Chapter 3. Schools as learning organisations in Wales: A detailed analysis

This chapter continues the Schools as Learning Organisations Assessment by exploring in greater depth the extent schools have put in practice the seven dimensions and underlying elements of Wales' schools as learning organisations (SLO) model.

The analysis suggests schools are progressing well on the dimensions "promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff" and "embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning". 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". Many schools could also do more to "learn with and from the external environment and larger system".

The presented examples show how challenges such as 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.

Introduction

This chapter continues the *Schools as Learning Organisations Assessment* that was started in Chapter 2 by exploring in greater depth to what extent schools in Wales have put in practice the seven action-oriented dimensions and underlying "elements" of Wales' schools as learning organisations (SLO) model. The chapter uses various sources of data and information (see Chapter 2, Box 2.2) and showcases some good practices that were identified through the OECD team's school visits and by representatives of the Schools as Learning Organisations Pilot Group (see Chapter 2), as well as from other OECD projects. These are used to exemplify the findings and offer ideas and practical guidance to those wanting to develop their schools as learning organisations in Wales and beyond. The chapter concludes by summarising the key findings of the Schools as Learning Organisations Assessment presented in Chapters 2 and 3, and offers some points of reflection and action for schools.

An assessment of schools as learning organisations by dimension and underlying elements

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

General overview

A school that is a learning organisation (SLO) has a shared and inclusive vision that gives it a sense of direction and serves as a motivating force for sustained action to achieve student and school goals (Schlechty, 2009[1]; Senge et al., 2012[2]). The evidence collected through the SLO survey (see Box 3.1), school visits and other sources suggests that on average the majority of schools in Wales had developed such an inclusive and shared vision.

Similarly, almost all school staff indicated that their school's vision embraced all students. These are encouraging findings considering that the new school curriculum promotes a broad range of learning outcomes and Wales' commitment to equity and student well-being (Welsh Government, 2017[3]).

Nonetheless, the answers for three of the survey statements that make up this dimension were significantly less positive; the involvement of staff, parents and external partners in the shaping of the vision were areas for improvement.

Furthermore, the data revealed some variation across different staff categories and school types (i.e. primary or secondary). These and other findings will be discussed further in the text below.


Box 3.1. Survey items for the SLO dimension "developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students"

- The school's vision is aimed at enhancing student's cognitive and social-emotional outcomes, including their well-being.

- The school's vision emphasises preparing students for their future in a changing world.

- The school's vision embraces all students.

- Learning activities and teaching are designed with the school's vision in mind.

- The school's vision is understood and shared by all staff working in the school.

- Staff are inspired and motivated to bring the school's vision to life.

- All staff are involved in developing the school's vision.

- School governors[1] are involved in developing the school's vision.

- Students are invited to contribute to the school's vision.

- Parents are invited to contribute to the school's vision.

- External partners are invited to help shape the school's vision.

The school's vision emphasises preparing students for the future and enhancing their cognitive and social-emotional outcomes, including their well-being

For a school's vision to be perceived as truly relevant it needs to include a moral purpose (Hiatt-Michael, 2001[4]; Fullan, 1999[5]). This moral purpose should focus on the future and appeal to the common good of the community and become the core force that binds individuals together – it is the "cultural glue" between all parties. In line with the aspirations of the new school curriculum, Wales' SLO model includes a moral purpose by calling for the realisation of "the four purposes" of the new curriculum that emphasises on equipping young people for the future by focusing on cognitive and social-emotional outcomes, including well-being (see Chapter 1, Box 1.1).

Figure 3.1 shows that most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their school had such a moral purpose in their school's vision. It shows that more than 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. Also, almost as many school staff (87%) responded that the school's vision emphasised preparing students for their future in a changing world. This is encouraging, although school leaders were significantly more positive than other categories of staff. For example, while 59% of head teachers strongly agreed with this, the same was true for a third of teachers (33%). And, as will be shown below, staff did not always feel inspired and motivated to bring the vision to life. This will be of critical importance to the success of the new curriculum.

Figure 3.1. Inclusion of moral purpose in schools' visions
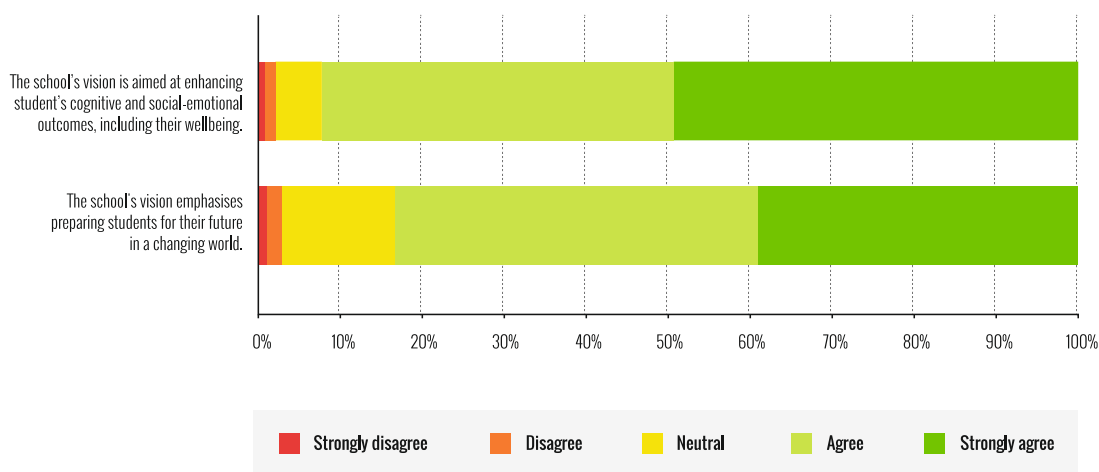
Note: N: 1 701 and 1 702 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

StatLink ⫘ http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933837473

The information collected from school staff during the school visits also supports these findings and provides an insight into how some schools are bringing their vision to life (see Box 3.2).

Several of the schools the OECD team visited also systematically collected information about their students' well-being to identify those students who may need additional support.

For example, **Craigfelen Primary School** in the local authority of Swansea aimed to enhance all students' cognitive and social-emotional outcomes, including their well-being through various measures which is a challenge considering the level of student deprivation. These measures include using the "Boxall Profile" (https://boxallprofile.org/) which is an online resource for the assessment of children and young people's social, emotional and behavioural development. The two-part checklist, which is completed by staff who know the child and young person best, is quick – and, very importantly, identifies the levels of skills the children and young people possess to access learning. The information is used by teachers and management to respond to students' needs and has contributed to setting up the "Blue Room". Curtained off, this area is a safe space in the school where children can go to when they are angry, have had a breakdown or are facing other issues, to talk about their feelings with a pastoral assistant. In this quiet and cosy room, the pastoral assistant draws on a range of resources to help vulnerable children to open up.

Other examples are provided by **Dwr-y-Felin Comprehensive School** in the local authority of Neath Port Talbot, where students complete the "Respect and How Safe Do You Feel" online survey every term, and **Sully Primary School** in the local authority of Vale of Glamorgan which uses the "Social and Emotional Learning for Improvement Elsewhere" (SELFIE) survey to identify student well-being issues, improve these and use it to promote good relationships between students.

> **Box 3.2. An example of using team learning and collaboration to develop pedagogy to bring the new curriculum to life – Connah's Quay High School**
>
> **Connah's Quay High School** is a secondary school (958 students in 2017) in the local authority of Flintshire, North Wales. Like many schools throughout Wales the school recognises the benefits of a collaborative learning culture for putting in practice the new curriculum. The school promotes collaborative working and learning through various means including through the use of professional learning communities that invite practitioners to improve specific areas of their teaching through a collaborative process of enquiry (Welsh Government, 2016[6]).
>
> As part of this model, a group of teaching staff (teachers and learning support workers) choose a pedagogical principle outlined in the *Successful Futures* report (Donaldson, 2015[7]). Examples include "building on prior learning and engagement", "learning autonomy" (learning to learn) or "blended teaching". The group engage in pedagogical research to deepen their understanding of the subject. Group members discuss new teaching strategies and experiment with them in their classrooms. Staff feed back to the group on what worked and what didn't. Conversations often lead to a "refining" stage, to further enhance the teaching strategies used. Outcomes and lessons learned are shared to other colleagues via a whole-school "sharing event" but also through the school's Learning and Teaching Newsletter.
>
> *Source:* Information collected by the OECD team as part of the school visits; Estyn (2017[8]), "Effective distribution of staff responsibilities to promote professional learning and shared responsibility", www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/effective-distribution-staff-responsibilities-promote-professional-learning-and.

The systematic monitoring of student well-being is important in any country, but would seem particularly important to Wales considering the equity challenges it faces. As mentioned in Chapter 1, although PISA 2015 suggests that students' socio-economic background in Wales has less impact on their performance than for students in other parts of the United Kingdom, it faces relatively high levels of child poverty and a high proportion of low performers in PISA 2015 (OECD, 2017[9]). The data from PISA 2015 also allow for an internationally comparable measurement of the well-being of 15-year-old students (see Box 3.3). The PISA 2015 results found that Wales performed well for some elements of student well-being, while in others areas it has room for further improvement. On the positive side, 15-year-olds in Wales performed relatively well when compared internationally in the "motivation to achieve" and "parents and the home environment" measures (OECD, 2017[9]).

Box 3.3. Student well-being in PISA 2015

PISA 2015 for the first time analysed students' motivation to perform well in school, their relationships with peers and teachers, their home life, and how they spend their time outside of school. Students' well-being as defined in *PISA 2015 Results: Students' Well-Being* refers to the psychological, cognitive, social and physical functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life. Well-being is thus first and foremost defined by the quality of life of students as 15-year-old individuals.

PISA 2015 offers a first-of-its-kind set of well-being indicators for adolescents that covers both negative outcomes (e.g. anxiety) and the positive impulses that promote healthy development (e.g. interest, motivation to achieve). Most of the PISA data on well-being are based on students' self-reports, and thus give adolescents the opportunity to express how they feel, what they think of their lives, and what aspirations they have for their future. PISA also allows those well-being indicators to be related to students' academic achievement across a large number of economies.

While it is extremely important to invest in future outcomes for children and adolescents, policy makers and educators need to pay attention to students' well-being now, while they are students. Well-being is also conceptualised in this report as a dynamic state: without sufficient investment to develop their capacities in the present, students are unlikely to enjoy well-being as adults.

Source: OECD (2017[9]) *PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264273856-en.

On the other hand, schoolwork-related anxiety and sense of belonging in school were two areas that appeared deserving of further attention. For example, 55% of 15-year-olds in Wales reported getting very tense when they study, which was significantly above the OECD average of 37% (OECD, 2017[9]). The Welsh Government is well aware of these findings, which support the attention given to equity and student well-being in Wales' strategic education plan, *Education in Wales: Our National Mission* (Welsh Government, 2017[3]) and the direction set out for the development of the new curriculum, promoting students' holistic development. The curriculum aims for children and young people to become ambitious and capable as well as healthy and confident (see Chapter 1, Box 1.1).

As will be further discussed in Chapter 4, the lack of a common definition and common understanding of student well-being in Wales is an issue which deserves urgent policy attention to ensure Wales' ambitions for its children and young people are put into practice.

A shared and inclusive vision that aims to enhance the learning experiences and outcomes of all students

Research evidence shows that one of the biggest challenges facing communities around the world is integrating those on the margins of society whose difficulties in learning undermine their self-confidence (Kools and Stoll, 2016[10]) – and Wales unfortunately is no exception to this. Schools throughout the country face challenges arising from poverty and other barriers to student learning (Estyn, 2017[11]; Welsh Government, 2017[3]). A SLO in Wales should therefore encourage inclusion, including through defining a vision centred on the learning of all students (Welsh Government, 2017[12]).

It is encouraging that nine out of ten (91%) respondents to the SLO survey indicated that their school's vision embraced all students. Very few respondents answered negatively (3%). However, an SLO does not just adopt a moral purpose within its vision but puts that vision into practice by aligning its activities and operations to it. This process is known as vertical alignment (Andrews et al., 2011[13]) and implies that learning activities and teaching are designed with the school's vision in mind. The SLO survey also found that nine out of ten school staff (89%) agreed that in their school, learning activities and teaching were designed with the school's vision in mind. Only 3% responded negatively.

This finding was exemplified by several of the schools the OECD team visited. For example, **Cathays High School** offers a 12-week induction programme to new arrivals to the country who enter Year 10 (in Key Stage 3) but do not speak English. These students are offered six weeks of intensive English classes, followed by a further six weeks when students are gradually integrated into mainstream lessons on a part-time basis. After this period, most students are able to follow the regular programme. Furthermore, for students who arrive at the end of Year 10 and Year 11, a tailored programme is offered including a progressive entry to Level 2 classes. The induction programme is one of the various measures Cathays High School has taken to realise the school's motto "opportunities for all" (see Box 3.4).

Although the vast majority of staff responding to the SLO survey shared the view that teaching and learning in their schools were geared towards the realisation of an inclusive vision centred on the teaching and learning of all students, other evidence shows that many schools are yet to realise this ambition. For example, Estyn (i.e. the inspectorate for education and training in Wales) has found that secondary schools in general display more excellence, but also more unsatisfactory practice, than primary schools (Estyn, 2017[11]; Estyn, 2018[14]). There is also a performance gap between girls and boys, and between students eligible for free school meals and other students. This gap widens as students progress from primary to secondary schooling. This suggests that secondary schools, which are often larger and more compartmentalised than primary schools, find it more challenging to respond to the learning and other needs of all their students (as well the needs of their staff, as the evidence presented in Chapter 2 and below suggests).

Box 3.4. Examples of ensuring equity in learning opportunities

The motto at **Cathays High School** (782 students in 2017) in Cardiff is "opportunities for all". With over 63 different languages spoken as a first language and more than three-quarters of its students from an ethnic background other than White British, this reflects the strong commitment of the school to support vulnerable students in their learning. Cathays High School developed a set of strategies to increase attendance and improve basic literacy skills for minority groups. For example, students from the Czech and Slovak Roma community generally had low attendance rates in their home countries. In order to engage them, the school established an Inclusion and Well-being team composed of Higher Level Teaching Assistants and the assistant head teacher to assist parents in educating their children. A volunteer from the Czech and Slovak Roma community was assigned to improve the communication between the school, the parents and the children. Witnessing the success of this position, the school's leadership established the team to further assist parents in their children's education. The team is in charge of translating documents, meeting with parents before the beginning of the term and facilitating the involvement of students and their families in extra-curricular activities such as reading sessions or sports. Thanks to these initiatives, student attendance at Cathays High School increased from 88% in 2011 to 94.1% in 2017.

In 2014, **Van Ostade Primary School** (425 students in 2017) in the city of The Hague in the Netherlands was awarded the prestigious "Excellent School" award for the third consecutive year. The primary school is located in the Schilderswijk, one of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods of The Hague. All of its students are from immigrant and low socio-economic backgrounds. In response the school has placed "upbringing", "education" and "the environment" (of the child) at the heart of the organisation of the school, and with good results. At the end of their primary education, students in the school obtain much better results than would be normally expected given their socio-economic background. This is evident from their relatively high scores in the end of primary exams. The school sets high standards and wants to bring the results of all the students at the level of the national average. The success of Van Ostade school can be attributed to how it has managed to establish a collaborative learning culture within the school, but also beyond the school boundaries. The school has established strong collaborations with a wide range of partners in order to also bring the quality of education in neighbouring schools to a higher level by working together.

Teachers also regularly meet with parents, sometimes at their homes or during information evenings at school. The school offers courses on child upbringing and care, organises festivities, and involves parents in the setting of school policy. These and other measures are at the heart of the school as a learning organisation and through them the school has managed to create a learning culture that is characterised by a professional learning mindset among its staff and strong engagement with parents, the community and other partners, and its students, who are learning to be self-confident and have an inquisitive attitude towards their own learning.

Source: Information of Cathays High School in Wales was collected by the OECD team as part of the school visits; Information on Van Ostade Primary School in the Netherlands was collected as part of the school visits of a review of the Dutch education system, see OECD (2016[15]), *Netherlands 2016: Foundations for the Future*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264257658-en.

