



Leadership and school improvement

Welsh Government published the ‘School improvement guidance: framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability’ in June 2022. This sets out the expectations relating to school improvement, in the context of their wider legal duties.

The overarching purpose of school improvement is to help schools give learners the best possible learning experiences and outcomes, whatever their background or circumstance, in order to achieve high standards and aspirations for all.

In response to this guidance, Estyn has considered a range of its thematic reports relating to school improvement, leadership, curriculum and teaching and used the findings to identify a range of common characteristics of schools who have undertaken successful school improvement journeys.

The table below sets out a staged overview of school improvement journeys. It aims to provide a practical guide to support school leaders and staff to reflect on their school’s current position and to think about what they might do next to improve different aspects of its work.

It also aligns to the eight contributory factors, set out by Welsh Government that describe the key attributes that schools that are successfully realising the curriculum demonstrate. These are:

1. Enabling all learners, and in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to progress along their own learning pathway and raise their aspirations to achieve their full potential; allied to a range of assessment approaches to understand and support this progress.
2. Co-constructing a curriculum, in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework, which promotes a broad range of knowledge, skills and experiences (including social and interactional experiences) with a clear understanding of why these matter.
3. Ensuring the school environment supports learners’ and practitioners’ well-being.
4. Supporting practitioners’ understanding of what works in curriculum design by investing in the enquiry and pedagogic skills of all staff.
5. Enabling ambitious professional learning for all practitioners in a school dedicated to being a learning organisation.
6. Embedding reflection, self-evaluation and improvement within schools, with good school leadership as a pre-condition for that.
7. Being at the heart of their communities - building better relationships between schools and families, communities and employers, to support and promote educational achievement and excellent employment, next steps education and training.
8. Listening to children and young people as they engage with their learning and supporting them in achieving their aspirations.







The characteristics of effective school improvement

Common characteristics of improvement

Leaders:

- Define clearly the **vision for pupils’ learning and wellbeing and the teaching and curriculum to achieve this. Keep this vision under review**
- Establish **professional values and behaviours** amongst staff to support continuous improvement and effective teamwork
- Focus on supporting all pupils to develop **positive attitudes** to school, learning and wellbeing
- Establish and maintain a culture where pupils’ **progress and wellbeing** is the main priority
- Make **improving teaching** the key process that contributes to improving **pupils’ progress and wellbeing**
- Design and deliver a **curriculum** that fully **meets the needs of all pupils**
- **Design and employ a range of assessment processes to support learner progress and well-being**
- Sustain a consistent focus on improving pupils’ **knowledge, skills (literacy (English/Welsh), numeracy and digital) and experiences**
- Make sure that **continuous professional learning** of staff improves the quality of provision and pupils’ progress
- Make all staff **accountable** for improving teaching, curriculum and pupils’ wellbeing and progress
- Make sure that evaluation work is reliable and that it informs and leads to improvement
- Provide **governors** with clear, understandable and honest analyses of how well the school is performing and encourage them to challenge any identified underperformance

