Inspirational leaders

School leadership

Leadership is good or excellent in around three-quarters of primary schools and in around half of secondary schools. Excellent leadership is as common in secondary schools as primary schools. Secondary schools are nearly three times as likely as primary schools to have unsatisfactory leadership.

Across all sectors, the best leaders support school improvement and the smooth running of their organisations by distributing roles and responsibilities skilfully and by prioritising improving teaching and outcomes for pupils. Successful leaders lead by example and foster a strong ethos of teamwork in their schools. They have high expectations of pupils' and of staff achievement and wellbeing. These leaders have a clear vision for the development of the school, which they share with pupils, staff parents and governors.

Successful school leaders ensure that improving teaching and learning is at the heart of their work. They make sure that staff have access to relevant professional learning opportunities and establish a culture that supports the development of staff skills and those of pupils. They foster a culture of leadership across the school by providing opportunities for staff to take on genuine leadership responsibilities. Many successful secondary schools have a clear succession plan and often 'grow' their own leaders.

Staff wellbeing is a key factor in achieving good pupil outcomes. Successful leaders create and sustain a culture where staff feel valued and supported to flourish in an environment that has a positive influence on their job satisfaction. Effective leaders promote staff wellbeing. For example, Penllergaer Primary School, Swansea, paid for a local school-based counselling service to provide regular professional supervision for any member of staff who wished to participate. Staff were able to share their feelings and experiences, and also learnt skills for supporting each other. The school now runs its own supervision in-house. In Bishop of Llandaff High School, Cardiff, the leadership team demonstrates its strong appreciation of the commitment of staff, by providing refreshments during break times and arranging car MOTs. This has resulted in a highly motivated team that aims for continuous improvement. The senior leadership team at Cardiff High also values and promotes staff welfare and has developed an innovative staff charter that aims to make the school an attractive place to work and learn.

The most successful school leaders manage change well and have a deep understanding of the school context. They plan what is best for their school in terms of wider reforms and steer how new initiatives relate to their overarching vision for the school. They protect staff from being overloaded and from unnecessary bureaucracy. They calm crises and take the heat out of emotional situations. These leaders empower their staff to innovate and are prepared to take considered risks as they try out new approaches. They champion objective and critical professional discussion about the impact of these changes.
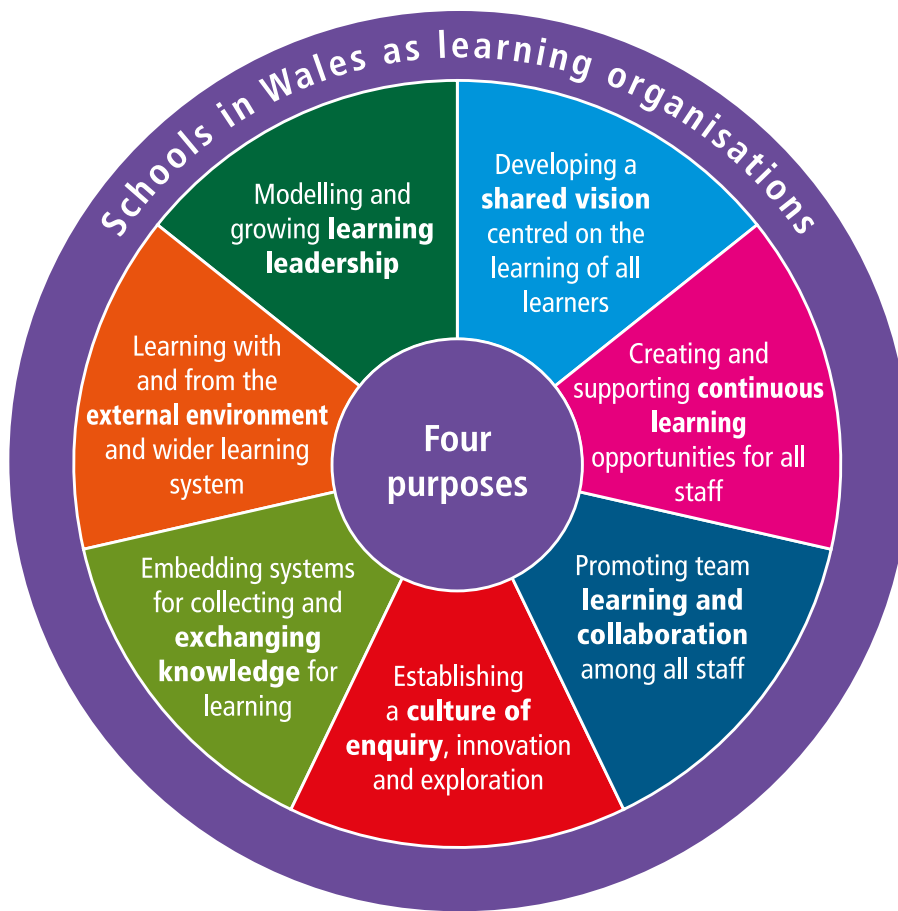
Inspirational leaders

Schools in Wales as learning organisations

- Modelling and growing **learning leadership**
- Developing a **shared vision** centred on the learning of all learners
- Creating and supporting **continuous learning** opportunities for all staff
- Promoting team **learning and collaboration** among all staff
- Establishing a **culture of enquiry**, innovation and exploration
- Embedding systems for collecting and **exchanging knowledge** for learning
- Learning with and from the **external environment** and wider learning system

Four purposes

(Welsh Government, 2018f)

Figure 6: Schools in Wales as learning organisations

Increasingly, successful leaders work with other schools to share and develop good practice. They are agile and respond to immediate issues creatively and swiftly. At the same time, they are forward-looking, foresee problems, and plan for the long term without getting lost in day-to day-business.

