
Engagement work: Primary sector update – Spring Term 2021

March 2021

This report is also available in Welsh.



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Introduction

This report summarises the findings from engagement phone calls made to 520 primary schools between the beginning of November 2020 and the end of February 2021. The report is based on the information discussed during remote meetings with headteachers and senior leaders and teachers. The main focus for each discussion was wellbeing, teaching (including a focus on the Foundation Phase), the curriculum, professional learning and additional learning needs. Proportions relate to the sample of schools that we contacted during this reporting period.

This report has been informed by evidence from the following sources:

- Remote meetings with headteachers and/or senior leaders responsible for specific areas
- Remote meetings with teachers who attended our teachers' fora
- Ten informal school visits

This report is also available in Welsh.

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Main findings

Wellbeing

- 1 During the second half of the autumn term 2020, nearly all schools continued to place a high priority on supporting their pupils' wellbeing.
- 2 Nearly all schools found that the initial lockdown had affected adversely the wellbeing of pupils to some extent. Many stated that pupils' concentration levels were not as strong as prior to the pandemic.
- 3 The majority of headteachers stated that in the autumn term they anticipated further closures over coming months, either as a class, cohort or possibly whole school. From January, staff felt they were better prepared to support pupils' wellbeing remotely.
- 4 Headteachers report there has been an increasing number of pupils in need of emotional support since the first lockdown.
- 5 Nearly all headteachers feel that supporting the wellbeing of staff is a priority.
- 6 Staff report a strong team ethic and a sense of community developing in their schools that includes parents and pupils.
- 7 The wellbeing of headteachers is a cause for concern. Many feel that they have not had a substantial break since the first lockdown. They often prioritise the wellbeing of staff and pupils at the expense of their own.

Teaching

- 8 During the second half of the autumn term, most headteachers reported that pupils' skills were recovering steadily following their return to school in September.
- 9 Headteachers report that generally, staff continued to implement foundation phase practice while ensuring learning environments were safe for pupils.
- 10 Many headteachers stated that teachers planned more outdoor learning experiences for all pupils on a regular basis, such as problem solving and activities to support their health and fitness.
- 11 Headteachers told us that from January 2021 they were better prepared for an extended period of remote learning.
- 12 Many schools provided pupils with a range of activities they could complete at home that reflected the experiential learning approach of the foundation phase.
- 13 While engagement levels for remote learning had improved, many headteachers reported that younger pupils were still less likely to take part consistently than those in key stage 2.

- 14 Nearly all schools provided frequent literacy and numeracy activities, along with opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in a broader context. Many headteachers stated that pupils in key stage 2, especially older pupils, were more likely to engage regularly in remote learning than in the first lockdown.
- 15 Headteachers explained that the use of live sessions was especially valuable in Welsh-medium schools to allow pupils that do not speak Welsh at home opportunities to practise the language on a regular basis.
- 16 Many headteachers stated that staff evaluated their remote learning provision and adapted their practice as the term progressed based on feedback from pupils and parents.
- 17 Headteachers welcomed the additional 'recruit, recover, raise standards' (RRRS) funding, and felt confident that it would help them to provide increased opportunities for pupils to re-engage with learning and make progress.

Curriculum

- 18 Many headteachers reported that as the autumn term progressed the majority of pupils made steady progress towards addressing gaps in their learning. Most schools were able to return to deliver a broader and more balanced curriculum by the second half of the term.
- 19 Nearly all headteachers welcome the main principles of the Curriculum for Wales, and a majority feel that they are on-track for its implementation in 2022. A minority, however, feel that the pandemic has hindered their preparations and are concerned about their ability to implement the Curriculum for Wales fully in 2022.

Professional learning

- 20 Many headteachers report that developing the digital skills of staff and deepening their understanding of remote learning approaches has been integral to the professional learning of staff.
- 21 Most headteachers spoke positively about the use of recorded sessions on professional learning platforms as they ensure access to training materials for staff at a time that is most convenient to them.