The school's vision is the outcome of a process involving all staff

An SLO does not take a top-down approach to developing its vision and putting it into practice. Rather it involves all staff in shaping and realising the school's vision (Fullan, 2006[16]). Research evidence clearly shows that this participation process is a condition for success (Pont and Viennet, 2017[17]). Table 3.1 presents the responses to three statements from the SLO survey that measure internal participation in the development of a school's vision. While the majority of school staff tended to respond positively, the data also showed sizable proportions of staff responded negatively or neutrally which may suggest they were in doubt or simply did not know. Almost one-quarter of school staff responded negatively or neutrally to the statement "staff are inspired and motivated to bring the school's vision to life", with teachers in particular less positive: 30% of teachers responded neutrally or negatively, compared with 8% of head teachers. This is a worrying finding. It should be noted here that if a school was truly a learning organisation one would expect only a few people – ideally hardly any – to respond neutrally or negatively.

**Table 3.1. Staff involvement in the development of the school vision**

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The school's vision is understood and shared by all staff working in the school	1.2%	6.0%	13.3%	46.9%	32.6%
Staff are inspired and motivated to bring the school's vision to life	1.6%	5.7%	17.3%	46.7%	28.6%
All staff are involved in developing the school's vision	2.3%	8.7%	17.1%	41.1%	30.7%

Note: N: 1 692, 1 697 and 1 699 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

The data also showed that staff in different categories had significantly different perceptions of how much staff in their school were involved in the shaping of the school's vision. For example, 14% of teachers and 10% of learning support workers responded negatively and a further 20% of teachers and 18% of learning support workers neutrally to the statement that "all staff are involved in developing the school's vision", compared with 3% and 6% respectively among head teachers (see Figure 3.2).

The responses also revealed significant differences by school type: 77% of primary school staff indicated they were involved in vision development, while in secondary schools this proportion drops to 57%. Close to one in five respondents in secondary schools (18%) stated they were not involved in shaping the school's vision, while at the primary level this was significantly lower, close to one in twelve (8%).

Figure 3.2. Staff involvement in developing the school's vision, by staff category

Responses to the statement "All staff are involved in developing the school's vision"
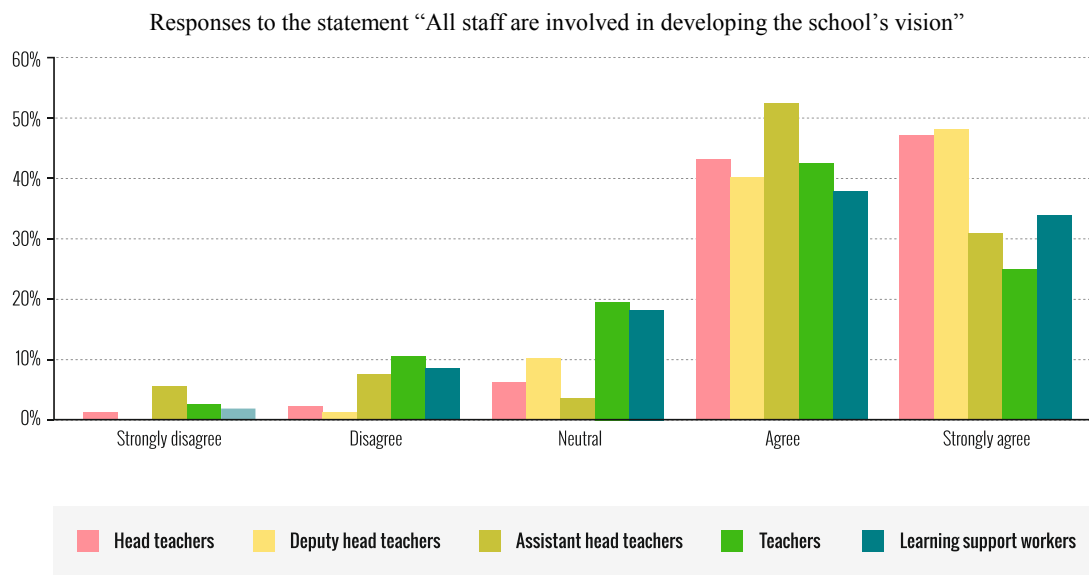
Note: N: 1 527 individuals.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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Student involvement in shaping the school's vision

"Student voice" is a key component of the SLO that runs through its organisational and educational processes. Involving students is key to increasing their engagement in the organisation of the school and the extent to which they feel a sense of agency over their own learning (OECD, 2013[18]). As Senge et al. (2000[19]) note: "Students can be some of the most effective instigators for organizational learning" (p. 25). For a school to be a learning organisation in Wales, giving students a meaningful voice should include having them contribute to shaping the school's vision (Welsh Government, 2017[12]).

The SLO survey found eight out of ten (79%) respondents agreed with the statement that in their school "students are invited to contribute to the school's vision". Only about 5% responded negatively to this statement, with little differences between staff categories.

Craigfelen Primary School in the local authority of Swansea provides an example of how students can be an important part of the development of the school's vision and goals and how schools can recognise their pre-eminence in decision making throughout Wales. Its students elect fellow classmates to represent them in the School Council. The School Council works closely with the governing board to inform the school's development plan. For example, to see how teaching and learning could be improved, council members launched a survey among students to collect data on teaching and the curriculum. The research process, entirely led by students, included interviews with students, questionnaires and photographs. After a year, students were asked again about their learning and one of the students acted as a "progress tracker" to compare the results with previous data. Students presented their findings to the school governing board who took them into account in their review of the school development plan.

The issue of student voice in organisational and educational processes will be discussed later as there are clear indications that this practice is less established than the responses to the SLO survey data may suggest.

Parents, the community and other external partners are invited to contribute to the school's vision

To be relevant for students and society, the development of a school's vision should include other stakeholders such as parents, the community, other educational institutions and businesses. They have a common stake in each other's future and the future of their community. Successful realisation of any school's vision increasingly depends on such partnerships as a means to grow social and professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012[20]), and to sustain innovative change (OECD, 2013[18]; Harris and van Tassell, 2005[21]; George, Desmidt and De Moyer, 2016[22]).

Figure 3.3 provides an overview of the responses to the three SLO survey statements that captured this involvement of external partners in the shaping of the school's vision. It shows that school governors were far more involved than parents and external partners. While 74% of school staff reported that school governors were involved in shaping the school's vision, only 58% reported that for parents. External partners were seemingly least involved: 12% of respondents indicated that external partners were not invited to contribute to the school's vision.

Figure 3.3. Involvement in shaping the school's vision
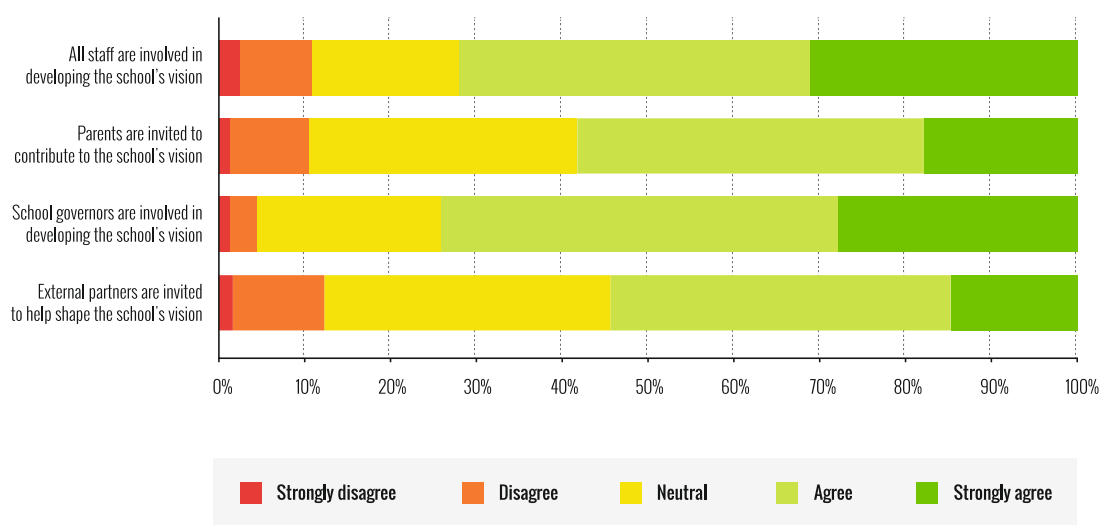
Note: N: 1 692, 1 697 and 1 692 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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The data highlight significant differences between school types. For example, while 61% of respondents from primary schools reported that parents were invited to contribute to the school's vision, this dropped to 50% in secondary schools. This issue was also raised as a challenge by several of the staff of the secondary schools the OECD team visited. As is common in other countries, secondary schools in Wales appear to find it more challenging to engage parents in the educational process and school organisation than

primary schools (Borgonovi and Montt, 2012[23]; Byrne and Smyth, 2010[24]; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003[25]; Williams, Williams and Ullman, 2002[26]). The examples of **Van Ostade Primary School** presented above (Box 3.4) and that of **Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan** in the local authority of Conwy in Wales (Box 3.5) show that it is entirely possible to increase the engagement of parents in their school's organisation and educational process. Inviting parents to contribute to the school's vision is an important first step towards realising this aim.

Box 3.5. An example of parental engagement – Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan secondary school

Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan secondary school (987 students in 2017) in the local authority of Conwy has been recognised for its efforts to engage parents in the school's operations and educational process. In 2017, the school was awarded the Leading Parent Partnership Award (LPPA) 2017-2020, a national award that recognises the school's work with parents. The assessment by the LPPA team highlighted that "the school has a strong commitment to parent partnership which is supported by the head teacher, senior leadership team, staff and governors. The school has created a welcoming, friendly environment for parents through its open-door policy and senior leaders and staff who welcome discussions with parents and listen to their views." The LPPA provides a framework for action to help schools identify strengths and areas of improvement. This award was won after two years of dedication and collaboration among staff, governors and leadership team to meet LPPA standards. For example, the school has organised a month-long "Parent Learner Cooking" class in Years 7, 8 and 9. Parents and students cooked lasagne, shepherd's pie and chicken curry from scratch together, alongside sweet treats, including fairy cakes, biscuits and syrup sponges.

Source: Information collected by the OECD team as part of the school visits.

Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff

General overview

The kind of education needed today requires teachers who constantly advance their own professional knowledge and that of their profession. A growing body of evidence shows that teachers' professional development can have a positive impact on student performance and teachers' practice. An SLO therefore creates continuous learning opportunities for teachers but also all other staff to enhance their professional learning and growth (Timperley et al., 2007[27]; Senge et al., 2012[2]).

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. For many of the 11 SLO survey statements used to measure this dimension (see Box 3.6) over three-quarters of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with them, which suggests that overall professional learning is high on the agenda of schools in Wales.

Box 3.6. Survey items for the SLO dimension "creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff"

- Professional learning of staff is considered a high priority.

- Staff engage in professional learning to ensure their practice is critically informed and up to date.

- Staff are involved in identifying the objectives for their professional learning.

- Professional learning is focused on students' needs.

- Professional learning is aligned to the school's vision.

- Mentors/coaches are available to help staff develop their practice.

- All new staff receive sufficient support to help them in their new role.

- Staff receive regular feedback to support reflection and improvement.

- Students are encouraged to give feedback to teachers and support staff.

- Beliefs, mindsets and practices are challenged by professional learning.

There are however clear areas for improvement. Various sources of data and information show that induction and mentoring/coaching need to be strengthened in many schools across Wales. For example, only two-thirds of staff indicated that in their school there were mentors or coaches available to help staff develop their practice. Furthermore, the use of student feedback to teachers and support to enhance their teaching and professional learning was not yet common in schools throughout Wales and some staff seemed unsure as to whether professional learning was stimulating deep change to practices, beliefs and mindsets. The interviews with various stakeholders corroborated these findings.

The SLO survey data also revealed some significant differences between staff across school types, staff categories, staff ages and their highest level of formal education.

All staff engage in continuous professional learning to ensure their practice is critically informed and up to date

Scholars, educators and policy makers around the world increasingly support the notion of investing in quality, career-long opportunities for professional development and ensuring ongoing, active professional learning (Schleicher, 2018[28]). An SLO has a supportive culture, and invests time and other resources to ensure all staff engage in quality professional learning opportunities.

Although staff on average reported that engagement in professional learning was a high priority in schools across Wales, the data presented in Table 3.2 suggest there is scope for further improvement. For example, 30% responded negatively or neutrally to the statement that in their school "beliefs, mindsets and practices are challenged by professional learning". Also, one in five staff (21%) responded negatively or neutrally to the statement that "professional learning of staff is considered a high priority" in their school.

Table 3.2. Engagement in professional learning to ensure practice is up to date

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Professional learning of staff is considered a high priority	1.8%	5.5%	13.7%	43.8%	35.1%
Staff engage in professional learning to ensure their practice is critically informed and up to date	1.1%	4.4%	14.2%	49.5%	30.8%
Beliefs, mindsets and practices are challenged by professional learning	0.8%	3.9%	24.0%	50.4%	21.0%
Staff have opportunities to experiment with and practise new skills	0.7%	6.1%	13.6%	50.5%	29.3%

Note: N: 1 632, 1 636, 1 635 and 1 651 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

The data also revealed some significant differences between staff categories. For example, while school leaders almost unanimously reported that professional learning was a high priority in their schools, 10% of teachers did not share their view and a further 16% responded neutrally. For learning support workers these proportions were 7% and 18% respectively. And while only 14% of all school leaders were neutral or disagreed that beliefs, mindsets and practices were challenged by professional learning, 28% of learning support workers and 30% of teachers shared this view. Again, we would not expect to find such large proportions of neutral responses in an SLO.

Furthermore, while 81% of respondents in primary schools responded positively to the statement that "professional learning of staff is a high priority" in their school, this was 10% lower in secondary schools.

New staff receive induction support and all staff have access to coaching and mentoring support

Research evidence shows that well-designed induction programmes increase teacher retention and satisfaction and improve teaching quality (Kessels, 2010[29]; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011[30]). Wales has had a mandatory one-year induction period for all newly qualified teachers for a long time. This is important, as well-structured and well-resourced induction programmes can support new teachers in their transition to full teaching responsibilities (Schleicher, 2012[31]).

The OECD team however learned that little is known about the quality of these induction programmes in Wales. The evidence from this assessment suggests challenges exist in terms of the quantity and quality of such programmes in some schools and parts of the country. For example, the SLO survey data showed that about 30% of respondents disagreed or responded neutrally to the statement that in their school "all new staff receive sufficient support to help them in their new role" (see Table 3.3).

Also, while 11% of staff under 30 years old responded negatively and 24% neutrally to this, among staff aged 60 years and older only 13% responded neutrally and none of them disagreed. This may mean that older staff are not fully aware of the support younger colleagues are receiving as they start their careers. Where these older staff are leaders – which frequently is the case – some may believe that support systems are in place when they are not seen as such by new staff.

The data also suggest that slightly fewer new staff in secondary schools benefit from sufficient induction support than their peers in primary schools: 13% of secondary school

staff disagreed that new staff received sufficient support, while in primary schools this was slightly lower (9%). Several policy makers and other stakeholders the OECD team interviewed were pleasantly surprised by the relatively minor difference between the two school types.

