should form a key component of the communication

strategy of a national SLO implementation plan and the curriculum reform more generally.

Implementation issue 1.2: Ensuring the education budget and school funding model support schools developing as learning organisations and putting the curriculum into practice

In terms of the feasibility of developing schools as learning organisations in Wales, the findings of this assessment suggest that although the majority of schools are making good progress towards developing as learning organisations, a considerable proportion are still far removed from achieving this objective and would need substantial support to make this transformation. However, only 40% of schools were invited to participate in the SLO survey as part of this study. A wider roll-out scheduled during the autumn term 2018 will significantly increase national engagement. It is obvious that some of our findings and recommendations have resource implications. Future resource requirements will have to be carefully estimated to inform the development of the proposed SLO implementation plan (see below).

The Welsh Government's fiscal situation – a decrease in the education budget compared to previous years, a trend that is expected to continue in the future – places further impetus on looking for ways to increase efficiency in public spending in education. It also calls for exploring creative and innovative ways of establishing a learning culture in and across schools with the resources available to them. Welsh Government should, as mentioned, consider reviewing its school funding model and using the proposed in-depth analysis of school funding in Wales to respond to concerns about unequal treatment of schools in similar circumstances as a result of different local funding models – see Recommendation 1.1.1.

Implementation issue 1.3: Continuing to strengthen the system infrastructure for supporting schools in their change and innovation efforts

A positive development is the progress made in recent years in providing resources and developing the system infrastructure, especially the school improvement services provided by regional consortia, to support schools in changing and innovating their practices in line with Wales' SLO model. Several challenges and areas for further improvement remain however.

- Realising the curriculum reform and developing SLOs are both likely to increase demand for support by schools, meaning the regional consortia will all need to be well organised and managed to respond to these demands.
- The regional consortia, to varying degrees, still emphasise challenging schools (by challenge advisors) rather than providing them with support and promoting a learning culture although they have recently started changing their operations to shift the balance. The regional consortia should continue investing in their staff, especially their challenge advisors who are the first points of contact for schools, to enhance their ability to develop schools into learning organisations and support schools in putting the new curriculum into practice.
- While there are examples of good collaboration between the consortia, for example on the development of Wales' SLO model, in other areas there is scope for deepening their collaboration and co-ordination – and lessening the competition between them. The senior management of the regional consortia have a vital role to play in this.

- Furthermore, more progress could be made on the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the regional consortia's school improvement services. Estyn should continue to monitor the progress consortia are making and ensure they collectively look for ways to enhance their services to schools. The same applies to the continued monitoring of local authorities.

Higher education institutions have also increasingly engaged with the school system, thereby expanding Wales' system infrastructure. This development however is still in its infancy. Several recommendations have been made in this report to promote such "win-win" collaborations.

Box 8. Recommendations for realising schools as learning organisations

Implementation issue 1.1: Improving the communication of the justification and logic of Wales' SLO policy and how it forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform and relates to other policies

Recommendation 1.1.1: Develop an easy-to-understand narrative that explains how Wales' SLO model can guide schools in their development, forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform and relates to other policies like the teaching and leadership standards, and contributes to realising the objective of a self-improving school system. This narrative should be shared widely through various means, including policy documents, blogs and presentations by policy makers.

Implementation issue 1.3: Continuing to strengthen the system infrastructure for supporting schools in their change and innovation efforts

Recommendation 1.3.1: Continue strengthening the capacity of the regional consortia to support schools developing as learning organisations. The Regional consortia should:

- **Continue their efforts to provide greater support to schools and promote a learning culture**, with less emphasis on challenging schools and greater attention to the secondary sector. Regional consortia should optimise their structures and services to be able to meet the demands for support by schools that are likely to grow because of the curriculum reform. Consortia should pay particular attention to enhancing challenge advisors' skills to support schools in establishing a learning culture and putting the new curriculum into practice.
- **Continue expanding and deepening collaborations and co-ordination between consortia.** The senior management of the consortia have a vital role to play in this, including by encouraging and facilitating their staff to work together on projects and activities, and explore ways to reduce duplications and streamline services.
- **Continue improving the monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of their services provided to schools.**

Recommendation 1.3.2: Estyn should continue to monitor the progress the consortia are making in enhancing and streamlining of their services to schools. Local authorities should continue to also be monitored by Estyn.