Additional learning needs

- 22 In the autumn term, nearly all schools provided intervention programmes for those pupils in need of additional literacy, numeracy, social and emotional support.
- 23 Headteachers stated that during the second lockdown, staff continued to work with pupils who required additional support, either via remote learning or in the hub.

Wellbeing

The wellbeing of pupils

During the second half of the autumn term 2020, nearly all schools continued to place a high priority on supporting their pupils' wellbeing. Many headteachers and teachers undertook wellbeing assessments of their pupils. They used this information to support individuals and groups of pupils. Nearly all schools found that the initial lockdown had affected adversely the wellbeing of pupils to some extent. Many stated that pupils' concentration levels were not as strong as prior to the pandemic. They noted that staff needed to reinforce pupils' social skills, especially in the foundation phase, for example with sharing and taking turns. A minority of schools faced challenges with pupils of all ages finding it difficult to focus, to pay attention for extended periods and to persevere with their tasks. A few schools that experienced a lack of engagement from their most vulnerable pupils developed strategies to support parents with remote learning.

Cameo – supporting parents to support their children

At Llantrisant Primary School, in Rhondda Cynon Taf, the headteacher noted that pupils' progress and learning had been variable since the beginning of the pandemic, particularly the more vulnerable. Teachers held online discussions with parents in the autumn term. Teachers took time to explain to parents precisely how limited engagement with tasks during the first lockdown had affected their child's learning. They explained the specific gaps in knowledge, understanding and skills that had emerged for individual pupils. This approach helped to improve the engagement of pupils and parents during the second lockdown.

The majority of headteachers stated that in the autumn term they anticipated further closures over coming months, either as a class, cohort or possibly a whole school. From January, staff felt they were better prepared to support pupils' wellbeing remotely. Schools held regular check-in sessions with pupils either through telephone conversations, or increasingly through live video communication. Many schools held class or year group assemblies where teachers celebrated pupils' efforts and encouraged continued engagement. Many pupils who benefited from wellbeing intervention programmes in school continued to receive this support via video conferencing sessions. In a few cases, families preferred paper copies of work packs. Schools also provided other materials such as reading books, stationery, crayons and playdough as pupils did not have access to these at home.

Cameo – dealing with pupils' anxieties

Ysgol Llangwryfon, in Ceredigion, planned a series of activities to promote pupil wellbeing such as an opportunity for pupils to create classroom murals reflecting their feelings. Staff provided every pupil in Year 5 and Year 6 with a 'feelings diary'. Each page was broken into sections to highlight those things that pupils were worried about, things that made them happy and things that excited them. A staff member monitored the contents and intervened purposefully as required.

A few headteachers whose schools have significant numbers of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) found that supporting the wellbeing of these pupils presented them with specific challenges. They stated that families in this group can feel particularly isolated when they have a limited understanding of English. In these circumstances, schools generally tried hard to offer continual support for the families, and worked closely with the local authority's EAL support service. Often staff made use of resources such as relevant apps and a translation phone service, which helped to support pupil engagement.

At the beginning of the spring term, school buildings closed to most pupils due to lockdown restrictions. Schools ran hub provision for the children of key workers and for vulnerable pupils. In the main, schools had clear criteria for inviting additional pupils they identified as being in need of face to face support to attend.

Headteachers state that multi-agency meetings have continued over online platforms. They say that in general, meetings such as core groups and case conferences have benefited from being online. This enables more professionals to attend on a regular basis and is a less intimidating environment for non-professionals. A few schools report an increase in referrals regarding domestic violence. Schools that work with Police in Operation Encompass¹ areas receive an alert the next morning following police attendance at an incident. Headteachers state that this information is valuable for the school in offering support for the pupils involved.

Headteachers report that there has been an increasing number of pupils in need of emotional support since the first lockdown. Most state that they continue to provide pupils with emotional support through in-house provision for wellbeing. Counsellors continue to provide valuable remote support for vulnerable learners who need more specialist wellbeing support.