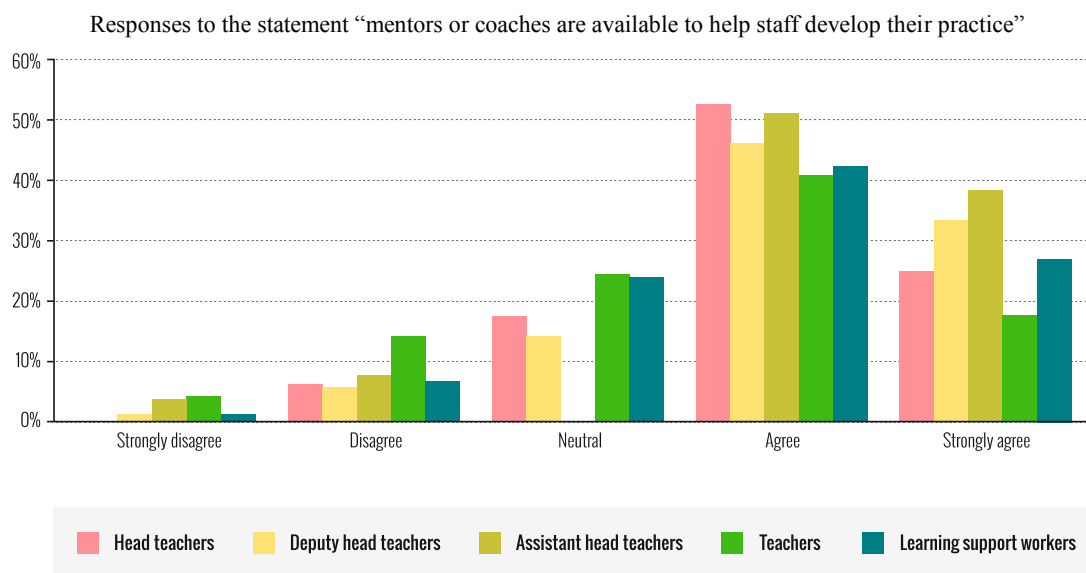**Table 3.3. Induction and mentoring and coaching support**

	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: N: 1 633 and 1 634 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

Furthermore, although PISA 2015 found that virtually all secondary head teachers (98%) reported that teacher mentoring was used as a means of quality assurance in their school, compared to an OECD average of 78% (Jerrim and Shure, 2016[32]), the SLO survey data provide a less positive view of the situation. About 18% of secondary school respondents indicated that mentoring and coaching support was not available for all staff in their school, and 12% of those in primary schools. In addition, at both levels of education, teachers – and to a lesser extent learning support workers – were more critical about this issue than those in leadership positions (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4. Availability of mentoring or coaching support, by staff categories

Responses to the statement "mentors or coaches are available to help staff develop their practice"

Note: N: 1 522 individuals.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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These are important findings considering that Wales is in the middle of a curriculum reform that is likely to require teachers and learning support workers to extend their skills and engage in trial and error learning. They would benefit from close relationships with colleagues who have had prior training and experience in the new curriculum (Thompson et al., 2004[33]). This is an issue which deserves further attention from school leaders – in particular those working in secondary schools – but also from Pioneer Schools, local authorities, regional consortia and the Welsh Government to ensure schools have the capacity and support to make high-quality induction and coaching and mentoring common practice in all schools in Wales.

Staff are fully engaged in identifying the priorities for their own professional learning – which is focused on student learning and school goals

In an SLO, staff are involved in identifying their professional learning needs, which also need to be aligned with students' needs and the school's goals (Kools and Stoll, 2016[10]). The SLO survey contains three statements related to this:

- Staff are involved in identifying the objectives for their professional learning.

- Professional learning is focused on students' needs.

- Professional learning is aligned to the school's vision.

On average about eight out ten school staff responded positively to these statements, with relatively little difference between the levels of education or across regions. There were some differences between staff categories though. For example, close to all head teachers, deputy head teachers and assistant head teachers (about 95%) responded positively to the first statement listed above, while for teachers and learning support workers this dropped significantly (81% for both).

The interviews with school staff and other stakeholders found that there was still a tendency among staff in some schools to focus professional learning on individuals' needs and interests rather than the strategic goals and learning needs of students. Also, according to Estyn (Estyn, 2018[14]) a quarter of primary schools and two-fifths of secondary schools have not established a culture of professional learning where staff have open and honest discussions about their own practice and its impact on student learning and outcomes.

Professional learning is based on assessment and feedback, including by students

Effective professional learning and growth depends on regular assessment and feedback. When shaped in a purposeful manner this can have a strong positive influence on teachers' professional development and their daily practice (Schleicher, 2015[34]; Hattie and Timperley, 2007[35]; Timperley et al., 2007[27]). Educators need feedback and other reflection approaches to challenge their thinking and assumptions about their practice. As such, reflection and challenge to thinking patterns, including by students, are central to Wales' SLO model (Welsh Government, 2017[12]).

Starting with the most important stakeholders, i.e. students, the SLO survey data showed that almost two out of three staff (64%) responded that in their school "students are encouraged to give feedback to teachers and support staff" to enhance their teaching and professional learning. This is an encouraging finding but at the same time points to the need for further improvement as 12% responded negatively to this statement – 11% of primary school staff and 17% of secondary staff.

Although almost three-quarters of school staff (72%) indicated that "staff receive regular feedback to support reflection and improvement" in their school, some 10% responded negatively to this statement (14% in secondary schools and 9% in primary schools) and a further 17% responded neutrally, which may suggest they were not sure or had mixed feelings.

The data also pointed to differences depending on the ages of staff and highest level of formal education. For example, while 74% of staff with a bachelor's degree agreed that staff received regular feedback, the figure was 7 percentage points lower among staff with A Levels or an equivalent qualification (67%). Several of the school staff, policy makers and other stakeholders the OECD team interviewed recognised this as area for further improvement for many schools in Wales – more than these data would suggest. The exchange of good practice and peer learning in the two schools showcased in Box 3.7 and other similar examples could contribute to such an improvement effort.

Box 3.7. Examples of professional learning based on assessment and feedback

Penygarn Community Primary School (471 students in 2017) in the local authority of Torfaen provides training for middle-level leaders to develop their role further according to the principles outlined in the *Excellence in Teaching* framework. This framework is a tool that is used by the school's teachers to review and receive feedback on their teaching and learning development. Among its various uses are recording and sharing data from observations, lesson planning, marking, and working with colleagues. For every element – i.e. subject knowledge, challenge and expectation, engagement and enthusiasm, resource and time, assessment, progress, and standards and behaviour for learning – teachers can range from unsatisfactory to excellent according to a set of characteristics.

Middle-level leaders also receive training responding to identified developmental needs and are taught how to write evaluation reports on their practice. They have adopted a "Focus-Analyse-Do-Evaluate" (FADE) approach to self-evaluation that facilitates a regular review of progress.

Olchfa School is a secondary school (1 693 students in 2017) in the local authority of Swansea. In 2006, the school established a Learning and Teaching Observation Group (LATOG), a peer teaching observation scheme to offer advice to teachers and share good practice across departments. Observations take place in a culture of trust and provide a starting point for dialogue about teaching and learning among staff. The school has a team of ten LATOG staff who are responsible for observing staff in various departments and promoting continuous professional learning. After being observed, teachers receive verbal and written feedback on their lessons. In order to keep the process efficient, oral commentaries are provided on the same day as the observation and the written feedback comes within seven days. The team is reviewed every year and any new observers are required to follow a training programme when they join the team.

The school is also piloting a new project involving a group of trained students who accompany LATOG staff during peer observations. The students are asked to give written feedback on selected areas. This use of feedback involving students gives them a greater voice and more participation in the school organisation.

Source: Information collected by the OECD team as part of the school visits; Estyn (2011[36]), "With a little help from my friends", www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/little-help-my-friends.

Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff

General overview

Schools offer great potential for collaborative working and learning. Where this does not occur, people are less likely to reap the benefits that team work and joint reflection can bring to enhancing their practice. Team learning and collaboration are central to the SLO and to the development of its staff (Senge et al., 2012[2]). To ensure that teachers and other school staff feel comfortable in turning to each other for advice and engaging in team learning and working, schools need to create an enabling environment characterised by mutual trust and respect (Cerna, 2014[37]). Box 3.8 lists the survey items related to this dimension.

Box 3.8. Survey items for the SLO dimension "promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff"

- Staff collaborate to improve their practice.

- Staff learn how to work together as a team.

- Staff help each other to improve their practice.

- Staff observe each other's practice and collaborate in developing it.

- Staff think through and tackle problems together.

- Staff reflect together on how to learn and improve their practice.

- Staff give honest feedback to each other.

- Staff listen to each other's ideas and opinions.

- Staff feel comfortable turning to others for advice.

- Staff treat each other with respect.

- Staff spend time building trust with each other.

The evidence suggests that on average collaborative working and learning are well embedded in schools throughout Wales. This assessment also points to some areas for further improvement for this SLO dimension, however. For example, schools could do more to ensure that "staff observe each other's practice and collaborate in improving it", that "staff think through and tackle problems together" and that "staff spend time building trust with each other". More than one-fifth of staff responded neutrally or disagreed with these SLO survey statements. For these statements, teachers were the most critical in their responses.

This assessment also suggests that some schools need more frequent and open discussions between school leaders, teachers and learning support workers to diminish the differences in their perceptions. Although 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 sizable differences reported in this section – and also other sections of this chapter – suggest the need for more professional dialogue and sharing of information. This is again particularly the case in secondary schools. This is all the more essential

considering the ongoing curriculum reform, where success will partly depend on staff engaging in trial and error learning and tacking problems together.

Staff learn and work collectively to improve their practice

In an SLO, staff learn to work together and learn collectively – whether face-to-face or using technology – with peer networking playing an important role in enhancing the professionalism of teachers and school leaders. Wales aims to have a collaborative education profession, driven by a deep understanding of pedagogy and their subject matter, and with a shared understanding of key responsibilities across the entire system (Welsh Government, 2017[38]).

The data presented in Figure 3.5 suggest that on average collaborative working and learning are well embedded in schools throughout Wales. An earlier OECD assessment (OECD, 2017[39]) and the OECD team's interviews with school staff and other stakeholders corroborate this finding.

Figure 3.5. Collaborative learning and working
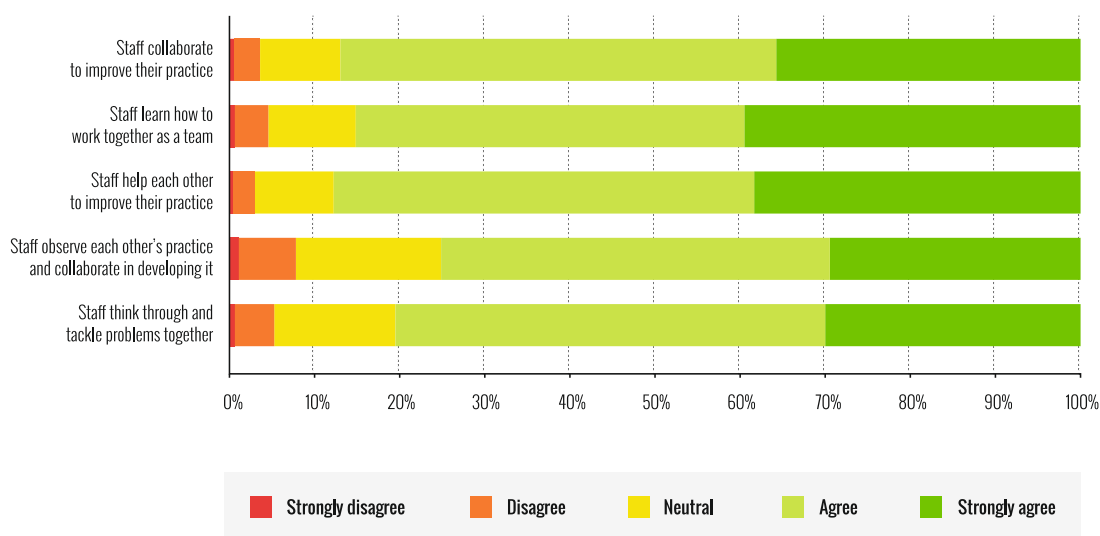
Note: N: 1 627, 1 625, 1 621, 1 624 and 1 625 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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At the same time this assessment points to some areas for further improvement. For example, the SLO survey data suggest schools could do more to ensure that "staff observe each other's practice and collaborate in improving it" and that "staff think through and tackle problems together" (see Figure 3.5). More than one in five staff responded neutrally or indicated they disagreed with these statements. For both statements teachers were most critical.

Younger staff were also slightly more critical in their views about how far staff in their school observe each other's practice and collaborate in improving. For example, while 27% of staff under the age of 30 responded negatively or neutrally to this statement, this proportion fell to 22% among 50-59 year-olds and 5% among staff aged 60 and over. This difference is partially explained by the fact that those in leadership positions are on

average older; the data show that staff in leadership positions were more likely to respond positively to this survey statement than other staff.

It is unclear whether younger staff thought that they themselves did not have the opportunity to observe others and collaborate, or whether they thought it was not true of their colleagues. Either way, in an SLO, it is generally expected that staff share their insights and findings on learning and teaching with colleagues (Kools and Stoll, 2016[10]). For some staff, this will come naturally but others may need encouragement and support to display and internalise such behaviour. It is important that the support provided to staff is not limited to those new to the school but should involve all staff in order to establish a thriving learning culture. In the SLO survey, some 15% of staff responded negatively or neutrally to the statement that in their school "staff learn how to work together as a team" – 21% in secondary schools and 11% in primary schools.

The assessment also found differences in perceptions across different staff categories in this area. For example, in PISA 2015, 92% of head teachers in secondary schools in Wales reported that teacher peer review (of lesson plans, assessment instruments and lessons) was used to monitor the practice of teachers, compared to an OECD average of 78.1% (OECD, 2016[40]). This figure may have to be interpreted with some caution, as the evidence from the 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 responded positively 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.

These are significant differences that suggest the need for more professional dialogue and sharing of information among all staff. The assessment learned of several examples that may act as a source of ideas for schools wishing to strengthen their professional dialogue and information sharing (see Box 3.2, Box 3.7 (Olchfa School) and Box 3.9).

Box 3.9. An example of promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff – Ysgol Gymunedol Comins Coch, a primary school

Ysgol Gymunedol Comins Coch is a primary school (184 students in 2017) in the local authority of Ceredigion, Mid Wales. The school's leadership promotes collaborative learning through a whole-school approach that includes peer observation, staff mentoring and training. Teaching staff and teaching assistants identify good practice during regular peer observations and align them with school priorities. Staff share videos of good practice within the school. Open discussions about these videos, as well as whole-school book scrutiny sessions guarantee dialogue among all staff, a clear understanding of the school vision and co-operation.

Furthermore, all staff members and representatives from the school's governing body join together on school training days to reflect on and evaluate the current priorities. Through these and other means the school aims to engage all staff in a professional dialogue and collective learning throughout the year.

Source: Information collected by the OECD team as part of the school visits; Estyn (2017[8]), "Effective distribution of staff responsibilities to promote professional learning and shared responsibility", www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/effective-distribution-staff-responsibilities-promote-professional-learning-and.

*A school culture characterised by mutual trust and respect*

In an SLO, staff have a positive attitude towards collaboration and team learning. Trust and mutual respect are core values. They form the glue that holds the school together and allows for co-operation between individuals and teams to thrive. When people trust and respect each other, other means of governance and control can be minimised (Cerna, 2014[37]; Bryk and Schneider, 2002[41]). Creating an organisational culture of trust and respect in which team learning and collaboration can thrive naturally involves most, if not all, members of the organisation.

Figure 3.6 suggests that in many schools throughout Wales trust and mutual respect are core values which are being worked on regularly. For example, about 85% of respondents to the SLO survey indicated that "staff listen to other's ideas and opinions" and "treat each other with respect". However, respondents were slightly more critical about the extent to which "staff give honest feedback to each other" and "spend time building trust with each other" – as can be seen from the proportions of staff who disagreed with these statements or responded neutrally.

Looking at differences between staff categories, it was again found that teachers in general held more critical views, followed by learning support workers – although they were considerably more positive (see for example Figure 3.7).