Implementation issue 2: Continuing the process of co-construction for the realisation of SLOs across Wales, while supporting greater policy coherence

Whether and how key stakeholders are recognised and included in the design and implementation process is crucial to the success of any policy (Spillane, Reiser and Reimer, 2002^[23]; Viennet and Pont, 2017^[22]). The process of co-construction which characterises the reform approach in Wales has played a pivotal role in ensuring a strong ownership of policies and has helped bring about greater policy coherence (OECD, 2017^[10]).

Despite the progress made, the OECD team identified several examples where there is scope for greater policy coherence. One such example is the ongoing development of the assessment, evaluation and accountability framework which does not seem to be sufficiently connected to the work on the development of the curriculum by the Pioneer Schools. There is also a need to better co-ordinate the ongoing work on the development of system-level key performance indicators with the development of the school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit. Failing to co-ordinate and align these strands of work may result in a lack of coherence between the curriculum and the assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements (OECD, 2013^[19]) which in turn puts the whole curriculum reform effort at risk.

Wales' SLO policy was also initially not directly linked to related policy areas, as it had not been fully integrated into the current reform narrative. However, the Welsh Government and other stakeholders have recognised the need for greater coherence with other policies and have taken steps to bring it about, such as integrating the SLO model into leadership development programmes.

Furthermore, the OECD team found significant differences in the extent and ways in which regional consortia have engaged with schools in their regions to disseminate the model and support them in putting it in practice. Continuing the work of the SLO Implementation Group may help ensure co-ordination and collaboration between the regional consortia and other stakeholders, to collectively look for the best ways to support schools in developing as learning organisations. Although room needs to be left for regional variance, one important step forward will be the intended joint formulation of a national SLO implementation plan that is partially made up of regional action plans.

However, the implementation group should have a clearer role in supporting the Welsh Government's efforts for greater policy coherence, aimed at realising the curriculum in schools throughout Wales. This includes co-ordinating and collaborating with those working on the establishment of a national professional learning model, the development of a school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit, and other related working groups. Additional stakeholders may also be engaged in the process. For example, the Education Workforce Council could be invited to join this working group given its mandate as the national regulator and promoter of professionalism and high standards within the education workforce.

Box 9. Recommendation for realising schools as learning organisations

Implementation issue 2: Continuing the process of co-construction for the realisation of SLOs across Wales, while supporting greater policy coherence

Recommendation 2.1: Enhance the collaboration and alignment between the various work strands on the development of assessment, evaluation and the curriculum. The ongoing development of the assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements and the work by the Pioneer Schools on the curriculum and assessment arrangements call for better co-ordination. Similarly, is there a need to better co-ordinate and align the ongoing work on the system-level key performance indicators and the school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit. Failing to co-ordinate and align these work strands may lead to a lack of coherence and put the whole curriculum reform at risk.

Recommendation 2.2: The SLO Implementation Group should continue to support the realisation of Wales' SLO policy, while striving for greater policy coherence. The group should lead the development of an SLO implementation plan (see below), monitor progress in realising Wales' SLO policy and ensure further action is taken when necessary. The group should continue to support greater policy coherence, including through collective working and learning about how best to support schools in their innovation journeys. It should furthermore co-ordinate with and collaborate with other working groups, most immediately in the areas of professional learning and school self-evaluation and development planning, and agencies such as the Education Workforce Council.

Implementation issue 3: Continue shaping, monitoring and responding to the changing institutional, policy and societal context

The successful implementation, or realisation, of a policy is more likely when it takes into account the institutional, policy and societal context in which the policy is to be put into practice (Viennet and Pont, 2017^[22]). In Wales, the institutional, policy and societal context has been conducive to large-scale education reform, and a wide range of stakeholders from all levels of the system have been fully engaged in shaping the process (OECD, 2017^[10]).

The involvement of schools and other stakeholders in the development of Wales' SLO model has supported its ownership by the education profession. Furthermore, increasing alignment with and integration into other policies, like the leadership development programmes or the development of school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit, have helped place the SLO on the agenda of regional consortia and Education Directorate governance bodies like the Change Board.