Headteachers often report the valuable support they receive from their local authority Education Welfare Officers (EWO). These officers support headteachers by visiting hard to reach families when there are concerns. This is even more important now as many social workers are not making house visits and these families can become increasingly isolated from support services.

Of the few engagement calls made to headteachers since schools reopened for all foundation phase pupils, most say that the levels of attendance are good. They say that most pupils have settled well and that they are delighted to see their friends. These headteachers feel it is important to re-establish familiar routines as quickly as possible. This includes providing opportunities for pupils to develop skills through formal and informal activities in class and outdoors.

The wellbeing of staff

Nearly all headteachers feel that supporting the wellbeing of staff is a priority. During the second half of the autumn term, headteachers reported that many members of

¹ 'Operation Encompass' is a police and education early information sharing partnership. Police forces that are part of Operation Encompass send information to schools prior to the start of the next school day after officers have attended a domestic abuse incident involving one of their pupils. This enables schools to offer immediate support for vulnerable children and young people, before the school day begins.

staff experienced a sense of isolation and heightened levels of anxiety. Schools developed many mechanisms to alleviate these feelings. Teachers generally report that leaders and colleagues support each other well by meeting online, holding regular check-ins and through more informal social media groups. A few members of staff reported that local authorities or regional consortia offered useful wellbeing sessions for teachers and leaders.

Occasionally, schools operated with reduced staffing levels as members of staff shielded or self-isolated. In general, staff at very small schools often appear to be experiencing greater pressure as there are fewer people to share the workload. This is particularly true of headteachers that also have teaching responsibilities. Despite this, staff report a strong team ethic and a sense of community developing in their schools that also includes parents and pupils.

During the second lockdown, many headteachers reported increased expectations on staff from parents around remote learning and particularly the number of live sessions. This was challenging for staff who also had caring responsibilities at home. A few headteachers provided parents with 'contact hours' when they may reasonably expect a response from a teacher. Other headteachers allocated set times in the week where staff were not expected to respond to any external communication. This allowed staff to prepare for the week ahead without interruption. During these times, pupils and their families were encouraged to work away from their screens on practical or physical activities.

Cameo – managing staff wellbeing via web-free sessions

At Archbishop Rowan Williams School, in Monmouthshire, leaders took account of staff feedback that constantly being on-call online was having an adverse effect on their own wellbeing. In addition, there were concerns from parents about the amount of time their children were spending on screen. Leaders made a decision to use Wednesdays for staff planning, preparation and assessment time. While tasks were still set, there were no live-streamed lessons or ICT dependent learning on that day and teachers did not monitor messages. There was always a dedicated member of staff 'on duty' for each class to pick up wellbeing or safeguarding issues that occurred on a Wednesday. This provided staff with protected time to consider their pupils' learning for the following week and to analyse patterns of engagement during the previous week. There was immediate positive feedback from pupils and families, and staff wellbeing greatly improved.

The wellbeing of headteachers

The wellbeing of headteachers is a cause for concern. Many feel that they have not had a substantial break since the start of the first lockdown. They often prioritise the wellbeing of staff and pupils at the expense of their own. Many headteachers have been undertaking additional responsibilities, such as lunchtime supervision and delivering work packs. In the smallest schools, they have been delivering remote learning in addition to their leadership and management roles.

During the autumn term, many headteachers felt frustrated that they were not receiving advance warning of national messages about education. They felt this left

them with little time to assimilate the information before staff and parents asked them about the repercussions for their school. A few said that they appreciated the opportunity to be involved in a webinar with the Minister for Education and officials from Public Health Wales. This allowed them to learn about the science behind the Welsh Government's decisions and to reflect upon the next steps for their school.

A few headteachers report that carrying out the test, trace and protect procedures was time consuming. For example, even during the Christmas holiday period a few headteachers reported that they needed to deal with positive cases within their school community and to help with tracing possible contacts.

