

# Foreword

## Major reform

Looking back over the last three years, the most striking features of the Welsh education system have been a set of fundamental reforms and the preparations made for those reforms. In the **compulsory education phase**, the reforms have centred around designing and planning for a new school curriculum, and on the knock-on effects onto teaching and assessment practice, staff professional learning, leadership development, and almost every other aspect of schooling and teaching. In the **post-compulsory education and training phase**, the proposed creation of a Commission for Tertiary Education and Research signals a major structural change to the planning and governance of higher education, further education, apprenticeships, sixth-form provision and adult learning. And there are also significant changes in train in the field of **special educational needs** that bridge the compulsory and post-compulsory sectors.

There is a widespread consensus among educationalists within Wales and further afield around the need for major changes to the Welsh education system. And indeed, there has been considerable agreement around the broad nature of particular reforms, while there has been debate on specific elements, such as the pace of change and the resources available. Even given this general consensus, **transforming a whole education system is a complex and long-term undertaking**, and one that is estimated to take at least a decade.

The reform programme can be conceived of not only in terms of a set of policy changes aimed at reshaping practice, but also in terms of a broader shift in the underlying culture of our national education system. The magnitude of this task is highlighted by identifying some of the cultural changes envisaged:

- moving from an education system where variability is tackled and improvement is driven by competition to a system based on self improvement and collaboration
- moving towards a more balanced use of performance data that avoids the unintended consequences of a high-stakes approach to accountability and target setting
- moving to a more reflective, evidence-informed education system with a greater emphasis on professional enquiry and research



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## Gathering momentum

Progress is being made on implementing the initial stages of this reform programme and the pace has accelerated recently. For example, the new curriculum has been published and there is a **growing culture of collaboration** between national, regional and local education organisations. The initial stages of this work have taken time, as expected of a process based largely on co-creation between government and a wide range of stakeholders, including the teaching profession. In terms of curriculum reform specifically, a stage has now been reached when **all schools need to think carefully about what the new curriculum means for them**. The newly published Curriculum for Wales offers an overarching structure for curriculum planning, but the responsibility is on each school to design its own curriculum to provide what their learners need to thrive in the modern world.

During a period of structural reform, it is important that the quality of education and standards do not slip. There is still much left to do and, along with identifying much good and excellent practice, this report highlights some of the challenges that remain. The messages regarding the sectors and phases of education and training that we inspect are similar to last year, with this year's inspection outcomes being broadly similar to those of previous years. There are well-established strengths in non-maintained nursery settings, primary schools, special schools, and post-16 provision. There have also been improvements this year in inspection outcomes for the growing all-age school sector.

Standards are good or excellent in eight-in-ten primary schools and in just under a half of secondary schools. The proportion of secondary schools causing concern compared to other sectors remains a challenge for several local authorities and for the system as a whole. Possible reasons for this have been explored in previous annual reports. **Improving teaching and learning is the most common inspection recommendation for these schools**. Improving teaching and the learning experiences of all pupils is a major aim of the current curriculum reforms. Revising qualifications to align with the new curriculum and ensuring that accountability measures do not distort teaching and learning are major tasks for the next few years. In the meantime, it is good that a new multi-agency approach to supporting secondary schools is being trialled across Wales.

It is also encouraging that there are **signs of improvements in several cross-cutting education themes**. Improvements in aspects of literacy and numeracy over recent years have been consolidated, although there is more to do to develop learners' higher-order skills. Encouraging a life-long love of reading is a key task for any education system. Wide reading of fiction and non-fiction books broadens horizons, develops critical thinking, and helps build a rich vocabulary that enables learners to articulate their thoughts and feelings. There is also more to do to improve learners' digital competency and particularly their technical understanding of digital technologies.

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## Meeting the needs of all learners

This year, we have also seen improvements in the outcomes for more able learners, including their PISA, GCSE and A level performances. Yet more support for these learners is needed, because, when they perform well, they serve as models of excellence for their peers, pointing the way to what can be achieved, and benefiting other learners and the system as a whole. It is also crucial that the most vulnerable in society are cared and provided for particularly during a time of change. We have a reputation as a country that values equity and inclusion. Special schools maintained by local authorities have been consistently strong over many years, with little variability in quality of provision – they work well together and share expertise effectively. This year, we have also seen improvements in independent special schools and in pupil referral units, including evidence of excellence in these sectors for the first time for many years. These sectors work with learners who have been excluded from other schools or have complex requirements that maintained schools are not able to provide.

