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Context

Maintained all-age schools provide education for pupils in the foundation phase through to key stage 4, and sometimes include a sixth form. In January 2019, there were 19 maintained all-age schools in Wales (Welsh Government, 2019m). The sector continues to grow with a further three schools having opened in September 2019 and consultations under way in different regions that could see another five all-age schools being established. The sector is very diverse in terms of the number of sites for each school, and the range of pupil numbers in different phases.

This year, Estyn inspected three maintained all-age schools. The schools range from over 1,500 pupils to 900 pupils, each on one site. Each school receives pupils into Year 7 from other partner primary schools. Two schools provide education for pupils aged 3 to 19 years and one school educates pupils from the age of 3 to 16 years.

Sector summaries:

Maintained all-age schools

Standards

Across the three schools, many pupils make swift progress in their personal and social skills and make secure progress in their literacy skills, knowledge and understanding during their time at school. In one of the schools inspected this year, pupils make less progress in the primary phase and there are important areas for improvement. In all the schools inspected, pupils in the secondary phase benefit from the wide range of learning experiences and make good progress.

Girls' performance in many indicators compares favourably with that of girls in similar schools. At the end of key stage 4, boys' performance in 2018 is generally lower than the average for boys in similar schools.

In two of the schools, where standards are good, nearly all pupils listen attentively and make good progress in developing their oracy skills in both English and Welsh. During their time at the school, most pupils develop as confident readers in both languages. Many pupils are able to skim and scan various reading texts successfully to find information and analyse evidence. Most pupils develop early writing skills successfully and, at key stages 3 and key stage 4, many pupils write at length for a range of purposes.

Most pupils in the primary phase make good progress in their mathematical development. Many secondary age pupils apply their numeracy skills well across a range of subjects. Overall, most pupils' ICT skills are developing well across these schools. This is more positive than in secondary schools inspected this year and may be due to more coherent planning for progress and ensuring continuity across key stages in an all-age school.

Many pupils show strong creative skills in lessons, for example when designing and making products in technology, creating pieces of high quality artwork or performing as part of an instrumental group.

Where standards are adequate, the majority of pupils do not use a rich enough vocabulary to express themselves. They do not have sufficiently developed reading skills and only a few more able pupils use higher order skills such as inference with confidence. Although the standard of pupils' writing in key stage 3 and key stage 4 is appropriate, across the foundation phase and key stage 2 most pupils do not use their literacy skills well enough across the curriculum. In addition, the ICT skills of the majority of pupils in key stage 3 do not build sufficiently on the firm foundation set in key stage 2.

Over the last three years, the performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has varied but, overall, is slightly lower than that of their peers in similar schools. Pupils with special educational needs make at least strong progress against their targets by the end of key stage 4. In one school inspected, many of these pupils make exceptional progress.



Sector summaries:

Maintained all-age schools

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In all three schools inspected this year, nearly all pupils feel safe in school and know whom to turn to with their concerns. Nearly all pupils understand clearly the importance of exercise and eating healthily. Many pupils develop positive attitudes to regular exercise and participation in extra-curricular physical activities is high.

Most pupils have a positive attitude towards their learning. They work together enthusiastically in pairs and groups. Most pupils behave well in classes and around the school. In one school, nearly all pupils show very strong independent learning skills and take ownership for their own learning. They understand how they learn and are motivated well to learn. Many show high levels of resilience when facing challenges with their work and are able to solve problems. A strong feature is pupils' willingness to undertake leadership roles and responsibilities such as being digital leaders and language mentors. Their work contributes extensively to the school's life and work and promotes Welsh heritage and culture effectively. Many pupils contribute to a wide range of charity and community work that develops them as ethical and tolerant citizens exceptionally well.

Teaching and learning experiences

In two schools inspected, the good working relationships between teachers and pupils are a key strength. This is often because teachers have good knowledge and understanding of pupils and their backgrounds and use this information well, particularly when planning. Many teachers plan lessons effectively, provide a suitable level of challenge and set high expectations. They have a clear focus on developing pupils' skills, use relevant and interesting resources and engage pupils' genuine interests. Many teachers provide useful verbal and written feedback that enables pupils to improve their work. In one school, teaching is not effective enough. Teachers over-direct pupils' learning and do not have high enough expectations. In addition, a few teachers do not question effectively enough or ensure that pupils respond to their advice well enough to improve their understanding or quality of their work.

Generally, the three schools provide a broad and balanced curriculum from 3-18 years old. They provide pupils with a wide range of learning experiences. One school in particular has adopted an innovative and experimental approach in preparation for the new curriculum. Although in its early stage of development, pupils benefit from stimulating experiences to develop their creative and thinking skills.