A majority of headteachers found valuable support networks through their local cluster and by creating social media groups with their peers. They shared thoughts and worries, along with ideas and solutions. Headteachers often stated that chairs of governors and regional consortia officers were supportive and provided a 'listening ear'. A few headteachers appreciated that senior local authority staff were available to answer queries at short notice in addition to regular headteacher meetings and update sessions.

Teaching

During the second half of the autumn term, most headteachers reported that pupils' skills were recovering steadily following their return to school in September. Many teachers continued with the adaptations they had made to teaching and the curriculum for the remainder of the term to help address any gaps in pupils' learning.

Headteachers report that generally, staff continued to implement foundation phase practice while ensuring learning environments were safe for pupils. Common adaptations included regular cleaning of equipment and reducing soft play and role-play resources. Most headteachers stated that they continued to follow foundation phase principles, such as ensuring that pupils develop literacy and numeracy skills through practical activities.

Many headteachers stated that teachers planned more outdoor learning experiences for all pupils on a regular basis, such as problem solving and activities to support their health and fitness. They said that this had a positive effect on pupils' wellbeing, social and physical skills, as well as developing their literacy and numeracy skills in an engaging manner. Headteachers also reported that staff had been creative in adapting learning activities. A few headteachers stated that it was challenging for schools to maintain certain teaching approaches, such as group and pair work due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Headteachers told us that from January 2021, they were better prepared for an extended period of remote learning. In most schools, head teachers reported higher levels of pupil engagement than in the previous lockdown. This was partly due to higher expectations by staff and an increased use of live sessions or pre-recorded video clips. Most staff adapted the amount of live teaching they provided according to the age of pupils, providing less for younger pupils.

Many schools provided pupils with a range of activities they could complete at home that reflected the experiential learning approach of the foundation phase. Teachers presented the majority of activities by sharing brief pre-recorded video clips that prompted pupils to engage in practical tasks. This pre-recording allowed parents and pupils to access sessions at a suitable time for them and to revisit lessons if required. Most teachers said that they provided pupils with frequent opportunities for class catch-ups so that they could 'see' their friends and reduce the feeling of isolation. As pupil confidence in the use of remote learning technology improved, teachers made increasing use of short live sessions to target specific skills such as phonics, reading or numeracy. Teachers also used this technology to encourage pupils to upload evidence of tasks they had completed and to provide feedback that was appropriate to the age of the pupil. For example, teachers used a short audio clip to comment on pupils' work. While engagement levels for remote learning had improved, many headteachers reported that younger pupils were still less likely to take part consistently than those in key stage 2. They noted that remote learning was often more challenging for pupils in the foundation phase and feared they would fall further behind in their learning.

Cameo – promoting foundation phase principles through remote learning

Foundation phase staff at Crossgates Primary School, in Powys, posted daily literacy and numeracy activities for pupils. Teachers provided videos to model the focused skills and tasks. They also provided a daily creative challenge, for example to 'go and build a den in your lounge or in your garden'. Literacy, numeracy and practical 'challenge tasks' all encouraged a 'computer free' approach to learning after the pupils had watched the initial videos. The headteacher said this approach received very positive feedback from parents and resulted in high levels of engagement with families.

Nearly all headteachers stated that most pupils in key stage 2 were able to access tasks via online platforms. These platforms often allowed teachers and pupils to share documents and to communicate with each other via video or chat facilities. Nearly all schools provided frequent literacy and numeracy activities, along with opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in a broader context. Many headteachers stated that pupils in key stage 2, especially older pupils, were more likely to engage regularly in remote learning than in the first lockdown. Headteachers attribute this to pupils' ability to work with a greater degree of independence, and their increased use of online learning platforms in the classroom during the autumn term. Many teachers used live streaming or shared video clips to explain individual tasks. A minority of schools also held discussions with small groups, which provided pupils with valuable opportunities to engage in discussion, reading activities, or short mathematics sessions. Headteachers explained that the use of live sessions was especially valuable in Welsh-medium schools to allow pupils that do not speak Welsh at home opportunities to practise the language on a regular basis. For example, staff recorded themselves reading stories that pupils could listen to with their families or demonstrated practical activities while modelling Welsh vocabulary and sentence patterns.