Despite these improvements in equity, the ‘poverty gap’ has not narrowed. **The differences in attainment and attendance between pupils from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds has not closed over the last decade.** These gaps typically widen as learners become older, and at least partly result from how families and the local community view education, as well as from the quality of the education provision itself. In previous annual reports, I have argued that closing this gap needs a two-pronged approach: by improving teaching and the learning experiences of all pupils and by providing a more ‘community-focused’ schooling system. Pupils cannot benefit fully from improved education provision if they are not in school or not supported with difficult circumstances in their lives. The work of the various agencies that help schools to support pupils and families require management, co-ordination and resourcing. We are currently reviewing the various models of community-focused schools for publication later this year.

Reform is a key feature of the post-compulsory education and training phase too. Just as the new curriculum provides a focus for policy changes in the compulsory sector, the proposed creation of a Commission for Tertiary Education and Research is intended to do the same for the post-compulsory sector. Together, these reforms have the potential to improve collaboration between schools and other post-16 providers. More seamless policy and practice should help ensure that young people’s experiences at different stages of their education build progressively to support them in becoming enterprising and creative contributors to workplaces across Wales. At the moment, too many young people do not progress into the most appropriate post-16 provision in relation to their ambitions, interests and abilities. Our report later this year on collaboration between further education colleges and schools will provide helpful examples to build on.

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## Listening and learning together

Estyn too is changing. Next academic year, 2020-2021, instead of inspecting a sample of schools, we will visit nearly all schools to learn about and feed back on how they are planning and preparing for the new curriculum. Keep up to date with how we're changing on our website.

Education reform is wide-reaching and complex. It's time now for schools to think seriously about what the curriculum means for them and take responsibility for designing learning experiences that meet the needs of all their pupils. But schools cannot do this alone. The education system as a whole needs to work together to support our schools and education workforce in transforming education and training in Wales.

## About the report and its data

The structure of the annual report reflects the extent and comprehensiveness of the current education reforms mentioned above. The report is in two parts: a thematic part addresses the main policy developments and cross-cutting themes over the last few years; and a sectorial part that contains separate sections on each of the sectors we inspect.

We published all our inspection judgements for the 2018-2019 academic year as official statistics in October 2019. Our interactive data website allows readers to explore these judgements. This report provides a commentary on that data and places it in context.

In 2018-2019, we recognised the excellence of those providers that achieved 'excellent' in the majority of their inspection judgements.



<b>Non-maintained nurseries</b>	Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup Cylch Meithrin Llanhari Cylch Meithrin Talgarreg Little Stars Nursery LLP
<b>Primary schools</b>	Broughton Primary School Clase Primary School Ewloe Green C.P. School Garnteg Primary School Glenboi Primary School Risca Primary School Shirenewton Primary School St Joseph's R.C. Primary School, Newport St Julian's Primary School St Mary's Catholic Primary, Wrexham Tremorfa Nursery School Trinant Primary School Ysgol Twm o'r Nant Ynysowen Community Primary School Ysgol Bryn Coch C.P. Ysgol Bryn Tabor Ysgol Brynaerau Ysgol Dolbadarn Ysgol Dyffryn Cledlyn Ysgol Ffordd Dyffryn Ysgol Gynradd Bethel Ysgol Gymraeg Y Gwernant Ysgol Gynradd Carno Ysgol Llanbrynmair Ysgol Mynach Ysgol Pant Pastynog Ysgol Pen Barras Ysgol Gymraeg Sant Curig Ysgol Y Foryd Ysgol Y Garnedd
<b>Secondary schools</b>	Bishop Hedley High School Cardiff High School Cowbridge Comprehensive School Cwmtawe Community School
<b>Independent schools</b>	Headlands School Landsker Education The Cathedral School Woodlands School
<b>Special schools</b>	Trinity Fields School & Resource Centre
<b>Pupil referral units</b>	Denbighshire PRU Tai Educational Centre