Although differences across the regions are relatively small in general for this SLO dimension, a common finding is that staff in secondary schools were less positive about the extent to which they engage in collaborative working and learning. This is clearly an issue for action especially for school leaders, including those in middle leadership positions, and the challenge advisors in the regional consortia and their professional learning offers.
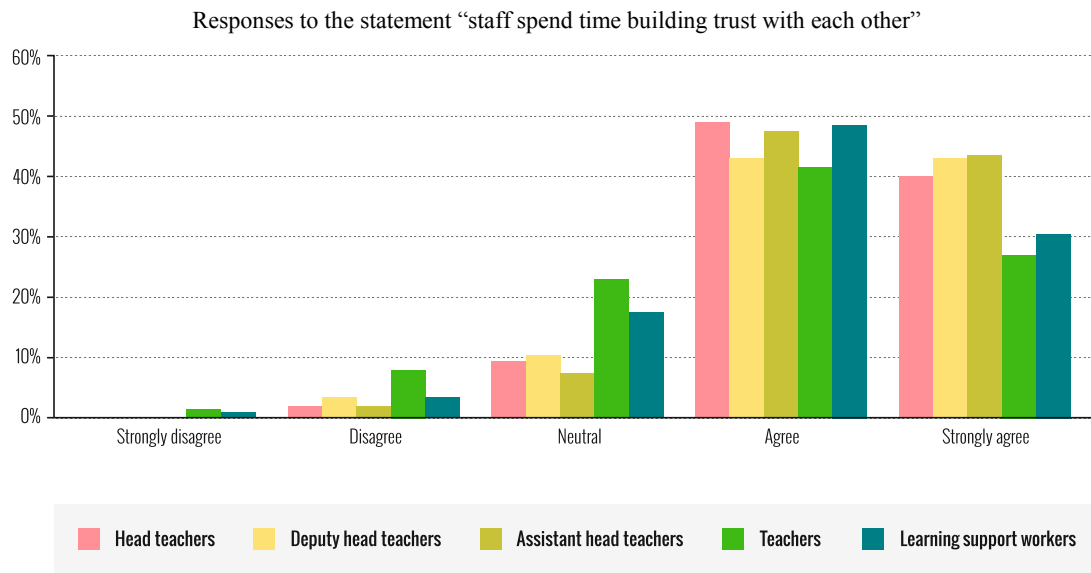
Figure 3.6. Trust and mutual respect in learning and working together
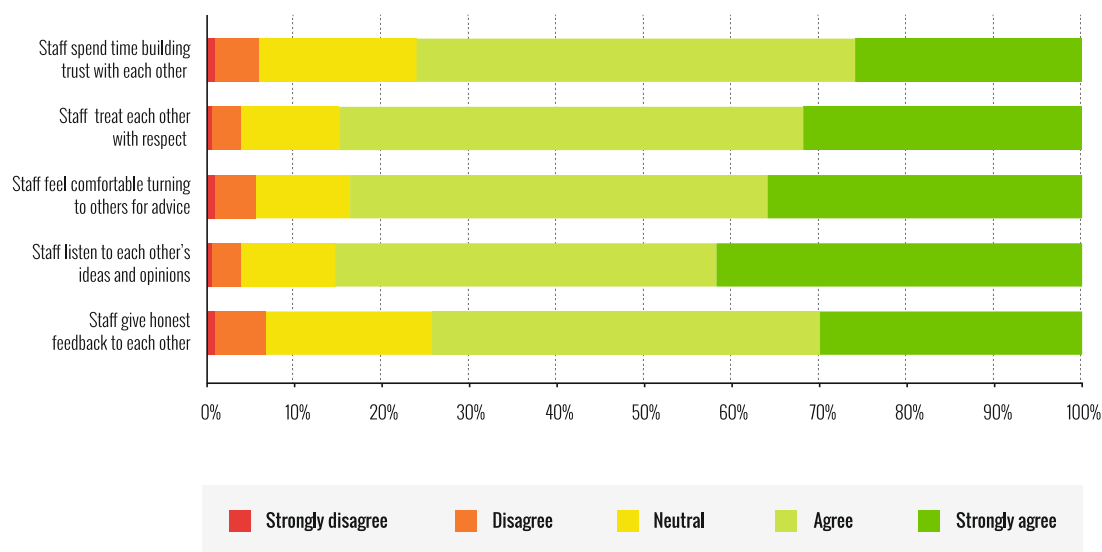
Note: N: 1 625, 1 626, 1 625, 1 626 and 1 620 individuals respectively.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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Figure 3.7. Building mutual trust, by staff categories

Responses to the statement "staff spend time building trust with each other"

Note: N: 1 521 individuals.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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Time and other resources are provided to support professional learning – both individual and collaborative

Research evidence shows that a key factor behind schools developing as learning organisations is the extent to which staff perceive that there are sufficient resources for learning to occur (Silins, Zarins and Mulford, 2002[42]). The importance placed on professional learning and collaborative working is reflected in the allocation of time and other resources, such as a weekly schedule of regular hours devoted to team meetings (Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2007[43]), and time for colleagues to observe each other and engage in networked learning.

This evidence, as well as the OECD team's interviews with school staff and other stakeholders, suggest schools in Wales do not have equal access to time and resources to support them in their professional learning. Concerns about staff workloads were raised several times in the interviews with school staff, policy makers and other stakeholders. These findings were corroborated by those of the 2017 National Education Workforce Survey (Education Workforce Council, 2017[44]) which pointed to clear challenges in terms of the workload of teachers and learning support workers and the amount of administration they need to do as part of their daily duties.

Time is one of the four cross-cutting themes of an SLO (Kools and Stoll, 2016[10]). It seems to be a factor of influence that may pose a challenge to schools as they develop into learning organisations and, ultimately, put the new curriculum into practice. The issue of workload reduction is therefore high on the policy agenda in Wales. A guidance note for teachers and head teachers has been produced to help them reduce workload issues (Estyn, 2017[45]). However, schools are likely to need further guidance to realise the note's suggestions which in many cases will require breaking with old habits. The regional consortia's challenge advisors will have a pivotal role in helping school staff do

this. The new assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements should also support this by promoting more efficient ways of working (see Chapter 4).

The issue of financial resources is also directly related. An issue that was raised several times by interviewees was that differences in local funding models are causing inequalities for both students and school staff across the 22 local authorities. Also, out of the 118 open comments received through the SLO survey, 11 referred to challenges in terms of funding and another 16 to the directly related issue of time and workload challenges. These issues will be further discussed in Chapter 4 as policy action seems needed.

Although schools need to be adequately supported and enabled to develop as learning organisations, they do have the power to implement many actions to ensure staff have the time and resources to engage in collaborative working and learning to establish "a rhythm of continuous improvement". Several examples from Wales presented in this report provide testament to this, while Box 3.10 gives an international example.

Box 3.10. An example of allocating time and resources for collaborative working and learning – Arroyo Grande High School in the United States

Arroyo Grande High School in the Lucia Mar Unified school district, in California (United States) (2 206 students in 2017) was a participant in the pilot of the PISA-based Test for Schools (known in the United States as the OECD Test for Schools) in 2012. The school's results from the pilot showed a large proportion of its students to be low performers; 29% of its students performed below level 2 in reading, 39% in maths and 20% in science. These findings triggered the school to take a number of concrete measures including a revision of its formative assessments to provide a greater focus on developing students' literacy skills and helped teachers understand how to embed critical thinking skills into their teaching. Teachers have since then used a variety of tactics to embed critical thinking activities into the classroom, with particular attention paid to strategies promoted by Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). Opportunities for rich discussion among students, coupled with group engagement work like Philosophical Chairs and Socratic Seminars, where students discuss their views on a given topic, have increased critical thinking in the classroom. The school also put in place a school-wide focus on critical reading and writing, which included the use of rubrics by each department to help teachers assess and support students' progress.

To facilitate these and other changes, the school changed its schedule to allow for more professional learning time for its teachers. The new schedule includes Late Start Mondays every week for teachers, when teachers work in collaborative groups to analyse and reflect on student data, collaboratively plan lessons, and identify areas for remediation and acceleration as needed.

These efforts have certainly paid off. Between the 2012 pilot and the 2014-15 administration of the OECD Test for Schools, the percentage of students performing below level 2 decreased by 15% in reading, 9% in maths and 9% in science, while the proportion of students performing at the highest proficiency levels rose in all three subjects.

Source: Information collected by the OECD team of America Achieves (www.americaachievesednetworks.org/) as part of the school visits; PISA for Schools project documents.

Establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration

General overview

A mark of any professional is the ability to reflect critically on both their profession and their daily work, to be continuously engaged in self-improvement. For such behaviour to pervade throughout organisations, it is necessary to cultivate a learning habit in people and a culture where a spirit of enquiry, initiative and willingness to experiment with new ideas and practices predominates (Watkins and Marsick, 1996[46]; Kools and Stoll, 2016[10]; Earl and Timperley, 2015[47]). This mindset is critical if schools are to develop as learning organisations. Box 3.11 lists the survey items for this dimension.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the findings of this assessment suggest that on average staff in the majority of schools in Wales thought that staff were willing and dared to take the initiative, experiment and do things differently. The OECD team members were in fact struck by the difference in attitudes compared with the review the OECD undertook in 2013 (OECD, 2014[48]). Although on more than one occasion school staff expressed uncertainty about how far Estyn inspections and other parts of the new assessment, evaluation and accountability framework under development would support innovations, the OECD team clearly found a great deal of enthusiasm within the system to change and innovate teaching and learning which the SLO survey data corroborate. This is an important step forward for realising Wales' ambitious education reform agenda.

Box 3.11. Survey items for the SLO dimension "establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration"

- Staff are encouraged to experiment and innovate their practice.

- Staff are encouraged to take initiative.

- Staff are supported when taking calculated risks.

- Staff spend time exploring a problem before taking action.

- Staff engage in enquiry (i.e. pose questions, gather and use evidence to decide how to change their practice, and evaluate its impact).

- Staff are open to thinking and doing things differently.

- Staff are open to others questioning their beliefs, opinions and ideas.

- Staff openly discuss failures in order to learn from them.

- Problems are seen as opportunities for learning.

Despite progress in recent years, the evidence suggests that this is one of the least-developed SLO dimensions in schools in Wales on average. This may partially be the result of the high-stakes assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements that have characterised the system for years (Donaldson, 2015[7]) (see also Chapter 4).

Furthermore, the data point to some significant differences between school types, staff categories and the four regions of Wales. For example, the SLO survey found different response patterns to the statement "staff openly discuss failures in order to learn from them" across the regions, with school staff in North Wales being most positive (78%

responded positively) and staff in schools in South Wales the least positive (67% responded positively).

Staff engage in enquiry and spend time exploring a problem before taking action

An SLO continually expands its capacity to create its future. This is not a linear or mechanistic process; rather it involves an iterative organisational learning process of reflection and "thinking in circles" through a series of decisions, actions and feedback loops (Earl and Katz, 2002[49]; Earl and Timperley, 2015[47]). Table 3.4 shows that 75% respondents agreed or strongly agreed that staff in their school engaged in enquiry to enhance their practice.

Table 3.4. Staff engaging in enquiry

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Staff engage in enquiry (i.e. pose questions, gather and use evidence to decide how to change their practice, and evaluate its impact)	1.1%	5.8%	18.5%	50.6%	24.0%
Staff spend time exploring a problem before taking action	1.2%	6.5%	22.0%	50.8%	19.6%

Note: N: 1 662 and 1 657 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
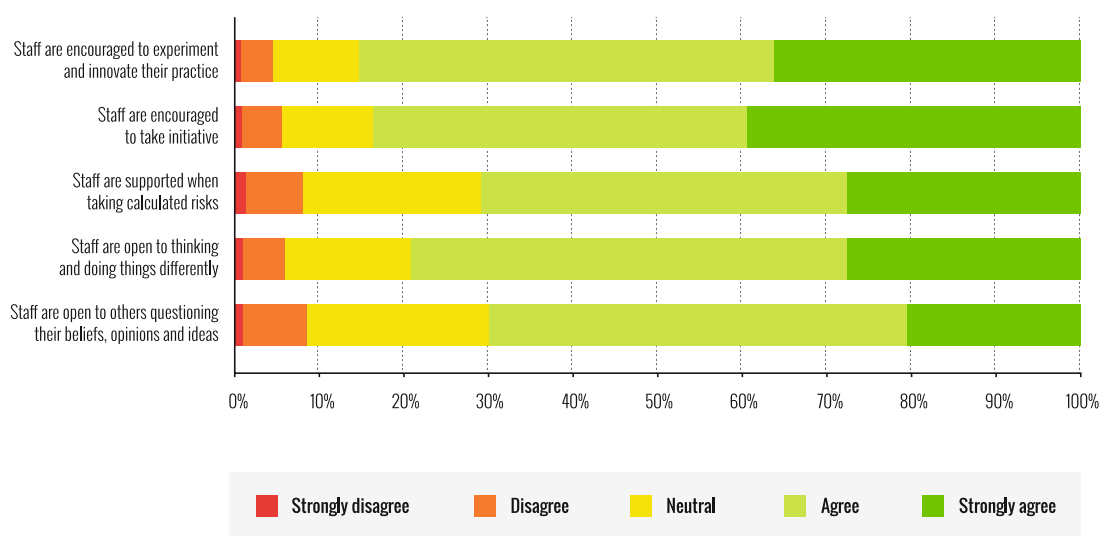*Source*: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

However, true engagement in enquiry also depends on the ability to tolerate ambiguity and holding back from rushing to judgements. The SLO survey data found that around 70% of staff agreed that time was spent exploring a problem before taking action – 73% of staff in primary schools and 62% of staff in secondary schools. Again leaders were more positive, with 81% of all leaders agreeing that this happened in contrast with 65% of teachers.

The school supports and recognises the taking of initiative and risks

For a school to be a learning organisation, it is essential that people feel confident and dare to innovate in their daily practice and are supported and rewarded for taking initiatives and risks (Welsh Government, 2017[12]). Building on the core values of trust and mutual respect, people need to have an open mind about new ways of doing things. Staff are thus helped to overcome the uncertainties of such challenges as engaging with a new curriculum through collegial and open dialogue, exchanging ideas and sharing experiences, and experimenting.

Figure 3.8 shows the extent to which respondents to the SLO survey agreed that staff were encouraged to experiment and innovate their practice, take the initiative and do things differently. More than eight out of ten staff responded positively to these statements, with the exception of two items, regarding calculated risks and openness to questioning – although these still scored highly.

The data revealed only minor differences between primary and secondary schools, but significant differences between staff categories. For example, while 96% of head teachers and assistant head teachers, and 94% of deputy head teachers, indicated that in their school staff were encouraged to experiment and innovate their practice, this proportion fell to 82% among learning support workers. Interestingly this is one of the few SLO survey items on which learning support workers recorded the lowest score across the different staff categories.

Figure 3.8. Staff attitudes to experimentation, initiative and risk taking

Note: N: 1 665, 1 660, 1 659, 1 661 and 1 661 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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Willingness and openness to take the initiative, experiment and do things differently were also apparent in the interviews the OECD team had with school staff and other stakeholders. One example is provided by **Ygsol San Sior** primary school in the city of Llandudno, showing how enquiry can serve creativity and create a stimulating and challenging learning environment for its students, as well as for the staff working in the school (see Box 3.12). For example, the evidence seemed to suggest that chickens will lay more eggs if music is being played to them. Putting this to the test, as part of their music lessons, students performed for the school's chickens to investigate whether this was indeed the case. At the time of the visit by the OECD team, the investigation was ongoing but regardless of the outcome this example shows how the staff of Ygsol San Sior use enquiry and creativity to stimulate and motivate students in their daily learning.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the OECD team were struck by the difference in attitudes compared with the review the OECD undertook in 2013 when it found a more conservative attitude to changing and innovating practice and reform fatigue seemed to reign in schools throughout Wales. Despite the staff uncertainty mentioned above about whether Estyn inspections and new assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements would support innovations, the OECD team noticed a positive change in mindset among school staff towards innovating their practice. This will be an asset for Wales when realising its curriculum reform and as such should be nurtured and further enhanced where possible.

This assessment may help with this as it points to several areas for improvement. Apart from once more finding that teachers were most critical in their responses to the survey statements, it was also found that staff in secondary schools were slightly more negative in their responses than those in primary schools. For example, while 74% of primary school staff responded positively to the statement that "staff are supported when taking

calculated risks", the figure was 11 percentage points lower among secondary school staff (63%).

Figure 3.9 shows secondary school staff were less positive about the extent to which staff in their school are open to others questioning their beliefs, opinions and ideas. Around 28% of primary school staff responded negatively or neutrally to the statement that "staff are open to others questioning their beliefs, opinions and ideas", about 10 percentage points less than their peers in secondary schools.