Headteachers reported that most pupils in key stage 2 submitted their work digitally using online platforms. Staff provided those that were unable to present their work

remotely with opportunities to return completed work packs to school. Many headteachers stated that teachers provided pupils with supportive, encouraging feedback on their work and that pupils responded by improving their work or writing additional comments. Many headteachers stated that staff evaluated their remote learning provision and adapted their practice as the term progressed based on feedback from pupils and parents.

Many schools have continued to develop engaging approaches to enrich pupils' online learning experiences. For example, they worked in partnership with external agencies such as museum curators and drama groups who tailored their offer to support remote learning.

Cameo – evaluating distance learning

At Ysgol Eifion Wyn, in Gwynedd, leaders and staff regularly but informally evaluated their teaching practices remotely. They discussed their methods regularly and identified approaches that were most effective. Leaders also liaised with parents to seek their views of their children's learning experiences and considered their responses. As a result, staff used live learning sessions that were short and stimulating in order to keep pupils interested and encouraged them to engage consistently with their learning. The school contacted the families of those pupils who needed additional guidance to complete tasks and offered them advice and assistance.

Headteachers welcomed the additional RRRS funding, and felt confident that it would help them to provide increased opportunities for pupils to re-engage with learning and make progress. During the second half of the autumn term, nearly all headteachers stated that they were using the funding to increase staffing levels. They said that the increase in staffing capacity allowed them to target individuals or groups to support their wellbeing, literacy and numeracy. Most headteachers told us that they had established processes to monitor pupils' progress.

Cameo – a team approach to accelerating learning

At St Helen's Primary, in Swansea, leaders developed a coordinated and cohesive approach to providing intervention and catch-up provision. The headteacher set up a team, which consisted of the school's family learning officer, deputy headteacher and teaching assistants. Together, they identified several key areas of pupils' learning that had been affected adversely and put in place plans to address these concerns. In the foundation phase, they targeted reading, numeracy, and social skills, such as adhering to routines. In key stage 2, they identified reading comprehension and spelling, health and fitness, and attitudes to learning as aspects needing support. The headteacher combined funding from multiple sources, including the RRRS funding, the pupil development grant and the minority ethnic achievement grant in order to increase staffing levels. They employed one additional teacher and three teaching assistants either to deliver support themselves, or to release the class teacher to deliver support to targeted pupils throughout the autumn term. The headteacher stated that many pupils were making good progress by the end of term.

A few headteachers used the funding to increase the ratio of staff to pupils in foundation phase classes. This allowed staff to model appropriate language and behaviours and to interact with pupils more regularly during their play to develop their communication skills.

A very few headteachers said that they used a part of the RRRS funding to purchase specific intervention resources or associated training for staff. For example, they provided pupils with remote access to a reading programme, which allowed them to have a wider range of reading material at home. Many headteachers said that during the second lockdown period, they continued providing pupils with intervention programmes using the school's distance learning platforms. Headteachers stated that those pupils who attended the hubs continued to receive valuable face to face educational support.

Curriculum

Many headteachers reported that as the autumn term progressed the majority of pupils made steady progress towards addressing gaps in their learning. They stated that pupils had benefited from a focus on wellbeing, literacy, numeracy and ICT at the start of the term. Consequently, most schools were able to return to deliver a broader and more balanced curriculum by the second half of the term. Many headteachers reported re-engaging with wider thematic approaches over this period, allowing pupils greater opportunities to apply their skills across the curriculum.