All three schools inspected plan purposefully to develop pupils' skills across the curriculum. A particular feature of this approach is teachers' planning in collaboration within areas of learning. Planning for the development of pupils' ICT skills across the school is not comprehensive enough and, as a result, pupils in the secondary phase do not build well enough on the firm foundations laid in the primary phase.



Sector summaries:

Maintained all-age schools

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance are a strong feature in all the schools inspected. All three schools have been asked to submit a case study about how their provision has impacted positively on pupils’ wellbeing and attitudes to learning. All three are inclusive with a caring ethos, placing a high priority on the wellbeing of each pupil.

All schools have robust and comprehensive systems to track academic progress, attendance and wellbeing. Leaders use tracking information well to make informed decisions about how to support pupils experiencing difficulties or those underachieving. Arrangements for pupils with additional learning needs are strong. Schools tailor interventions carefully and sensitively to address the needs of individual pupils. They monitor the impact of the interventions carefully and adapt the provision as required. Through training of staff, work with external agencies and parents, the schools ensure that pupils with additional learning needs make strong progress during their time at the school.

Support for pupils with emotional, health and social needs is a particular strength in each school. In two of the schools, support is exceptional. A strong feature in these schools is the wrap-around support for pupils and their families who experience challenges. Pastoral teams work effectively with external agencies to ensure that support is specific and meets the needs of the individual well. Early identification of pupils at risk of underachieving helps schools to provide early and efficient provision to ensure that pupils are happy to be in school and are given every opportunity to succeed. As a result, pupils take great pride in their school. The schools provide a wide range of opportunities for pupils to participate in cultural events, creative arts projects and activities in their local community. Personal and social education programmes successfully develop pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural attitudes. The schools provide pupils with many opportunities to express their opinions, and leaders consider their views effectively to inform changes to the curriculum and school life.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good in all three schools inspected this year. Leaders have secured solid foundations for an all-age school in their early stages of development. Wellbeing and care, support and guidance have been their priorities when amalgamating schools serving different communities.

In all three schools, leaders have been successful in establishing a clear vision for their school and communicating this effectively with staff, parents and stakeholders. Lines of accountability are clear and leaders work well together across all phases. Robust leadership has had a positive influence on important aspects of the school’s work, in particular attendance, wellbeing, quality of teaching and curriculum planning. Governors are enthusiastic and dedicated. They have a sound awareness of their responsibilities and provide effective support and challenge. Leaders generally have a sound understanding of the strengths and areas

Ysgol Bae Baglan

Ensuring the level of care, support and guidance is a strong feature at Ysgol Bae Baglan. The school appreciates that not all pupils work in the same way and have created a pupil support network.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Ysgol Bro Teifi

Ysgol Bro Teifi created a system to identify their pupils’ needs so they could provide continuous provision for them. The system helps to track progress, behaviour, attendance and wellbeing.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Ysgol Bro Morgannwg

Pupils and staff at Ysgol Bro Morgannwg have a strong sense of pride in their Welsh Community. Staff encourage the use of the Welsh language throughout the school. There is a ‘Welshness Committee’, which promotes the social use of the Welsh language.

For more information, please read our **case study**



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for improvement in their school. Leaders at all levels analyse data well and draw on other first-hand evidence such as lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work to plan for improvement. At times, the focus of self-evaluation and improvement planning has veered too much towards key stage 3 and key stage 4 rather than across the whole school. As a result, leaders do not always have a secure enough understanding of the shortcomings in the primary phase, nor do they identify clearly enough where good practice exists that could be shared across the school.

All three schools have created a strong ethos and culture of continuous professional learning. They provide rich opportunities for staff to expand and refine their professional knowledge and work well with other schools and providers to expand provision for staff professional learning.

Leaders manage their school's resources well. Two out of the three schools have a deficit budget with a plan agreed by the local authority to eliminate the deficit within the next two years. All three schools make good use of grant funding, including the pupil development grant, to support pupils. This has had a positive impact on progress, attendance and wellbeing of pupils eligible for free school meals and other vulnerable groups. All the schools benefit from new purpose-built accommodation that provides a stimulating place for pupils to learn.

Follow-up activity

None of the all-age schools inspected this year were placed in follow-up. In each school inspected, areas of good practice were identified and the schools were asked to provide a case study. Each case study related to pupils' wellbeing and the care, support and guidance provided. One all-age school remains in Estyn review and one all-age school monitored this year remains in need of significant improvement.