	 Starting the journey	 Making progress	 Building momentum	 Sustaining high standards
Strategic vision	<p>Establish a vision for pupils' learning and wellbeing.</p> <p>Establish a vision for teaching and curriculum.</p> <p>Ensure the school's vision takes account of the four purposes set out in the Curriculum for Wales.</p> <p>Establish a shared set of professional values and behaviours that underpin a common purpose.</p>	<p>All staff and the school community understand the school's vision for pupils' learning and wellbeing, teaching and curriculum.</p> <p>All staff understand the shared professional values and behaviours that underpin a common purpose.</p>	<p>All staff and the school community develop the school's vision for continuous improvement and know their roles in achieving the vision. They review the vision and strategic direction to ensure that it supports further improvement.</p> <p>All staff exemplify the shared professional values and behaviours that underpin a common purpose. This is reflected in the decisions that staff make and in the day-to-day life of the school.</p>	<p>The school continues to implement its vision for the learning and wellbeing of all pupils. It reviews and updates its vision at appropriate points to promote high aspirations for all and to secure continuous improvement.</p> <p>The work of all staff consistently reflects professional values and behaviours that underpin a common purpose to achieve the very best for their learners.</p>
Leadership approaches	<p>Use an instructional or direct approach to deal with identified shortcomings in pupils' progress, wellbeing, teaching and curriculum.</p>	<p>Build on this instructional approach by beginning to develop a more collaborative approach to school improvement, for example through widening leadership responsibilities and improving teamwork.</p>	<p>A collaborative, open and inclusive approach is firmly established, based on high expectations. There is a high degree of consistency in most aspects of the school's work.</p>	<p>Leaders at all levels use a variety of styles to maintain high standards across all aspects of the school's work. They empower all staff to take appropriate risks and make informed choices based on the school's values, behaviours and vision.</p>
Developing leadership capacity	<p>Establish a clear leadership structure with designated roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Establish arrangements to ensure that leaders fulfil their roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p>Distribute leadership opportunities and ensure that staff in these roles understand specifically what they are accountable for and have the support to develop skills to fulfil these duties.</p> <p>Use established arrangements to ensure that leaders fulfil their roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Provide a range of helpful professional learning to support and improve leadership skills.</p>	<p>Distributed leadership is well established and consistently successful in improving learning, wellbeing, teaching and curriculum.</p> <p>All leaders clearly understand their roles responsibilities and contribute to continuous improvement.</p>	<p>Distributed leadership is well established and highly successful in improving learning, wellbeing, teaching and curriculum.</p> <p>All leaders model leadership behaviours effectively. This promotes a continuous culture of leadership development.</p>
Improving standards of learning and wellbeing, Including developing positive attitudes to learning	<p>There is a focus on developing systems and approaches to improving the fundamentals of behaviour and attendance.</p> <p>Establish clear expectations in relation to pupils' progress in learning and wellbeing in lessons and over time.</p> <p>Establish and implement a clear and consistent whole school plan to develop pupils' literacy and mathematical skills consistently and progressively.</p> <p>Begin to develop pupils independent and 'learning to learn' skills.</p> <p>Foster attitudes of resilience and perseverance among pupils.</p>	<p>Systems to manage behaviour and attendance are consistent and successful and are based on clear and well-understood expectations for all. They begin to develop positive attitudes to school and learning.</p> <p>Maintain specific expectations in relation to pupils' progress in learning and wellbeing.</p> <p>Continue to implement a clear and consistent whole school plan to develop pupils' literacy and mathematical skills consistently and progressively.</p> <p>Continue to develop pupils independent and 'learning to learn' skills.</p> <p>Continue to develop pupils as resilient and determined learners.</p>	<p>Standards of behaviour and attendance are good. Pupils have positive attitudes to school and learning. They are nurtured through high quality teaching and learning experiences and positive relationships throughout the school.</p> <p>There are consistently high expectations in relation to pupils' progress in learning and wellbeing.</p> <p>Pupils develop their literacy and mathematical skills consistently and progressively. They apply these across areas of learning.</p> <p>Increasingly, pupils demonstrate strong independent learning skills, show resilience and perseverance.</p>	<p>Standards of behaviour, attendance and pupils' attitudes to learning and wellbeing are normally exemplary because of the quality of provision and the culture at the school.</p> <p>A culture of high expectations and performance permeates all aspects of the school's work.</p> <p>Pupils apply their skills (including literacy, numeracy and digital) well, consistently across all areas of learning.</p> <p>Pupils become effective independent learners.</p>