Figure 3.9. Openness to questioning among staff, by school type

Responses to the statement "staff are open to others questioning their beliefs, opinions and ideas"
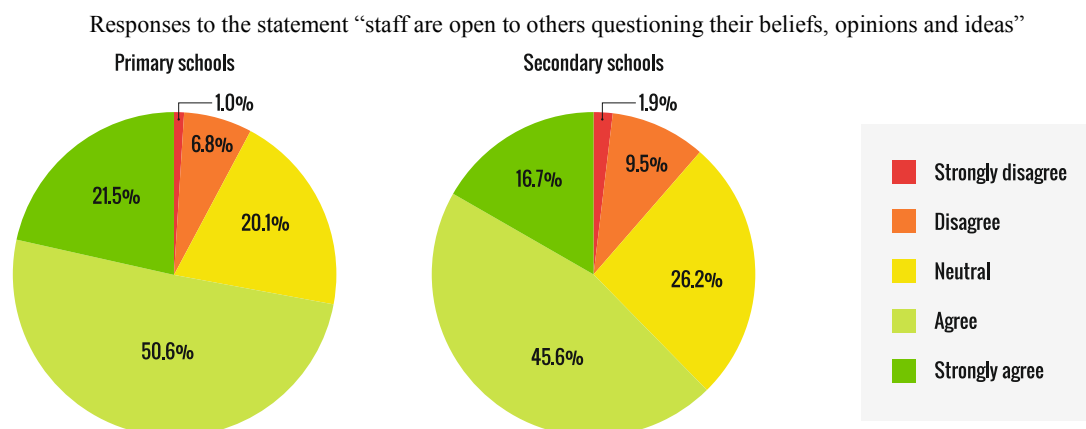
Note: N: 1 664 individuals.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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For both levels of education, teachers were most critical: 11% of teachers reported that in their school staff were not open to others questioning their beliefs, opinions and ideas, compared to 6% of learning support workers, deputy head teachers and assistant head teachers, and 3% of head teachers.

These findings suggest that further efforts should be made to help increase people's willingness to consider new ways of working, find ways to promote greater openness and move towards a learning culture built on trust in all schools in Wales. School leaders have an important role in creating these conditions (as will be further discussed below), and this particularly seems to be a challenge for leaders of secondary schools.

Box 3.12. An example of doing things differently – Ygsol San Sior, a farm school

Ygsol San Sior is a primary school (242 students in 2016) in the city of Llandudno in the local authority of Conwy, North Wales. The school exemplifies how doing things differently can help create a stimulating and challenging learning environment that explores the opportunities offered by the wider environment to enrich student learning.

The school is considered a "farm school" and is the only school in Wales allowed to sell eggs to retail establishments. Like many Welsh primary schools, Ygsol San Sior keeps chickens and animals in the school garden. In 2013, the school had seven chickens, essentially for pedagogical purposes. In 2017, the activity has grown; its 99 chickens produce over 20 000 eggs a year. These eggs are stamped by the Egg Marketing inspector and sold to parents and the local community.

In 2014, the school won the Welsh Government's Best Enterprise Award for the San Sior Enterprise. This award demonstrates the entrepreneurial skills acquired by the students through the links with retail outlets selling the eggs. Every student, from nursery to Year 6 is involved in the school business. Teachers adapt their lesson plans to include the enterprise in the students' learning, so they are not only collecting eggs, for example, but also driving standards in literacy and numeracy. Each week, teachers and support staff link their classes to an aspect of the school farm and the duties it generates. For example, students have to write creative stories about how to catch a chicken, learn accounting and calculate the profits from the egg sales, or write an egg cookbook. These cross-curricular activities – the result of joint lesson planning and intense collaboration between staff – have spillovers, since students improve their performance in literacy and numeracy while tending the chickens. Activities are also geared towards the community's well-being. Students are taught how to become active citizens: for example measuring the decibels of noise from the "nuisance cockerel" and how it affects the local community. The profit from the chicken enterprise is put into outdoor projects, such as the creation of a beehive, and is also used to buy better equipment for sports, according to School Council initiatives. The school also invested part of the profit in cameras to record the bees' activity and display it in the foyer.

In addition to chickens, bees and the school garden, the school foyer houses an exotic collection of hedgehogs, hamsters, reptiles and insects that are incorporated into lessons and cared for by students, thereby complementing the stimulating and challenging curriculum of this extraordinary school.

Source: Information collected by the OECD team during the school visit and from the school's website, www.sansior.co.uk/.

Failures and problems are discussed and seen as opportunities for learning

SLOs systematically learn from failure. This is important as some initiatives and experiments will fail, while others succeed – and both offer valuable lessons. Problems and mistakes are thus seen as opportunities for learning and are considered a natural, even essential part of making progress in a learning organisation (Watkins and Marsick, 1996[46]; Cannon and Edmondson, 2005[50]).

Although the majority of respondents shared the view that in their schools "staff openly discuss failures in order to learn from them" and "problems are seen as opportunities for learning" the survey also suggested that about one-third of them did not know for certain or disagreed with these statements (see Table 3.5). The data here also showed notable differences in reporting patterns between staff categories, school types and the four regions of Wales. For example, 15% of teachers did not share the view that staff in their schools openly discussed failures in order to learn from them, compared with 7% of learning support workers and 6% of head teachers and deputy head teachers. Assistant head teachers were interestingly more critical than their colleagues in formal leadership roles; some 11% did not agree with this statement. This finding is notable because assistant heads were generally extremely positive in their responses to the survey – frequently more so than head teachers and deputy head teachers. As many assistant head teachers have a role closely connected with leading learning and teaching or professional learning, their observations can shine a valuable light on the process of change in schools.

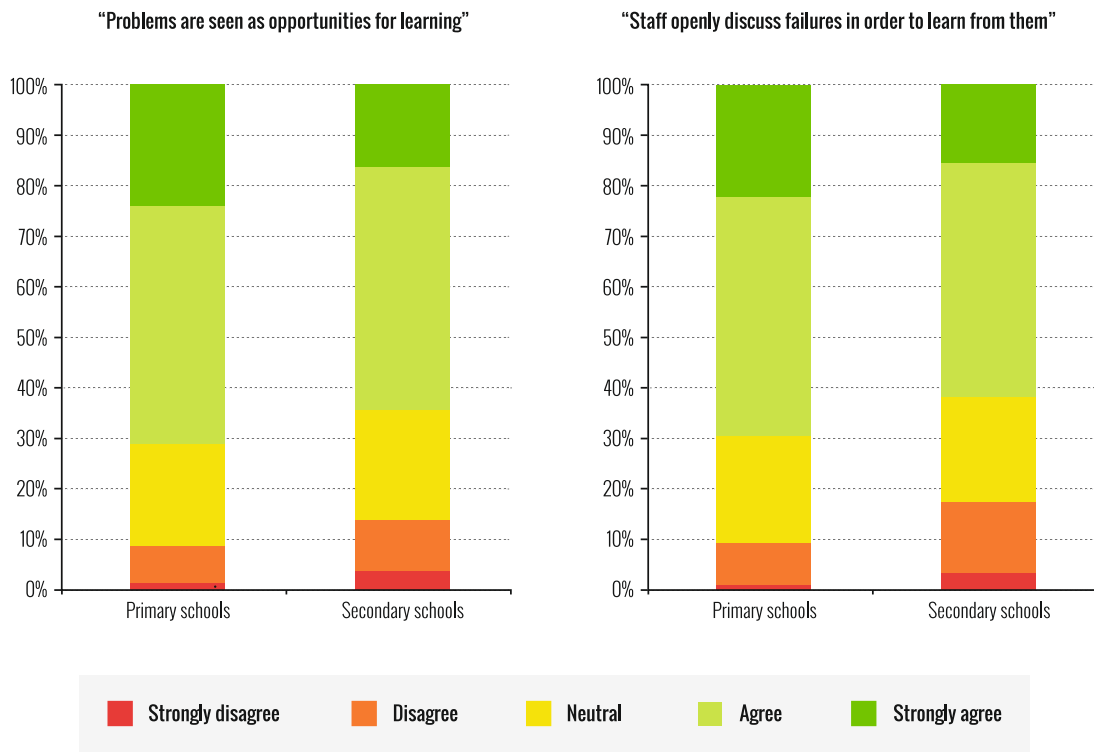**Table 3.5. Staff attitudes to failure and problems**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Staff openly discuss failures in order to learn from them	1.9 %	9.6 %	20.7 %	47.2 %	20.6 %
Problems are seen as opportunities for learning	2.1 %	7.8 %	20.6 %	47.7 %	21.8 %

Note: N: 1 664 and 1 657 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

Figure 3.10 shows the differences in responses between staff in primary and secondary schools which, although relatively minor, confirm the common trend throughout this section that establishing a culture of enquiry, experimentation and innovation seems more challenging for secondary schools in Wales. Wales' high-stakes assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements are believed to be a factor of influence in this. Chapter 4 will elaborate on this issue.

As mentioned above, the data in this dimension point to some differences across the regions. For example, just under two-thirds (65%) of staff of schools in South Wales responded positively to the statement that "problems are seen as opportunities for learning", compared with 73% for schools in South East Wales and 75% for schools in North Wales. In South West and Mid Wales, the share was 69% of school staff.

Figure 3.10. Staff attitudes to failure and problems, by school type

"Problems are seen as opportunities for learning"

"Staff openly discuss failures in order to learn from them"

Legend: Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Note: N: 1 657 and 1 664 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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There were also different response patterns for the statement "staff openly discuss failures in order to learn from them", with school staff in the South West and Mid Wales being most positive (78% responded positively) and staff in schools in South Wales the least positive (67% responded positively).

Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning

General overview

SLOs develop processes, strategies and structures that allow them to learn and react effectively in uncertain and dynamic environments. They institutionalise learning mechanisms in order to revise existing knowledge. Without these, a learning organisation cannot thrive (Schechter and Qadach, 2012[51]). Effective use of data by teachers, school leaders and support staff has thus become central to school improvement in countries around the globe (OECD, 2013[52]), and this includes Wales.

The evidence suggests that schools throughout Wales and the system generally are "data-rich". Schools have well-established systems for measuring progress and the vast majority of staff agreed that in their school data were analysed and used to inform practice. The items for this dimension can be found in Box 3.13.

> **Box 3.13. Survey items for the SLO dimension "embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning"**
>
> - Evidence is collected to measure progress and identify gaps in the school's performance.
> - Staff analyse and use data to improve their practice.
> - Staff use research evidence to improve their practice.
> - Staff analyse examples of good/great practices and failed practices to learn from them.
> - Staff learn how to analyse and use data to inform their practice.
> - Structures are in place for regular dialogue and knowledge sharing among staff.
> - Staff regularly discuss and evaluate whether actions had the desired impact and change course if necessary.
> - The school development plan is based on learning from continuous self-assessment and updated at least once every year.

While the vast majority of school staff indicated that structures were in place for regular dialogue and knowledge sharing among staff in their school, there were significant differences between the levels of education. The SLO survey data and OECD team's interviews also point to the need to improve the use of research evidence by staff to inform their practice.

Furthermore, although school development planning is informed by continuous self-assessments (self-evaluations) in the vast majority of schools, as Chapter 2 discusses, many schools in Wales could improve the quality of school self-evaluations and development planning. Part of the challenge lies in a lack of a common understanding of what good school self-evaluation and development planning entails in Wales. This issue is further discussed in Chapter 4.

Systems are in place to examine progress and gaps between current and expected impact

International evidence shows that embedding systems for capturing and sharing learning is essential for organisational learning and improvement to take place (Yang, Watkins and Marsick, 2004[53]). In line with their vision and goals, SLOs therefore create systems to measure progress and any gaps between current and expected impact.

An earlier OECD review (2014[48]) found that schools in Wales and the wider system were "data-rich". This is still the case today. The evidence from the SLO survey suggests that systems for measuring progress were well established in schools throughout Wales. For example, more than nine out of ten (92%) school staff responded positively to the statement that "evidence is collected to measure progress and identify gaps in the school's performance". Several of the schools the OECD team visited exemplified this.

Structures for regular dialogue and knowledge sharing

Having a large amount and range of data available does not guarantee that data will be used well. For example, a study on the use of education data in schools in five EU countries (Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland and England) found that data and reports were still rarely used to take action to improve teaching and learning, despite the quantity of data sources available (Schildkamp, Karbautzki and Vanhoof, 2014[54]).

Being "data-rich" or, more appropriately, "knowledge-rich" is clearly not what matters; it takes social processing in the school context to bring information to life so that data can be used to make wise decisions about changes in practice. For this to happen, schools and other organisations need to create the structures for regular dialogue and knowledge sharing among staff, and ensuring their staff have the skills to analyse and use the data (Fullan, Cuttress and Kilcher, 2005[55]; Vincent-Lancrin and González-Sancho, 2015[56]).

It is encouraging to find that almost nine out of ten staff (89%) reported that staff in their school "analyse and use data to improve their practice". Furthermore, 85% of school staff responded positively to the SLO survey statement that, in their schools, "structures are in place for regular dialogue and knowledge sharing among staff". The data however also point to differences in response patterns between the levels of education. While 87% of primary school staff responded positively to this statement this fell to 77% among staff in secondary schools.

Having the skills to analyse and use data and information effectively

As mentioned above, an SLO ensures that staff have the capacity to analyse and use data. Again the vast majority of respondents to the SLO survey indicated they recognise such practice in their schools; close to 78% of staff responded positively to the statement "staff learn how to analyse and use data to inform their practice" with only 4% responding negatively.

Figure 3.11, however, shows the differences in response patterns across the staff categories. For example, while 90% of head teachers responded positively to this statement, positive responses among teachers and learning support workers were around 10-15% lower.

Figure 3.11. Building capacity to analyse and use data, by staff categories

Responses to the statement "staff learn how to analyse and use data to inform their practice"
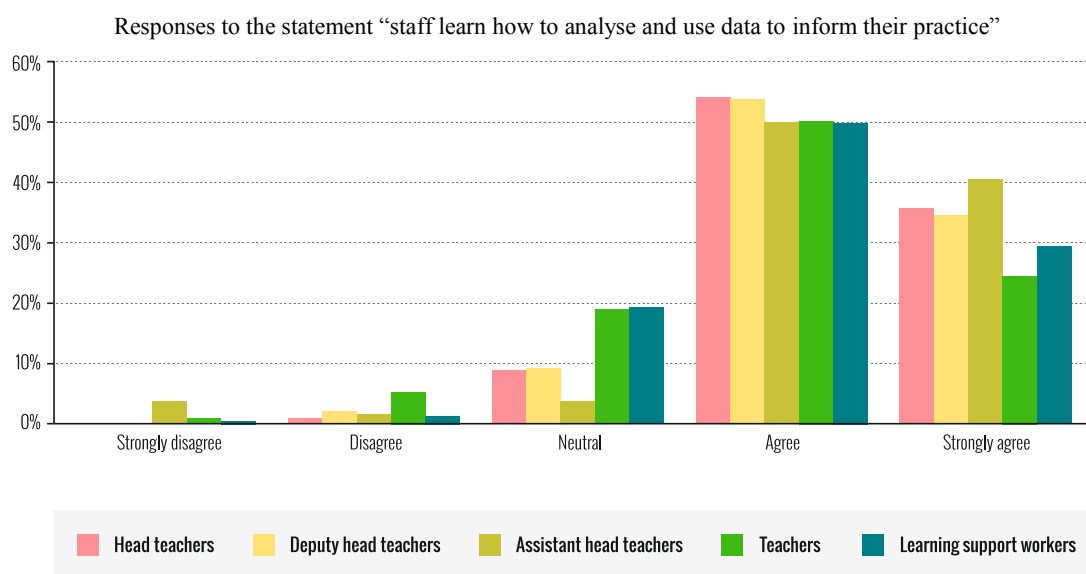
Note: N: 1 597 individuals.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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Staff use research evidence to improve their practice.