Headteachers noted that it was challenging to provide pupils with stimulating activities by outside providers due to Covid-19 restrictions. Staff often overcame this by seeking innovative ways for pupils to deepen their knowledge and apply skills through meaningful contexts. For example, one school created links with local businesses that allowed pupils to develop their speaking and presentation skills by pitching their ideas remotely to a local housing developer for new house designs. Many schools reported making good use of their indoor and outdoor learning environments to provide pupil with engaging experiences they normally received on school trips.

By the start of the spring term many headteachers had worked closely with their staff to develop a suitable remote learning curriculum that was accessible to pupils. For example, schools often created common whole school topics, allowing siblings within the same household to support each other's learning. Almost all schools reported providing daily literacy and numeracy activities and wider curriculum tasks throughout the week to widen learning experiences.

Cameo – a broad curriculum via remote learning

At the start of the week at Nant Celyn Primary, in Torfaen, families of foundation phase pupils received a weekly 'Learning Mat' that outlined the week's 'jobs'. These ran from Monday to Thursday with Friday being a day for sharing, reflecting and catching up on unfinished work. Teachers assigned pupils' daily numeracy and literacy activities, which they completed and returned on the same day. In addition, teachers provided one Welsh and one 'topic' activity for pupils to hand in by the end of the week. Teachers also challenged pupils to develop a 'life skill', such as learning to make their bed, helping to wash up or learning to feed a pet. To support families further, the school produced a set of 'could do' activities that covered both individual and family learning experiences.

Nearly all headteachers welcome the main principles of the Curriculum for Wales, and a majority feel that they are on-track for its implementation in 2022. A majority believe that retaining the current timeline for curriculum for Wales is an important step in maintaining momentum. A minority however, feel that the pandemic has hindered their preparations and are concerned about their ability to implement the Curriculum for Wales fully in September 2022. For example, a few commented that schools were missing the crucial 'experimental stage'. Only a minority of headteachers articulated a clear understanding of the process of curriculum design or were able to place their school in the context of the 'Journey to 2022'. In these cases, the school's vision was clear and included plans for evolving teaching in line with the twelve pedagogical principles. Many schools have revisited important aspects of teaching, such as effective means of responding to pupils' work and improving questioning. Headteachers often describe this as a cluster approach, linking teachers across schools to explore and develop a common understanding of effective pedagogy. A majority of headteachers stated they have focused on reviewing their approaches to planning to take into account of the four purposes and the areas of learning and experience. In these cases, it is often difficult to gauge the extent to which the schools' curricular reform journeys have had an impact on classroom practices, given the lack of first-hand evidence available at present. Headteachers often reported an increased emphasis on designing authentic learning experiences for pupils that make effective use of the school's local community. Many headteachers have encouraged staff to innovate and trial new approaches.

Cameo – using real-life contexts to drive the curriculum

At Ringland Primary School, in Newport, staff have provided pupils with learning opportunities to broaden their understanding of their local area. All classes worked on a common theme based around the Newport Ship, which is located near the school. This deepened pupils' understanding of the history of the ship and the impact of pollution on the waterways. In subsequent environmental activities, pupils became 'shareholders' in a windmill as part of their learning about sustainable energy.

Professional learning

Many headteachers report that developing the digital skills of staff and deepening their understanding of remote learning approaches have been integral to the professional learning of staff. In a few cases, headteachers encouraged teachers to research and develop pedagogical approaches for remote learning and to share good practice. This assisted them in refining their provision to best meet the needs of pupils.

Cameo - teaching triads supporting distance learning

At Ysgol Waunfawr Primary School, in Caerphilly, teachers developed their approaches to distance learning using established teaching triads to ensure consistency throughout the school. Teachers observed each other's distance learning sessions. For example, staff in the foundation phase observed colleagues' activities to look at how best to use digital resources to support learning in an online environment. In key stage 2, teachers experimented with the use of the 'breakout rooms' feature on their video-conferencing platform. Staff worked together to develop their practice and leaders encouraged them to innovate and support each other.