<p>Improving teaching & assessment</p>	<p>Ensure that all staff understand what good teaching and assessment looks like and how this supports pupils to make progress.</p> <p>Establish consistent approaches to common classroom practice e.g. basic routines, approaches to teaching reading and writing.</p> <p>Establish processes to ensure that staff use accurate/appropriate assessment information to inform teaching and learning.</p> <p>Ensure that tracking processes support schools to drive improvements in pupils’ progress.</p> <p>Establish systems to evaluate teaching and its impact on pupils’ progress in learning and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Ensure all staff use a range of appropriate strategies/approaches to support pupils’ wellbeing and progress.</p> <p>Further develop consistent approaches to common classroom practice e.g. basic routines, approaches to teaching reading and writing.</p> <p>All staff use assessment and tracking information to inform teaching and learning to support progress in pupils’ learning and wellbeing.</p> <p>Embed systems to evaluate teaching and its impact on pupils’ progress in learning and wellbeing. Use this information to identify opportunities to improve teaching and learning further.</p> <p>Focus on developing pupils’ learning to learn skills, for example, their ability to respond to feedback and improve their work.</p>	<p>All teachers have a secure understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and use a range of teaching approaches to support good progress in learning and wellbeing.</p> <p>Teachers use consistent classroom practices and routines effectively. They begin to innovate to increase the effectiveness of approaches to teaching and learning.</p> <p>Assessment and tracking arrangements consistently support good levels of progress in support progress in pupils’ learning and wellbeing.</p> <p>All staff make valuable contributions to evaluating and improving the quality of teaching and assessment.</p> <p>Ensure pupils apply their learning to learn skills, for example, their ability to respond to feedback and improve their work.</p>	<p>The quality of teaching consistently ensures that nearly all pupils make particularly good progress and achieve very high standards.</p> <p>Teachers use consistent classroom practices and routines effectively. They adapt these naturally at appropriate times to increase impact on learning and wellbeing.</p> <p>Assessment and tracking arrangements are highly effective because they have a notable impact on progress in learning and wellbeing.</p> <p>Arrangements to evaluate and improve teaching and assessment are highly effective. They develop a culture of continuous improvement and support positive progress in learning and wellbeing for all.</p> <p>Pupils consistently apply their learning to learn skills to enhance and improve their learning, where appropriate, in a range of contexts.</p>
<p>Developing a curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils</p>	<p>Design a curriculum in line with their vision to fully meet the needs of all pupils. Ensure that all teachers understand the importance of strong teaching in securing a successful curriculum. Develop Staff understanding that curriculum is everything a pupil experiences whilst at school.</p> <p>Focus on improving pupils’ knowledge, skills (including literacy, numeracy and digital), understanding and experiences.</p>	<p>Ensure the curriculum matches the needs and interests of the pupils and provides a wide range of learning experiences across the school that it promotes positive attitudes to learning and supports pupils’ progress.</p> <p>Sustain the focus on improving pupils’ knowledge, skills (including literacy, numeracy and digital), understanding and experiences.</p>	<p>Ensure that the curriculum is broad balanced and relevant to pupils’ needs and interests and that it is underpinned by effective teaching to support good progress in learning and wellbeing.</p> <p>Develop approaches to enable staff work well with other staff in the cluster of schools to ensure pupils have sufficient opportunities to build on their learning as they progress through different stages of learning.</p> <p>All staff consistently develop pupils’ knowledge, understanding and skills (including literacy, numeracy and digital) by providing high quality learning experiences across all aspects of their school curriculum.</p>	<p>Ensure that the curriculum and provision for skills is highly engaging and provides broad and balanced learning experiences in and outside of lessons and supports all pupils to make consistently high progress in learning and wellbeing.</p> <p>Ensure staff work well with other staff in the cluster of schools to understand how to build on pupils’ prior learning to continually secure progress.</p> <p>All staff are highly successful in developing pupils’ knowledge, skills (including literacy, numeracy and digital) and understanding by providing high quality learning experiences.</p>
<p>Self-evaluation and improvement planning</p>	<p>Introduce a culture of self-evaluation based on the analysis of a range of relevant first-hand evidence.</p> <p>Establish clear links between self-evaluation and improvement processes.</p> <p>Support the achievement of improvement priorities by establishing effective performance management arrangements for staff and continuous professional development that meets specific improvement needs.</p>	<p>Further develop leaders’ skills to evaluate and improve teaching and learning.</p> <p>Further develop links between self-evaluation and improvement processes.</p> <p>Support the achievement of improvement priorities through effective use of performance management of staff and continuous professional development.</p> <p>Begin to evaluate the effectiveness of school improvement systems on improving quality.</p>	<p>The culture of evaluation and improvement is established, well understood and effective in improving teaching, curriculum, learning and wellbeing. It draws on the views of all relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>There is a clear link between findings from self-evaluation and school improvement priorities.</p> <p>High quality professional learning and effective performance management arrangements support the school in making strong progress in meeting all improvement priorities.</p>	<p>Evaluation and improvement processes are highly effective and support continuous improvement in all aspects of the school’s work.</p> <p>Links between self-evaluation work, school improvement priorities, high quality professional and effective performance management arrangements support the school in maintaining very high standards of teaching, learning and wellbeing.</p>

Professional learning	<p>Establish professional learning arrangements to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide specific support for staff to improve the quality of their teaching • provide specific support to enable staff to support the school in reaching improvement goals • establish and maintain high expectations in relation to provision for pupils and their progress in learning and wellbeing <p>Begin to develop opportunities for staff to contribute to specific areas of school improvement.</p>	<p>Continue to broaden professional learning opportunities for staff to improve their own practice, improve pupils' learning and wellbeing and to increase leadership capacity at the school.</p> <p>Increase opportunities for staff to contribute to specific areas of school improvement.</p>	<p>Professional learning arrangements are effective in improving the quality of leadership, teaching and curriculum. This supports continuous improvement to pupils' learning and wellbeing.</p> <p>Many staff engage in professional reflection to improve teaching and learning. They make use of relevant research (where appropriate) and begin to share this work within and beyond the school to demonstrate the difference this work has made to teaching, curriculum, learning and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Arrangements for professional learning are highly effective and support a culture of continuous improvement at the school.</p> <p>All staff engage regularly in effective professional learning. They make use of relevant research (where appropriate) and regularly share this work within and beyond the school to demonstrate the difference this work has made to teaching, curriculum, learning and wellbeing.</p>
Using pupil voice	<p>Establish arrangements to take account of and act upon the views of pupils.</p>	<p>Further develop arrangements to take account of and act upon the views of pupils.</p>	<p>Pupil voice is influential and an established part of school improvement processes.</p>	<p>Pupil voice has a regular and positive impact on raising standards of provision, learning and wellbeing.</p>
Family and community engagement	<p>Focus on establishing or restoring the reputation of the school with parents and the local community.</p> <p>Establish effective arrangements to communicate with the school community.</p>	<p>Take all opportunities to develop partnerships with parents and the local community that support improvements to provision and pupils' learning and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Partnerships with parents and the local community are mutually beneficial and support consistently good learning and wellbeing for pupils.</p>	<p>Partnerships with parents and the local community are mutually beneficial and highly successful in securing the best possible learning and wellbeing for pupils.</p>