Many scholars argue that the use of research evidence is essential to improving practices (Kools and Stoll, 2016[10]; Brown, 2015[57]; Hattie, 2012[58]). Nevertheless, in many countries, teachers' involvement in research remains sparse, due to lack of motivation and limited time and resources. The evidence suggests this is also an area for improvement for Wales.

While the use of data appears to be common in many of schools across Wales, use of research evidence to inform practice is less so (see Figure 3.12). The SLO survey data revealed that just over two-thirds of respondents (68%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "staff use research evidence to improve their practice" in their school. Here learning support staff were considerably more positive in their responses (78%) than teachers (62%).

There were also minor differences between the regions: at one end of the spectrum 67% of staff in schools in South Wales responded positively to this statement, while at the other end, the figure was 72% of staff in schools in North Wales.

PISA 2015 data complements these findings and places them in an international context. It found that 57% of secondary head teachers in Wales reported that they promoted teaching practices based on recent educational research at least once a month (OECD, 2016[40]). Although this was above the OECD average of 41% it was still significantly below the United Kingdom average (65%) or the average in countries like Australia (76%) or the United States (84%).

Figure 3.12. Staff use of data and research evidence to improve their practice
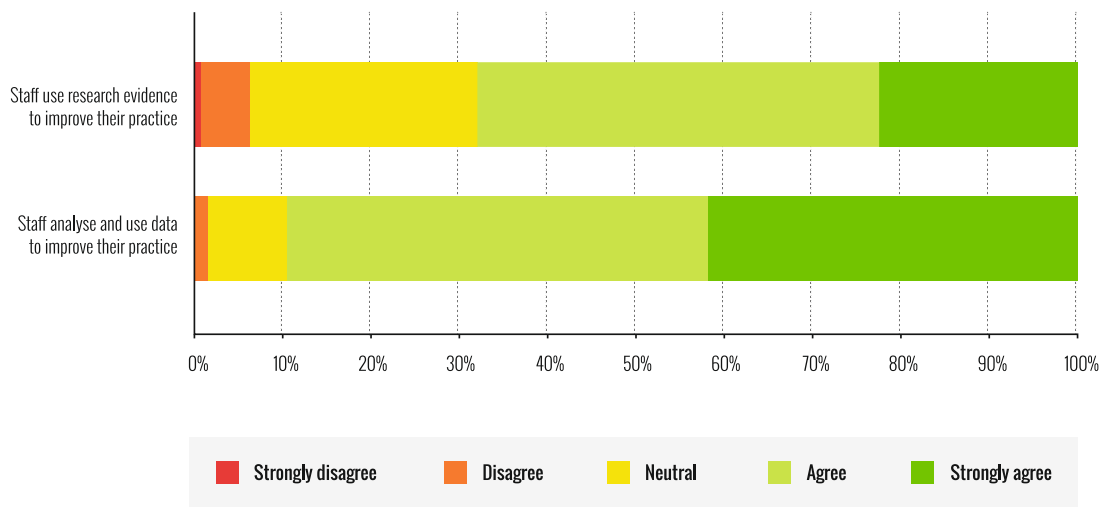
Note: N: 1 595 and 1 604 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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Many of the stakeholders the OECD team interviewed saw this as a clear area needing attention in many schools in Wales. Several of the school visits the OECD team undertook, as well as the interviews with policy makers, showed that research, often in the form of "action research", was increasingly seen as a key component of school improvement strategies (e.g. Box 3.14, Box 3.16 and Box 3.17). The regional consortia are clearly playing a pivotal role in promoting the use of research in schools, with gradually increasing engagement of higher education institutions apparent in recent years.

Staff analyse examples of good and failed practices to learn from them

A school that is or strives to become a learning organisation makes lessons learned – whether good or bad – available to all staff in order to learn from these. Close to eight out of ten school staff (78%) responded positively to the statement that "staff analyse examples of good/great practices and failed practices to learn from them" in their school.

However, the data point to significant differences between the staff categories. Around 84% of head teachers and 86% of assistant head teachers indicated that sharing examples of good and failed practices to learn from them was common practice in their schools, while among teachers this was more than 10 percentage points lower (73%).

Several of the stakeholders the OECD team interviewed mentioned this issue as an area for development for many schools in Wales – possibly more than these data would suggest. They spoke of the high-stakes evaluation, assessment and accountability arrangements as a reason for people being cautious about sharing failed or less successful practices. These stakeholders also highlighted the need for greater clarity on the new assessment, evaluation and accountability framework currently under development, as this could positively influence people's willingness to innovate and also share their less successful practices. Still, even when greater clarity is

provided to schools, it is likely to take time and concerted effort and encouragement for all staff in schools throughout Wales to feel confident enough to start sharing less successful practices; however, this will be essential for true learning to take place (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1998[59]).

Box 3.14. An example of developing action research groups – Ysgol Eirias secondary school

Ysgol Eirias secondary school (1 375 students in 2016) in the local authority of Conwy, North Wales, took part in the pilot of the SLO survey in April 2017. Every pilot school received an SLO "snapshot" that showed its strengths and weaknesses according to the views of the school staff. The staff critically reflected on the findings presented in the snapshot. In light of these and the new Teacher and Leadership Standards, they agreed that establishing a culture of enquiry, exploration and innovation, and exchanging knowledge and learning was an area for improvement for the school.

The school created action research groups (ARGs) building on the positive experiences with research-based approaches such as Lesson Study [1], and on steadily growing interest among some staff to engage in research to inform and innovate their practice. ARGs are composed of particular interest groups (e.g. assessment for learning (AfL), mentoring, additional learning needs (ALN), or literacy and numeracy) covering most of the pedagogical principles of the school (see Figure 3.13). Ysgol Eirias decided to partner with Bangor University to benefit and learn from their research expertise, starting with a presentation on how to conduct effective action research by two tutors from Bangor University at the start of the academic year.

Figure 3.13. Action research groups and pedagogical principles
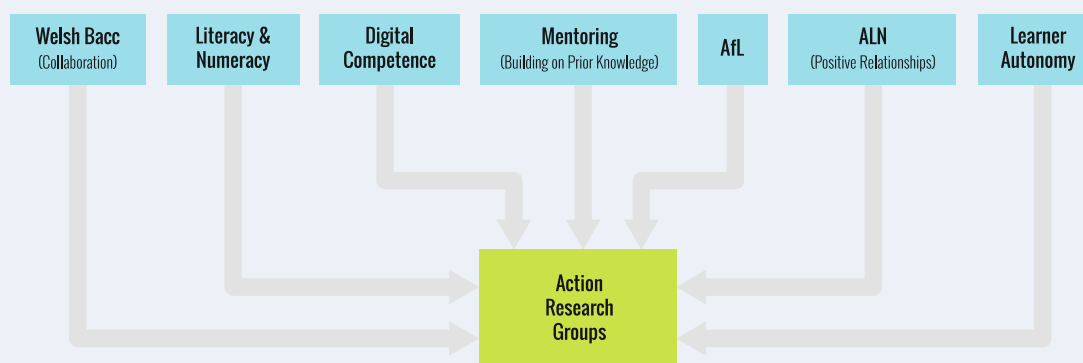
The decision was made that all groups would give feedback on the lessons learned to the whole school throughout the year, for example during training days or faculty meetings, depending on the nature of the research and findings. This decision was not only aimed at disseminating lessons learned, but also at gradually building the interest and willingness of other staff to engage in enquiry and experiment with new ideas and practices.

Note: 1. "Lesson Study" is a Japanese method of action research in which triads of teachers work together to target an identified area for development in their teaching and learning practices. Teachers use existing evidence and collaboratively research, plan, teach and observe a series of lessons.
Source: Information collected by the OECD team as part of the school visits.

Staff regularly discuss and evaluate whether actions had the desired impact and change course if necessary

In an SLO, staff evaluate the impact of their actions in order to learn from them and make adjustments where needed. This implies regular discussion about the expected outcomes of these actions as well as their evaluation and must involve the effective use of data and information (Earl and Timperley, 2015[47]; Schechter and Qadach, 2012[51]).

The SLO survey data showed that more than three-quarters (77%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "staff regularly discuss and evaluate whether actions had the desired impact and change course if necessary", with small differences between the levels of education and staff categories. Around 73% of secondary school staff responded positively to this statement, while the share was 5 percentage points higher among primary school staff (78%).

School leaders were most positive on this statement and teachers the most critical. For example, 85% of head teachers agreed with the statement, compared to 71% of teachers. In secondary schools these proportions fell to 80% for head teachers and 65% for teachers. The OECD team were surprised by these high numbers. The interviews and other sources of evidence, like Estyn's annual report (2018[14]), suggest this is an issue for further improvement for many schools in Wales.

School development planning is informed by continuous self-assessment

The vast majority of respondents to the SLO survey indicated that "the school development plan is based on learning from continuous self-assessment and updated at least once every year" (91%). These findings are not surprising given that much attention has been paid in Wales to promoting school self-evaluation and development planning. One such example is provided by **King Henry VIII Comprehensive School** in the local authority of Monmouthshire. In June 2016 it was found by Estyn to have made strong progress in its self-evaluation and improvement planning processes since its inspection two years earlier, through actions such as introducing peer reviews of departments, which have also supported the development of middle-level leaders. Furthermore, senior leaders were found to be successfully challenging and supporting middle-level leaders to improve the quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning, which in turn had contributed to improvements in student performance (Estyn, 2017[11]; Estyn, 2016[60]). These and other sources confirm the pivotal role leaders play in making change happen.

Despite these achievements, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the desk review and interviews by the OECD team revealed a need to further improve the quality of school self-evaluation and development planning (Estyn, 2018[14]; Estyn, 2017[11]). Part of the challenge seems to lie in a lack of a common understanding of what good school self-evaluation and development planning entails in Wales. At the time of writing, efforts are ongoing to develop a national school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit. This provides an important opportunity for realising a common understanding of good school self-evaluation and development planning in Wales (see Chapter 4).

Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system

General overview

Schools do not operate in a vacuum; they are "open systems" that are sensitive to their external environment, including social, political and economic conditions. The SLO therefore enables its staff to learn collaboratively and continuously and put what they learn to use in response to social needs and the demands of their environment (Silins, Zarins and Mulford, 2002[42]; Kools and Stoll, 2016[10]). Such schools also forge partnerships with, and networks of, students, teachers, parents and members of the local communities to complement and enrich their own capacity. Box 3.15 lists the survey items used to measure this dimension.

The evidence suggests that Wales has made much progress in recent years in learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system. The regional consortia have played a vital role in this development. However, there remain clear areas of improvement. For example, there seems scope to engage further with parents and guardians in the educational process and organisation of the school, particularly for secondary schools.

Box 3.15. Survey items for the SLO dimension "learning with and from the external environment and the larger system"

- Opportunities and threats outside the school are monitored continuously to improve practice.

- Staff collaborate, learn and share knowledge with peers in other schools.

- The school as a whole is involved in school-to-school networks or collaborations.

- Parents/guardians are partners in the school's organisational and educational processes.

- Staff actively collaborate with social and health services to better respond to students' needs.

- Staff actively collaborate with higher education institutions to deepen staff and student learning.

- Staff actively collaborate with other external partners to deepen staff and student learning.

Furthermore, there are significant differences between primary and secondary school staff in the extent to which they engage in collaborative learning and working with their peers in other schools.

Although it was not apparent when looking only at the SLO survey data, the interviews the OECD team conducted, as well as an earlier OECD assessment (2017[39]), suggested that Wales' school governance model challenges schools' ability to collaborate with social and health services in order to respond to students with additional learning needs (i.e. special education needs). Several local authorities, especially smaller ones, are believed to lack the capacity to respond to the seeming growing need for support for this

diverse group of students (see also Chapter 4). These and other issues will be elaborated further below.

The school as learning organisation is an open system

Schools in the 21st century are not sustained by working in isolation but instead have to be responsive to the changing demands of society. As such, the SLO is proactive in continuously scanning the environment to monitor and respond to external challenges and opportunities as appropriate (Silins, Zarins and Mulford, 2002[42]).

The vast majority of respondents to the SLO survey indicated that in their school opportunities and threats outside the school were monitored continuously to improve practice: 72% of staff responded positively to this statement, 25% neutrally (which may suggest they did not know) and 3% negatively.

Genuine partnerships

Schools' urgent drive to avoid isolation comes from the awareness that significant innovation cannot be achieved and sustained alone. As learning organisations, schools connect with their community and partners in their external environment to enrich their capacity to serve their students (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012[20]; OECD, 2013[18]). This section discusses schools' partnerships with parents, other schools, higher education institutions, social services and other external partners.

Parents and guardians

Parents or guardians are key partners for schools in the organisation and educational process and thereby strengthen it (Epstein, 2001[61]; Domina, 2005[62]). Without co-operation between families and schools, it is unlikely that all students will meet the high expectations set by a demanding society. An SLO shares information with parents and considers them to be partners in the educational process and organisation of the school.

This, as mentioned, is an area for development for many schools in Wales and is a particular challenge for secondary schools: 57% of secondary school staff responded positively to the SLO survey statement "parents/guardians are partners in the school's organisational and educational processes", compared with 71% of staff in primary schools.

There are also differences in responses between staff categories, with teachers being the most critical. Just over half (53%) of secondary school teachers agreed that parents/guardians were partners in their schools' organisation and educational processes, compared with 62% of secondary head teachers. For primary schools, these proportions showed also differences but were significantly higher, 65% and 85% respectively.

The data also pointed to some differences across the four regions of Wales; 65% of school staff in South Wales responded positively to this statement, a proportion that increased to 69% in the North Wales, 70% in South East Wales, and 72% in South West and Mid Wales.

PISA 2015 provides further information on this issue (OECD, 2017[9]). It 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 that it provided information and ideas for families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning (98%). A further eight out

of ten (79%) secondary head teachers reported that their school included parents in decision making (OECD average: 78%). 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 – a finding that is also commonly reported in other countries (Borgonovi and Montt, 2012[23]; Byrne and Smyth, 2010[24]; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003[25]; Williams, Williams and Ullman, 2002[26]). However, examples from Wales and internationally show that it is possible to increase parental engagement in the school and the learning of their children – even at the secondary level (e.g. Box 3.5).

Figure 3.14. Collaboration with external partners
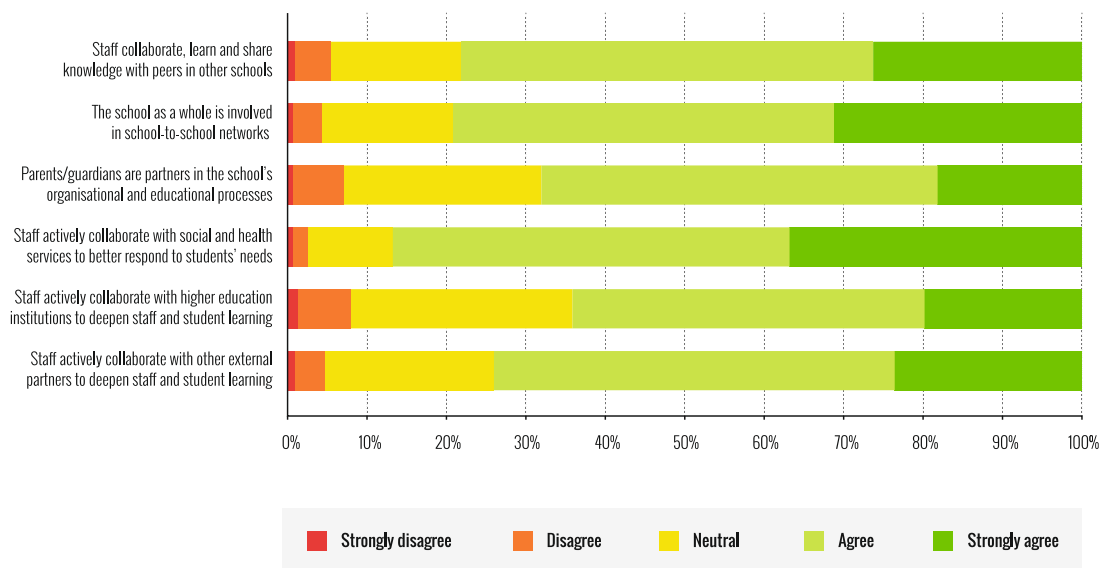
Note: N: 1 593, 1 597, 1 589, 1 592, 1 592 and 1 593 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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School-to-school collaborations

As the previous OECD assessment also found (2017[39]), learning with and from other schools and external partners has become common practice in many schools in Wales. The regional consortia have played an important role in this development (e.g. Box 3.16). The data from the SLO survey corroborated these findings (see Figure 3.14), and found only minimal differences across the regions of Wales. Primary school staff seem most likely to engage in collaborative learning and working with their peers in other schools: 80% of primary school staff responded positively to this item, compared with 73% of their peers in secondary schools. The interviews with regional consortia and Estyn representatives corroborated this finding.