Headteachers sourced professional learning opportunities for staff to develop their skills and knowledge in areas such as safeguarding, autism spectrum disorder and communicating through sign language. Most head teachers spoke positively about the use of recorded sessions on professional learning platforms as they ensure access to training materials for staff at a time that is most convenient to them. For example, in one school staff accessed recorded on line modules around attachment disorders and then collaborated in a virtual staff meeting to consider how they could implement this in their school.

Leaders with different responsibilities within schools have engaged in webinars to enhance their understanding of developments in education, such as the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Act and the Curriculum for Wales. In addition, leaders organised specialist teachers to provide on-line sessions to support staff in providing pupils with literacy and numeracy programmes and effective approaches to teaching Welsh.

In a minority of schools, headteachers enabled staff to participate in accredited courses, such as first aid and food hygiene. Headteachers encouraged staff to keep a log of their professional learning activities to assist with discussions around their future professional development needs.

Many headteachers have worked collaboratively with regional consortia officers and university tutors to support newly qualified teachers and initial teacher education students. Headteachers have provided opportunities for school based mentors to attend training to enhance their skills in guiding and supporting newly qualified teachers and initial teacher education students. In most cases, teachers and students have also participated in the school's professional learning activities.

Most headteachers report that staff are keen to engage in professional learning to help them to meet the changing needs of their pupils. However, generally, headteachers are mindful of the additional time pressures professional learning activities can place on teachers when they are already providing online sessions, responding to pupils' work and supporting learners who attend the hub provision.

Additional learning needs

In the autumn term, nearly all schools provided intervention programmes for those pupils in need of additional literacy, numeracy, social and emotional support. Headteachers reported that in general, pupils responded positively to the support provided and made beneficial progress during the term. In general, schools continued to hold meetings and consultations with professionals, such as educational psychologists and speech and language therapists to support pupils either remotely or face-to-face. Staff stated that social distancing restrictions made it more difficult to support pupils with special educational needs. For example, many headteachers said it was difficult for staff to provide additional support for pupils in different classes while maintaining 'bubbles'.

Headteachers stated that, during the second lockdown, staff continued to work with pupils who required additional support, either via remote learning or in the hub. In general, they reported that teachers often found it more challenging to meet pupils' individual needs through virtual platforms. They stated that additional learning needs co-ordinators often supported staff to provide pupils with suitably challenging learning activities. In a few schools with specialist provision, experienced staff provided advice about the effective use remote learning for colleagues, pupils and their families.

A few headteachers raised concerns about their schools being ready to implement the new Additional Learning Needs Act on time. Responding to the challenges of the pandemic has meant that they have not been able to focus as much attention on their plans for the reform as they would have liked. A few headteachers report that they have re-structured staff responsibilities to better meet the requirements of the Act. In most schools, staff have received professional learning opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of the impending changes. A few are working in partnership with their clusters to achieve this.

Annex

Consortium	Local authority	Engagement Calls
CSC	Bridgend	20
	The Vale of Glamorgan	17
	Rhondda Cynon Taf	48
	Merthyr Tydfil	7
	Cardiff	35
	Total CSC	127
EAS	Caerphilly	24
	Blaenau Gwent	5
	Torfaen	9
	Monmouthshire	9
	Newport	15
Total EAS	62	
ERW	Powys	32
	Ceredigion	13
	Pembrokeshire	28
	Carmarthenshire	43
	Swansea	32
	Total ERW	148
GwE	Isle of Anglesey	23
	Gwynedd	38
	Conwy	28
	Denbighshire	22
	Flintshire	28
	Wrexham	23
Total GwE	162	
Neath Port Talbot		21
All primary providers		520
FSM benchmark (3YA FSM 2018-2020)		
Up to and including 8%		117
Over 8% and up to and including 16%		154
Over 16% and up to and including 24%		109
Over 24% and up to and including 32%		67
Over 32%		68
Not available *		5
Total		520

* FSM is not available for maintained nurseries