The most effective leaders ensure that robust quality assurance arrangements are in place to identify the school's strengths and areas for development. They establish an open culture of self-evaluation that draws on a range of first-hand evidence and on pupils' outcomes. In these schools, all staff see themselves as part of the self-evaluation and of the school's continuous improvement process.

The Welsh Government has promoted the concept of schools as learning organisations (SLO). The SLO model has seven dimensions that capture the features of excellent school leadership outlined above and is being used increasingly by school leaders.

Inspirational leaders

Where leadership is less effective, senior leaders do not concentrate their work well enough on driving improvements or raising expectations, particularly through improving teaching and learning. They do not evaluate the effectiveness of teaching in terms of its impact on pupils' learning well enough. In weaker secondary schools, the role of middle leaders is often underdeveloped. Middle leaders do not have enough opportunities to lead initiatives, to evaluate outcomes or to identify areas for development and plan for improvement.

In the best schools, members of the governing body work alongside school leaders to provide a strong strategic direction for the school's work. The governors are involved in activities around the school that help them gain a first-hand insight into how well the school is meeting its priorities. They use a wide range of evidence, as well as performance data, to understand the school's strengths and the areas that need to improve. In the minority of schools, where governance is weak, members of the governing body rely too heavily on information provided by school leaders, do not have a secure understanding of the quality of education provided, and fail to challenge leaders on the work of the school.

In nearly all schools, senior leaders ensure that there is a senior member of staff with responsibility for co-ordinating provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). In the best examples, this staff member is part of leadership team discussions and is able to influence the quality of provision for pupils with SEN. In most schools, senior leaders ensure staff receive training and support, often from the local authority, on additional learning needs (ALN) reform. In particular, successful leaders provide appropriate support and training for staff to ensure that they make suitable adaptations to resources, the curriculum and teaching methods to meet the special educational needs of individual pupils. As a result, many school and PRU leaders have a good awareness of the changes planned under the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and are aware of the draft Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code published in February 2017 (Welsh Government, 2018c). Schools and PRUs with clear leadership roles and excellent practice are well placed to make the transition from the current SEN system to the new ALN system.

In many schools, leaders use funding strategically to provide the best possible education, for example by identifying individual staff expertise and using these to improve provision and standards throughout the school. Only a minority of primary schools employ a business manager, although this proportion has risen over recent years, with increasing cases of a single business manager employed jointly by a cluster of schools. As part of a national pilot started in September 2017, the Welsh Government supported business managers for clusters of schools in several local authorities, with benefits being quickly realised. For example, in Conwy this has led to a reduction in headteachers' administrative workload, giving them more time to support improvements in teaching and learning, improved collaboration between schools and supported the sustainability of small and rural schools (Welsh Government, 2019e).

Inspirational leaders

Overall, the level of reserve funding held by primary schools has been around £40 million over recent years. Reserves held by secondary schools have reduced over the same period, and at the end of the 2018-2019 financial year they were in overall deficit by £4.4 million (Welsh Government, 2019l).

Excellence, equity and wellbeing

Pupil voice

In recent years, schools in Wales have strengthened their commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), with increasing numbers using it to underpin their work to promote excellence, equity and wellbeing. As part of this work, they are giving pupils a more influential voice in decisions about their education, from choosing a learning activity through to agreeing the individual support they will receive or shaping school policies. Around nine-in-ten pupils in key stage 2 feel that teachers and other adults in school listen to them and care about what they think about the school. However, this reduces to around seven-in-ten pupils in key stage 3 and to around a half of pupils in key stage 4. In a few primary schools and in a majority of secondary schools, 'pupil voice' groups are directed too much by adults. In these schools, despite opportunities for participation, pupils are not involved enough in decision-making about core aspects of school life, including aspects of teaching and learning.

Figure 7: Pupil voice (2016-2019)
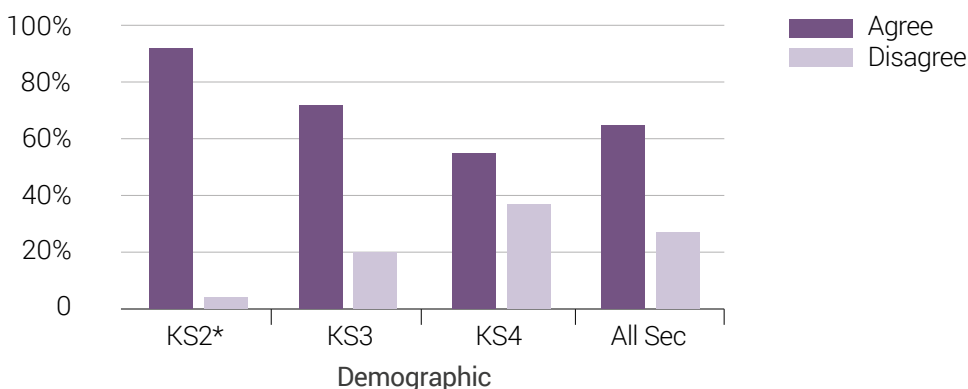
*There was no question about pupil voice in 2016-2017 for key stage 2

Questions ?

Key stage 2
Teachers and other adults in school listen to me and care about what I think about the school

Key stages 3 and 4
Teachers and other adults in school listen to me and care about what I think about the school