There are significant differences between the staff categories. Close to nine out of ten head teachers (95%), deputy heads and assistant head teachers (90% and 93% respectively) reported that in their school "staff collaborate, learn and share knowledge with peers in other schools", whereas this ratio dropped to eight out of ten learning support workers (83%) and seven out of ten teachers (70%).

Box 3.16. An example of school-to-school collaboration – School Improvement Groups

Since 2014, the Central South Consortium and its five local authorities have been collaborating in order to find more effective ways of improving the quality of education for all of their children and young people. One of the outcomes of this effort are the School Improvement Groups (SIGs), a cross-local authority model where a head teacher in each group acts as a convenor and co-ordinates a group of school leaders collaborating on school improvement. The purpose of the SIG is for schools to work together to share best practices around common interests and priorities. Each of the 38 SIGs [1] is composed of schools from different local authorities, in different places on their development and with students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

The regional consortium finances the programme and each school is in charge of releasing staff to attend joint training and planning events. The consortium also leads an evaluation for each project. Schools are individually responsible for gathering data for specific projects and are expected to share information and lessons learned through newsletters to parents, websites and governors or other means. For example, one SIG in 2017 focused on developing the role of senior leaders in performance management and the monitoring of standards through the use of Continua, an online developmental self-evaluation tool for teachers and school development. Senior leaders attended Continua training and in turn conducted training for all staff in their schools.

Note: 1. 32 primary SIGs and 6 secondary.
Source: Information collected by the OECD team.

Higher education institutions

Partnerships with higher education institutions can offer schools clear advantages in drawing on these institutions' expertise and capacity, and bringing an external perspective (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006[63]; OECD, 2013[18]). The benefits can work both ways, as innovative ideas and practices can in turn influence the higher education/university level, and the teacher education and service missions of universities or teachers colleges may be very well served by such partnerships (OECD, 2013[52]).

About two-thirds of school staff (64%) responded positively to the statement that "staff actively collaborate with higher education institutions to deepen staff and student learning". A further 8% responded negatively and 28% neutrally which may suggest they are not certain.

The data pointed to differences between the regions, with 68% of school staff in North Wales responding positively to this survey statement, falling to 60% for staff in schools in South East Wales. In the South West and Mid Wales and South Wales the figures were 65% and 63% respectively.

Various stakeholders the OECD team interviewed highlighted this as an area for improvement for Wales' education system as a whole. The OECD team learned of positive developments in the accreditation of new teacher education programmes, which require higher education institutions to demonstrate they work in partnerships with schools. As will be discussed further in Chapter 4, one difficulty in encouraging schools to work in closer partnership with higher education institutions is that is voluntary, with no incentives to promote such partnerships. As a result, few schools are willing to make

long-term commitments, often withdrawing, sometimes at the last minute, particularly if they are facing an Estyn inspection (Furlong, 2015[64]).

The OECD team however learned that such partnerships are gradually becoming more established across the school system of Wales. Further encouragement and incentives seem to be needed (see Chapter 4). Box 3.14 and Box 3.17 show how such partnerships can contribute to schools' capacity for using research evidence to inform their development planning.

Box 3.17. An example of partnership between higher education institutions and schools – the Collaborative Institute for Education Research, Evidence and Impact (CIEREI)

The Collaborative Institute for Education Research, Evidence and Impact (CIEREI) is a strategic collaboration between three equal partners: 1) university researchers (Bangor University); 2) schools at a regional level; and 3) GwE, the regional consortium for North Wales, but other bodies and institutions also contribute. Based on the ambitions set out in the *Successful Future* report (Donaldson, 2015[7]) its strategic aims are to:

- build a vibrant research community that will inform current educational practice, initial teacher education programmes and the ongoing professional development of teachers

- work collaboratively and strategically with existing groups and centres that undertake educational research

- develop and strengthen teachers' and school leaders' skills and knowledge in evidence-based educational practice

- create an educational environment that supports the innovation and evaluation of educational practice

- support the Welsh Governments' strategic education plan *Education in Wales: Our National Mission* and contribute to the existing "what works" guidelines

Bangor University works with GwE to evaluate the quality of their school improvement programmes in the consortium. For example, CIEREI has evaluated GwE's Headsprout Online Reading Programme that consisted of two online training programmes for teachers on early reading and comprehension. Phase 1 of the evaluation consisted of pilot studies in small schools to take measures of reading skills before and after the implementation of Headsprout programmes. Phase 2 consisted of larger-scale evaluation projects involving more than 60 primary schools on different topics (parents' involvement in the programme, early reading skills, etc.). During the process, researchers worked closely with schools to identify barriers to the implementation of the programme and ensure that schools were helped to overcome those limitations. Embracing national objectives, particular attention was paid to reducing the attainment gap between students. At the end of the process, CIEREI was able to deliver evaluation reports for each school and used the findings to support GwE in the development of its regional action plan.

Source: Bangor University (2017[65]), *Collaborative Institute for Education Research, Evidence and Impact*, http://cierei.bangor.ac.uk/about.php.en (accessed on 20 November 2017).

Social and health services

The SLO survey data showed that close to nine out of ten respondents (87%) indicated that in their school "staff actively collaborate with social and health services to better respond to students' needs" (Figure 3.14 above) – 88% in primary schools and 80% in secondary schools – with minimal differences between the regions. Teachers were again the most critical: for instance, 76% of secondary teachers agreed with this statement, compared to 96% of secondary head teachers. While all secondary deputy head teachers agreed with this statement, only 89% of secondary assistant head teachers did, with the other 11% responding neutrally.

The interviews with stakeholders, as well as the findings of an earlier OECD assessment (2017[39]), suggest that Wales' school funding and governance model provides challenges to schools' ability to respond to the additional learning needs of all students, however. Several local authorities, especially the smaller ones, are believed to lack the capacity, both human and financial, to respond to the seemingly growing need for support for the diverse group of students with additional learning needs (i.e. special education needs). An additional complication is the separation of responsibilities between local authorities, which manage the social and health services, and the regional consortia, which are responsible for school improvement services (OECD, 2017[39]). This issue is further discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Modelling and growing learning leadership

General overview

Leadership is the essential ingredient that binds all of the separate parts of the learning organisation together. Leadership should set the direction and take responsibility for putting learning at the centre and keeping it there, and using learning strategically so that the school's actions are consistent with its vision, goals and values (Fullan, 2014[66]; Schleicher, 2018[28]; OECD, 2013[67]).

As noted in an earlier OECD assessment (2017[39]) it is key that Wales continues its investments in the development of its school leadership – as well as leadership at other levels of the system – to ensure greater consistency throughout the system. These investments will be essential in the years to come, considering the areas for further improvement reported in this chapter to develop SLOs, and thus help ensure the readiness of staff to engage with the new curriculum and bring it to life.

Box 3.18 lists the survey items used to assess this dimension. The information collected during the school visits and their interviews with various stakeholders at other levels of the systems, point to the conclusion that investment in leadership development has received much attention in recent years, particularly at the regional and local levels.

Areas for further improvement include enhancing leaders' coaching 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. Leaders in secondary schools seem to find it more challenging to develop their schools into learning organisations. The more compartmentalised structures and leadership practices appear to be factors of influence here.

**Box 3.18. Survey items for the SLO dimension "modelling and growing learning leadership"**

- Leaders participate in professional learning to develop their practice.
- Leaders facilitate individual and group learning.
- Leaders coach those they lead.
- Leaders develop the potential of others to become future leaders.
- Leaders provide opportunities for staff to participate in decision making.
- Leaders provide opportunities for students to participate in decision making.
- Leaders give staff responsibility to lead activities and projects.
- Leaders spend time building trust with staff.
- Leaders put a strong focus on improving learning and teaching.
- Leaders ensure that all actions are consistent with the school's vision, goals and values.
- Leaders anticipate opportunities and threats.
- Leaders model effective collaborations with external partners.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the generally high survey scores on this dimension were in contrast to other data sources like OECD team interviews and Estyn reports. The analysis of other SLO dimensions presented above also points to several areas for further improvement – several of which are under the direct control of school leaders. 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.

Leaders model and promote participation in professional learning

By engaging in appropriate professional learning as "lead learners" (Barth, 2001[68]), and creating the conditions for others to do the same, school leaders model and champion such professionalism throughout the school and beyond the school boundaries (Marsick and Watkins, 1999[69]; Kools and Stoll, 2016[10]). Participating in teachers' professional learning is also a key strategy for leaders to improve student learning (Robinson, 2011[70]). The vast majority of staff (86%) responded positively to the statement that "leaders participated in professional learning to develop their practice" with hardly any answering negatively (3%) (Figure 3.15).

A closer look at the data showed that all the respondents in leadership positions agreed that they participated in professional learning to develop their practice. Although less an issue for primary schools, the fact that 8% of teachers in secondary schools responded negatively to this statement and another 21% responded neutrally suggests that leaders in secondary schools could make their participation in professional learning more visible.

Figure 3.15. Modelling, coaching and promoting professional learning
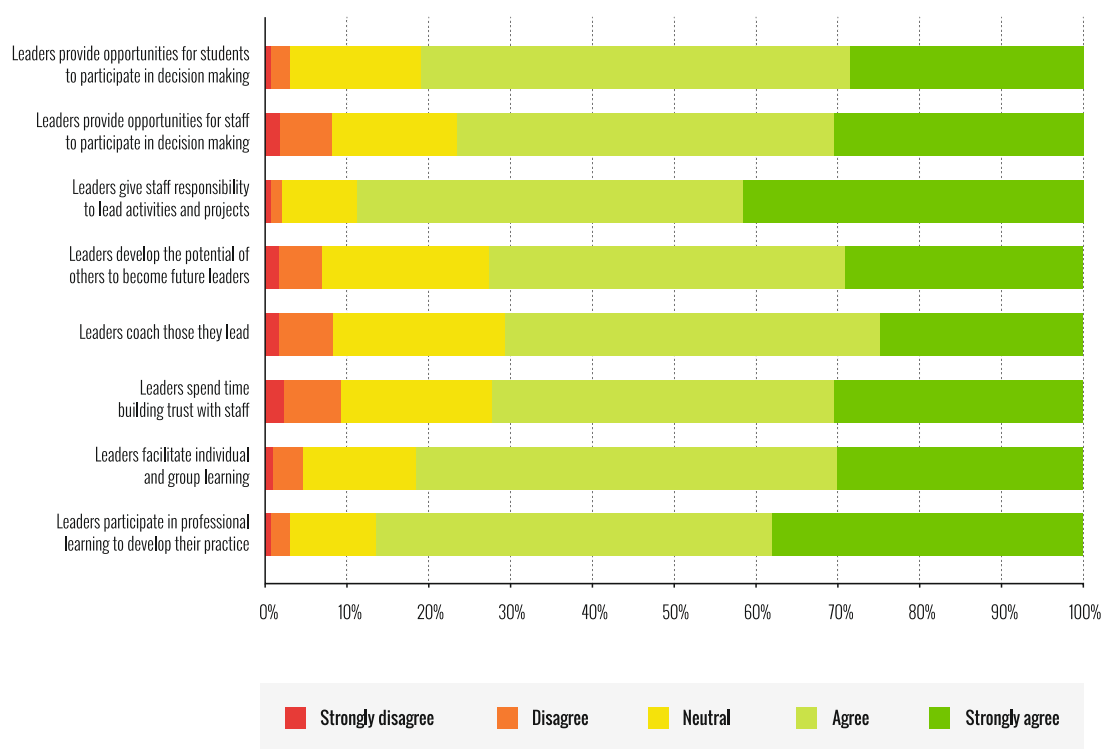
Note: N: 1 576, 1 575, 1 570, 1 575, 1 570, 1 574, 1 570 and 1 576 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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School leaders are the nerve centre of school improvement and play a vital role in establishing a learning culture, and promoting and facilitating individual, group and ultimately organisational learning (Schlechty, 2009[1]; OECD, 2013[67]; Schleicher, 2018[28]). Figure 3.15 shows that close to eight out of ten respondents to the SLO survey (82%) responded positively to the statement that "leaders facilitate individual and group learning".

The OECD team also learned of several examples of schools where school leaders serve as creative change agents and have created the structures and conditions to facilitate individual and group learning (e.g. Box 3.19). The stakeholders the OECD team interviewed noted that it is important for Wales to continue to identify and "share and move knowledge and good practices around" while promoting peer learning between school leaders within and across schools. This issue is further discussed in Chapter 4.

Box 3.19. An example of creating the conditions for professional dialogue, peer learning and knowledge exchange – the Fern Federation

The Fern Federation consists of two primary schools: **Craig Yr Hesg Primary School** (146 students in 2017) and **All Saints Church in Wales School** (246 students in 2017) located in deprived areas of Central South Wales. The schools were federated after an improvement strategy showed unsatisfactory results. The appointed executive head teacher took a range of measures to create the conditions for professional dialogue, peer learning and knowledge exchange among staff within and between the schools – as well as with other schools.

Informed by consultations with staff and an evaluation of teaching in both schools, the head teacher launched a strategic development plan with a strong focus on professional learning aimed at improving teachers' competencies in both general and subject pedagogy. Structures set up as part of the development plan include:

- shared leadership with a large share of the teaching staff assuming some kind of leadership role (e.g. leader of data: tracking and monitoring individual student data, following up with teachers, leader of literacy improvement)

- "teaching and learning workshops" every two weeks focusing on a chosen area of practice to improve

- co-coaching sessions (leaders of teaching and learning coach teachers to provide pedagogical support)

- mentoring (for teachers failing to make progress, mentoring sessions are in place to ensure practice progress).

The development plan included investment in resources to facilitate systematic enquiry, reflection and peer learning. These included:

- a classroom with a one-way mirror that allows observers to watch the class and teaching staff in practice without disturbing or influencing children's behaviour

- video cameras

- a video library system with individual accounts for each teacher where they can upload their recordings, add reflection notes to them and share them with other users.

Teachers are ensured dedicated time to conduct individual or collaborative research projects, and to reflect on their impact on their own learning.

Source: OECD (2018[71]) TALIS initial teacher preparation study, www.oecd.org/education/school/talis-initial-teacher-preparation-study.htm; Révai, N. (2018[72]) "Teachers' knowledge dynamics and innovation in education – Part II", http://dx.doi.org/10.21549/NTNY.21.2018.1.1.

One area of improvement for school leaders would seem to be in creating settings in which trust can develop over time so that colleagues are more likely to engage in mutual learning (Figure 3.16). Around 9% of respondents disagreed that "leaders spend time building trust with staff" in their school, with a further 19% responding neutrally which may suggest they did not know for sure. Moreover, as Figure 3.16 illustrates, there were differences across staff categories with 14% of teachers disagreeing with this statement as opposed to none of the school leaders. The responses also suggest secondary schools faced slightly more challenges: 18% of secondary teachers did not share the view that leaders spent time building trust in their school, compared with 13% of primary teachers.