This current fertile ground for reform is also contributing to schools' willingness to engage with Wales' SLO model. There are some contextual issues, however, that should be monitored and responded to in order to realise the SLO policy. There is a need to expand the public dialogue generated by PISA results to align it to the ambitions of the new curriculum. Wales should also ensure its governance arrangements enable all schools in Wales to develop as learning organisations and as such respond to the learning and other needs of all its students.

Implementation issue 3.1: The need to broaden the public dialogue generated by PISA results

The broad support for education reform in Wales was initially triggered by the disappointing 2009 PISA results. These served as a catalyst for public discussion on the future of education in Wales and resulted in a broad conviction in Welsh society that things needed to change. The resulting education reform has evolved into the current curriculum reform, of which Wales' SLO policy is a part. This reform is ongoing and it will surely take time for its results to transpire.

There were concerns expressed to the OECD team that if the PISA 2018 results did not show sufficient improvement in student performance, some may use this as evidence against the curriculum reform. However, it would be too soon to draw such conclusions as the whole curriculum will only be made available in April 2019, so the PISA 2018 results would not yet reflect any change.

Furthermore, attention should be paid to broadening the public dialogue on student performance to align it to the ambitions of the new curriculum. International comparisons of literacy, numeracy and science could be complemented with more in-depth analysis of the data in areas such as factors influencing student performance, collaborative problem-solving skills, and student motivation for learning and well-being. These are at the heart of Wales' ambitions for the new curriculum but are often overlooked in the public debate when PISA results are released in Wales. A more explicit recognition of such skills in the system-level monitoring of PISA results by the Welsh Government and Estyn may support broader discussions on the learning and well-being of students in Wales.

Implementation issue 3.2: The need to optimise governance arrangements to enable all schools in Wales to develop as learning organisations

The deployment of the SLO model in Wales has been designed with the current institutional arrangements in place. Representatives from various institutions of the three tiers of the education system (see Chapter 1) have been engaged in its development and will play a key role in helping schools make this transformation and shaping how Wales' SLO model is used in the future to support the wider curriculum reform effort.

This assessment has identified that one barrier to enabling all schools in Wales to develop as learning organisations is the current school governance model, which (among other issues) hampers the provision of services for students with additional learning needs (ALN). Evidence suggests that several of the 22 local authorities, especially the smaller ones, lack the capacity – both human and financial – to respond to the growing need for support for this group of students. Interviews and other sources of data suggest this situation has contributed to inequalities in schools' abilities to respond to the learning needs of all students – which is central to the first dimension of Wales' SLO model (Welsh Government, 2017^[3]).

A new system for ALN is intended to respond to this challenge. Wales has developed an ALN Transformation Programme to support its realisation. This includes the establishment of five new positions, the “ALN transformation leads”. Four of these are operating at the regional level and are responsible for supporting local authorities, schools, early years settings and local health boards as they prepare for and implement the new system (Welsh Government, 2018^[24]). The Welsh Government should – as it intends to do – carefully monitor the progress made in developing the cross-sector collaboration and multi-agency work practices that are fundamental to the success of the new ALN

system. If progress is lacking further action should be taken. This may require further optimisation of the governance structure.

A second potential barrier to the curriculum reform effort could be the possible reform of public services that is currently being considered in Wales. If this decision is indeed made to reduce the number of local authorities and restructure public services accordingly, the Welsh Government may want to consider delaying any immediate action on it, to help ensure all efforts remain focused on bringing the new curriculum to life in schools across Wales.

Box 10. Recommendation for realising schools as learning organisations

Implementation issue 3: Continue shaping, monitoring and responding to the changing institutional, policy and societal context

Recommendation 3.1: Expand the public dialogue generated by PISA results to align it to the ambitions of the new curriculum. Skills such as collaborative problem solving, and student motivation for learning and their well-being are central to the four purposes of the new curriculum but are often overlooked in public discussions about PISA in Wales. More explicit recognition of such skills in the system-level monitoring of PISA results by the Welsh Government and Estyn could help support a constructive and broader discussion about how PISA can inform the learning and well-being of students in Wales.