Figure 3.16. Building trust, by staff categories

Responses to the statement "Leaders spend time building trust with staff"
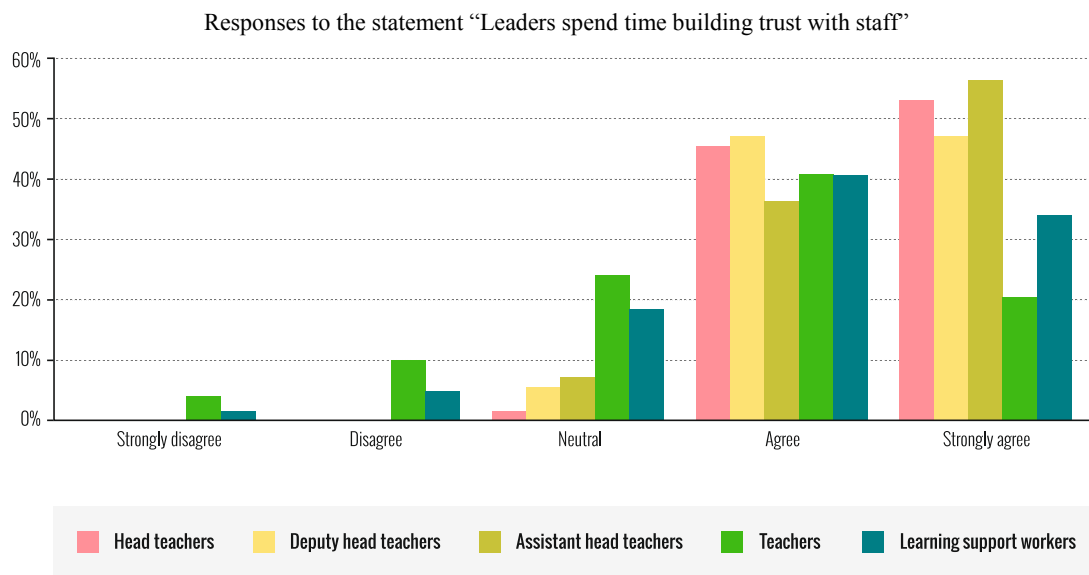
Note: N: 1 525 individuals.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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Extending and growing leadership

The demands of leadership in the 21st century are far too extensive for any one person. Because head teachers' work has become so complex, some of these responsibilities need to be more broadly shared with others, both inside and outside the school (Schleicher, 2012[31]; Fullan, 2011[73]; Hallinger and Heck, 2010[74]). SLOs therefore have a culture of shared responsibility for school issues, and staff are encouraged to actively participate in decision making. Through mentoring and coaching, school leaders prepare those they lead to take on more senior-level responsibilities and ensure sustainable leadership through succession.

Just over seven out of every ten respondents to the SLO survey indicated that "leaders coach those they lead" (71%) and that "leaders develop the potential of others to become future leaders" (73%) – which is a positive finding. Indeed, there are examples throughout this chapter that exemplify this (e.g. Box 3.20).

Box 3.20. An example of extending and growing leadership – Dwr-y-Felin secondary school

Dwr-y-Felin is a secondary school (1 134 students in 2017) located in the city of Neath, in South West and Mid Wales. The school values each member of staff as a dynamic member in the school organisation. The head teacher mentors other senior leaders to develop through the School Challenge Cymru Programme. This programme for secondary schools gave the school additional resources for improvement. The school used these resources to develop its middle leaders and encouraged them to explore the work of senior leadership by offering them opportunities to shadow and work alongside leadership colleagues. This enabled them to develop a better understanding of the expectations, functions and accountability arrangements associated with school leadership.

In 2017, the school had 22 staff in middle leadership roles, all of whom had been coached by the senior leadership team. Many of them also take leadership courses at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David with support of the regional consortium (ERW) through its Leadership and Development Programme.

Source: Information collected by the OECD team as part of the school visits.

The SLO survey data found some differences in responses between staff categories, levels of education and the four regions. For example, the data showed that some 13% of teachers and 5% of learning support workers did not agree that in their schools, leaders coached those they led, while hardly any school leaders did so. Among secondary school staff, 65% agreed, compared to 72% in primary schools.

When looking across the regions of Wales over two-thirds (68%) of staff in schools in South Wales agreed that leaders coached those they led in their school. The proportion increased to over three quarters (76%) for staff in schools in the South West and Mid Wales (see Figure 3.17).

Figure 3.17. Coaching by leaders, by region

Responses to the statement "Leaders coach those they lead"
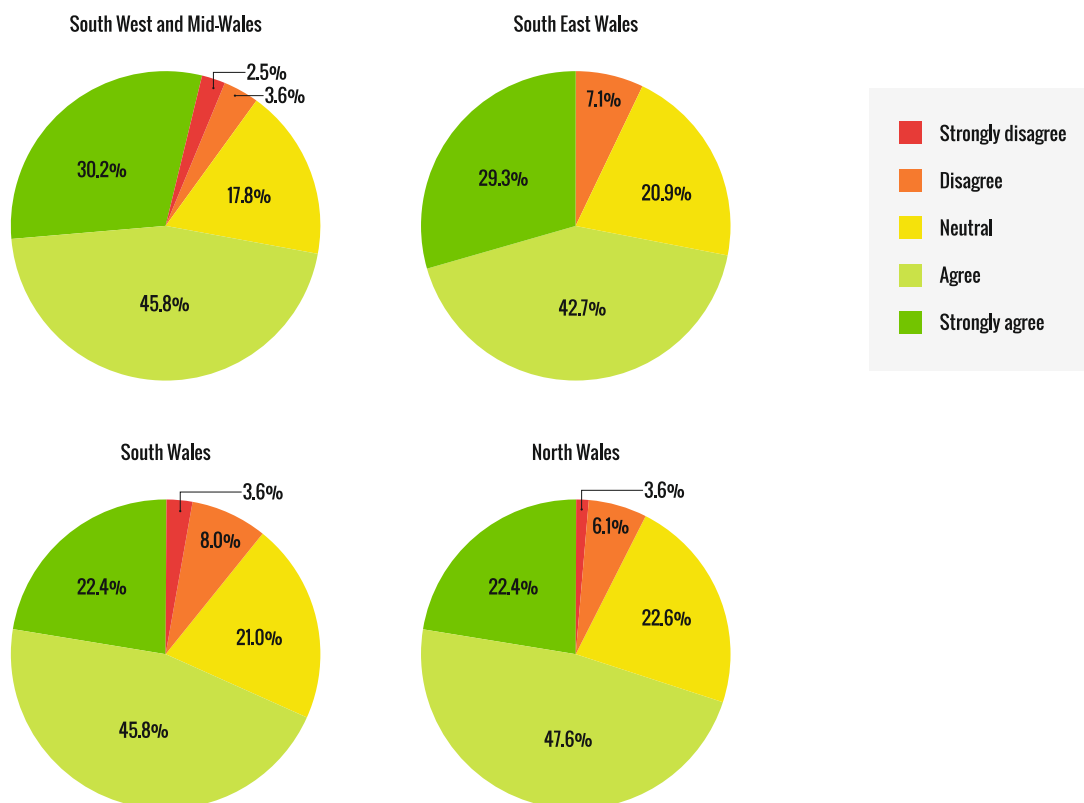
Note: N: 1 570 individuals.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

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Leaders providing opportunities to others to participate in decision making

Data from the SLO survey (see Figure 3.15 above) suggested that providing opportunities for others to participate in decision making was a strength of those in leadership positions in schools throughout Wales.

The SLO survey data suggest that distributed leadership practices were slightly better established in primary schools than in secondary schools. For example, 12% of staff in secondary schools disagreed with the statement "leaders provide opportunities for their staff to take part in decision making", compared with 7% in primary schools.

However, in terms of the recognition of the importance of "student voice" in the decision making of the school – in organisational and educational matters, the interviews with school staff and other stakeholders revealed a more critical view than the survey data. These suggested that students' input is often restricted to issues such as uniform or canteen provision, rather than concerning teaching and learning or the actual organisation of the school. The OECD team learned that students' role in school self-evaluations and development planning is also often minimal or even non-existent. This issue is further discussed in Chapter 4.

A focus on learning and teaching and ensuring actions respond to the school's vision, goals and values

The people the OECD team interviewed, whether they were working in schools or other parts of the system, strongly supported the view that school leaders in Wales are focused on improving the teaching and learning of their students. They also confirmed that the vast majority of school leaders work to ensure their actions respond to the school's vision, goals and values. The data from the SLO survey corroborated these findings (see Table 3.6) and, for both elements, showed relatively minor differences between the regions and school types.

Table 3.6. Focus of school leaders

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Leaders put a strong focus on improving learning and teaching	0.4%	1.4%	7.6%	43.1%	47.5%
Leaders ensure that all actions are consistent with the school's vision, goals and values	1.1%	2.3%	12.0%	46.3%	38.3%

Note: N: 1 574 and 1 577 individuals for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

For example, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, for the statement "leaders ensure that all actions are consistent with the school's vision, goals and values" the data showed that 13% of primary school staff and 16% of secondary school staff responded negatively or neutrally which may suggest they did not know for sure. For both levels of education, teachers were the most critical with 19% of primary teachers and 27% of secondary teachers responding in a similar vein.

PISA 2015 data enriches and offers an international perspective on this issue. It found that 39% of secondary school head teachers in Wales reported they ensured that teachers work according to the school's educational goals more than once a month, compared with an OECD average of 53% (OECD, 2016[40]). This suggests that secondary head teachers in Wales could place a greater emphasis on ensuring their schools' actions respond to its vision and goals, communicating these efforts better with their staff, and engaging them in decision making.

Connecting strategically and systemically

In SLOs, school leaders are "system players" who promote the establishment of strong collaborations with other schools, parents, the community and higher education institutions (Fullan, 2014[66]; Dimmock, Kwek and Toh, 2013[75]).

The SLO survey data corroborated the OECD team's interview findings that school leaders in Wales on average were well aware of the opportunities and threats that lay in their schools' external environment. Close to three-quarters of school staff responded positively to the statement "leaders anticipate opportunities and threats" (77%), but with significant differences between levels of education: 79% of primary staff but 70% of secondary staff responded positively. At both levels of education, teachers were the least positive. Interviews with secondary school leaders and other stakeholders suggested that the former sometimes find it challenging to make all of their actions visible to all staff, with school size playing a role in this.

Three-quarters of respondents to the SLO survey (76%) agreed that leaders effectively modelled collaborations with external partners, with relatively minor differences between the regions. For example, in South East Wales 78% of school staff responded positively to this statement, compared with 73% of staff in schools in South Wales.

Key findings of the Schools as Learning Organisations Assessment and points of reflection and action for schools

Chapters 2 and 3 have explored the extent to which schools in Wales have already put in practice the key characteristics of a learning organisation. 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.

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

According to the views of school leaders, teachers and learning support workers the majority of schools in Wales are well on their way in putting the SLO model into practice. The SLO survey data (when aggregated to the school level) suggested that close to six out of ten schools (58%) in the sample have put five or more of the seven dimensions of the learning organisation into practice.

The data however also suggested 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 had realised only two or fewer. Some 10% of schools in the 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 need to be interpreted with some caution. First, they are based on one source of self-reported survey data and, although satisfactory, the response rate to the SLO survey was not optimal. 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 for deep learning and sustained progress 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. 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", although on the latter the differences between primary and secondary schools are particularly large, with primary schools faring better.

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 data suggest that many schools in Wales could also do more to "learn with and from the external environment and larger system". The text below elaborates on these and other findings.

Many schools in Wales could do more to improve their development and realisation of a shared vision centred on the learning of all students

Some 53% of schools in the sample reported that their school had developed a vision centred on the learning of all students which was shared by staff – the lowest proportion of the seven SLO dimensions. Responses to the SLO survey items that make up this dimension varied considerably.

Nine out of ten school staff (92%) reported that their school has 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 emphasises preparing students for their future in a changing world. These are encouraging findings considering the ambitions set out in Wales' new school curriculum. Various sources however point to the conclusion that many schools in Wales are yet to put this vision centred on the learning of all students into practice.

Further work is also needed to make such a vision into something that is truly shared among schools' staff and other key stakeholders. The involvement of staff, parents and external partners in the shaping of the vision are areas for improvement, in particular for secondary schools. For example, while 77% of primary school staff indicated they were involved in the development of the school's vision, among secondary school staff this was 57%.

High-quality inductions and mentoring/coaching support are not common practice

The evidence suggested 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 would seem to have created and supported continuous learning opportunities for all staff (i.e. put this dimension into practice). The data however revealed significant differences between the levels of education: 64% of primary schools and 26% of secondary schools seem to have put this dimension into practice.

Various sources of data and information also showed that induction and mentoring/coaching need to be strengthened in many schools across Wales. For example, some 35% of respondents to the SLO survey disagreed or were unsure whether their school had mentors or coaches available to help staff develop their practice. 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 – and collaborative learning and working – more important.

More needs to be done to promote team learning and peer review and encourage staff to tackle problems together

The evidence suggested that about seven out of ten schools in the sample (71%) are promoting team learning and collaboration among all its staff. Primary schools however fare better in this: 75% of primary schools in the sample appeared to promote team

learning and collaboration among all staff, compared to 48% of secondary schools. Furthermore, schools could do more to ensure that staff learn to work together as a team, observe each other more regularly and tackle problems together.

For several of the elements that make up this dimension, there were also different perceptions depending on staff categories. For example, 92% of secondary head teachers in the SLO survey agreed that staff in their schools observed each other's practice and collaborated in developing it, compared with only 67% of teachers. Although 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 in 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

A culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration is underdeveloped in many schools, particularly in secondary schools

The OECD team were struck by a change in attitudes compared to the OECD 2014 review. At that time, it 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[48]). This situation appears to have changed considerably. However, the OECD team found that this general change in mindset is yet to result in a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration in a significant proportion of schools in Wales. Four out of ten schools from the sample (41%) do not yet seem to have established such a culture.

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 the sample had established a culture of enquiry, exploration and innovation, compared to 63% of primary schools. Other data sources corroborated this finding.

Systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge are well established, but the quality of school self-evaluations and development planning is variable

Systems for measuring progress seem well established in schools across Wales. The SLO survey data suggested that 70% of schools in the 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 (the largest difference of all SLO dimensions).

The evidence also suggested that, while the use of data is common in many schools across Wales, considerably fewer schools seem to have staff that are using research evidence to inform their practice.

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 reporting upwards 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. Wales' 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 lies in the fact that there is no common understanding of what good school self-evaluation and development planning entails in Wales.

School-to-school collaborations are common practice, but collaborations with some external partners need to be strengthened

Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system is common practice in just over the majority of schools in the sample (55%): 57% of primary schools and 39% of secondary schools in the sample of schools seemed to have put this dimension in practice (the smallest difference of all dimensions).

One area for improvement is the engagement of parents and guardians in the educational process and organisation of the school. This was found to be 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. 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 have shown, it is possible for schools to increase parental engagement, even at the secondary level.

Another area for improvement is the 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.

Furthermore, 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, interviews with various stakeholders and the figures on average student expenditure per school suggest that the school funding and governance model in Wales affects schools' ability to respond to the needs of all students.

The need for continued investment in the capacity of school leaders to model and grow learning leadership

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

Particular areas for development are the 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. In addition, the evidence suggested 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 however were in contrast to other data sources like OECD team interviews and Estyn reports. The analysis of other SLO dimensions also pointed 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 suggested that the majority of schools in Wales are well on their way to developing as learning organisations. On the dimensions "promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff" and "embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning" schools appear to be progressing well. Although on the latter differences between primary and secondary schools are particularly large, with primary schools faring better, and also school self-evaluation and development planning stands out as an area for further attention.

Two dimensions were found to be considerably less well developed and deserve particular attention: "developing a shared vision centred on the learning of all students (learners)" and "establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration". The data also suggested that many schools in Wales could do more to "learn with and from the external environment and larger system".

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 for them to develop as learning organisations.

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.

Note

[1] School governors are elected members of a school governing board that has a central role in decisions about budgets and recruitment of the school. Members consist of teaching staff, parents, councillors and community representatives.

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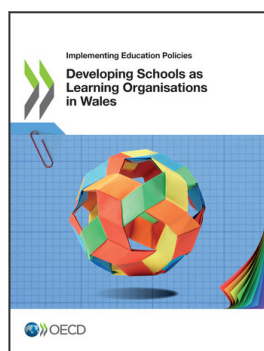
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Part III. System assessment for developing schools as learning organisations