Recommendation 3.2: Continue monitoring the effectiveness of recent and possible further changes to governance structures to ensure all schools in Wales are able to developing as learning organisations and realise the ambitions of the new curriculum for all students.

Implementation issue 4: The need for a coherent implementation plan

While this report was being finalised, work had started on the development of an SLO implementation plan intended to form an integrated part of larger reform effort. Several activities have been taken already, are planned or ongoing that should be part of this plan. These include:

- the establishment of the SLO Pilot Group (see Box 1) (September 2016)
- the inclusion of the objective to develop all schools and other parts of the system into learning organisations in the education strategic action plan *Education in Wales: Our National Mission* (September 2017)
- the co-construction and release of Wales' SLO model (November 2017)
- the integration of the SLO model into leadership development programmes (autumn 2018)
- the ongoing development of the school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit in which the model is likely to be integrated (started in May 2018)
- ongoing development of an animation aimed at children and young people that explains Wales' schools as learning organisation model and its relation to the curriculum reform

- scheduled workshops for the regional consortia's challenge advisors (July 2018)
- ongoing development of an online SLO self-assessment survey that can be freely used by school staff (scheduled to be launched November 2018)
- ongoing efforts by the Welsh Government and several middle-tier organisations to develop into learning organisations.

The OECD team agree these are all important activities to support schools in their development efforts. However, this assessment has identified several other issues and policy areas (see above) that call for further action by the Welsh Government, regional consortia, local authorities, Estyn and other stakeholders at various levels of the system and as such should inform the development of the implementation plan.

Furthermore, there is a need for caution in defining objectives and the monitoring of progress. The development of SLOs should not become a high-stakes exercise for schools; this would stand at odds with the ambition of developing all schools in Wales into learning organisations and empowering the people working in them to realise a learning culture in their hearts and minds.

Box 11. Realising schools as learning organisations

Implementation issue 4: The need for a coherent implementation plan

Recommendation 4.1: Develop and put in practice a national SLO implementation plan to empower schools across Wales in developing as learning organisations. The SLO Implementation Group should lead the development of an SLO implementation plan, monitor progress in realising Wales' SLO policy, and ensure further action is taken when necessary.

The findings and recommendations of this report aim to inform the development of the implementation plan, not as a separate action plan but rather as an integrated part of the larger curriculum reform effort. The national action plan – to be partially made up of four regional action plans – should ensure *all* schools have the opportunity to develop as learning organisations and ultimately put the new curriculum into practice. Particular attention should be paid to bringing on board and supporting those schools that for various reasons are less likely to seek support, participate in school-to-school collaboration and other forms of collaborative learning and working, while needing it most. Furthermore, attention should be paid to:

- **The setting of objectives and the monitoring of progress should not become a high-stakes exercise for schools.** One option could be to regularly mine the anonymised data that will be collected through the online SLO survey. Qualitative research could complement the analysis, aimed at exploring progress, including identifying good practices that should be widely shared, challenges and areas for further improvement.
- **Task allocation.** The regional consortia play a pivotal role in supporting schools in their change and innovation journeys. However as highlighted through this report, higher education institutions and other parties could do their part and complement the system infrastructure.

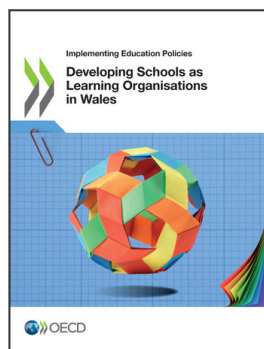
- **The timing and sequencing of actions will require prioritisation.** Phasing in actions allows efforts to be focused, bearing in mind schools' capacity to develop as learning organisations and bring the new curriculum to life. One action that requires immediate attention is the need to clarify the transition period to the new approaches to school self-evaluations and Estyn evaluations.
- **Communication and engagement strategy with education stakeholders.** An important first step will be, as recommended above, to develop and widely share an easily understood narrative that explains how Wales' SLO model can guide schools in their development, forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform and relates to other policies. The systematic collection and sharing of good practice is another area to consider.

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