

**Value for Money (VFM) review and report for 2021/22 for  
South East Wales Education Achievement Service (EAS)**

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# 1. Executive Summary

## Introduction:

A key requirement of the South-East Wales Education Achievement Service ('the EAS') is to demonstrate annually that it offers value for money to the five local authorities within its geographical remit and their constituent schools. This report details the findings from a Value for Money (VfM) review that was undertaken to evaluate the extent to which that requirement was met for the year April 2021 to April 2022.

Value for Money, or cost effectiveness, is a measure of how well resources are being used to achieve intended outcomes. Good value for money is the optimal use of resources to achieve intended outcomes. VfM is usually measured by considering:

- **Economy:** minimising the cost of resources used while having regard to quality (inputs) – spending less;
- **Efficiency:** the relationship between outputs and the resources used to produce them – spending well; and
- **Effectiveness:** the extent to which objectives are achieved (outcomes) – spending wisely.

While the above represent the traditional method of measuring VfM it is also possible to include two further dimensions:

- **Equity:** the extent to which service provision is needs based to remove barriers and facilitate equal opportunity – spending fairly.
- **Sustainability:** an increasingly standard consideration within the context of the Well Being of Future Generations Act (WBFG) – spending for the long term.

## Focus for the review:

It was recognised from the outset that time and financial constraints did not allow for a detailed consideration of the above criteria across the full range of activities undertaken, and services provided, by the EAS in the period under review. This meant that the review was not a review of school improvement in its broadest sense, but a review of a particular approach to school improvement.

To ensure the validity of any subsequent judgements it was essential to identify an area of activity that was broad enough to provide a representative view of the EAS, but specific enough to lend itself to detailed analysis and subsequent evaluation.

The process of identification was simplified through reference to the Invitation to Tender document which set out the requirement to provide.... *'an independent report on value for money functions of the EAS paying particular attention to how the organisation has refined its delivery model from a fully staffed central model to a model where schools are funded to provide support and challenge to peer schools within the region'*.

## **2. Review Framework:**

Having determined the focus for the review it was then essential to develop a framework for the review that:

- set out what evidence would be required and how it was to be gathered;
- determined evaluative criteria for arriving at a VfM judgement;
- established a chronology of phases for undertaking the review; and
- recognised any contextual factors that needed to be considered.

These phases are described in more detail in the main body of the report.

## **Review Findings:**

The overall conclusion is that the refined S2S delivery model represents good value for money. This judgement has been arrived at from the following evaluative judgements:

- *The model is efficient:* - Evidence gathered from case studies demonstrates that the small 5% increase in spending to fund investment in the model can result in significantly accelerated progress in schools requiring support; with a consequent reduction in the amount of time that additional support needs to be provided.
- *The model is equitable:* The distribution of funding ensures that those schools most in need of support receive the most support.
- *The model is sustainable:* The concentration on capacity building, based on leadership development in supported schools, ensures that progress is sustainable and increases the pool of potential support providers in the future.

## **Recommendations**

- The EAS must ensure that approaches to school improvement represent continuation and refinement to this model rather than any shorter-term fixes.
- The EAS must ensure that it has systems and mechanisms in place to gather valid data and wider intelligence on school performance to verify the effectiveness of the model and inform future improvements.

The main body of the report sets out:

- Details of the review framework

- A financial overview of the EAS
- A detailed description of the S2S delivery model
- Illustrative case studies
- Conclusions drawn from the evidence

### **The Review Framework:**

#### *Evidence gathering:*

In essence, the review needed to be an evaluation of how successful the EAS approach to school to school learning has been in terms of the quantity, quality and deployment of resources designed to secure improvement. This necessitated:

- comparing the costs associated with a decentralised school to school approach with the previous more centralised approach;
- gathering information from the EAS including, where available, from relevant reports and surveys;
- gathering, where possible, feedback from participating schools; and
- bringing the above together.

#### *Evaluative criteria:*

While there are more nuanced interpretations available; for the purposes of this review VfM would be demonstrated if the approach ensures that:

- effectiveness remains unimpaired or improves while costs have been reduced; or
- effectiveness improves while costs remain constant; or
- increased spending is offset by improved effectiveness
- equity is preserved; and
- sustainability can be demonstrated.

#### *Contextual factors:*

Having determined the focus for the review, the approach to evidence gathering and the necessary evaluative criteria, it was also important to consider the specific context of the external environment within which the EAS has been operating during the period under review. For the period 2021-2022 the dominant external consideration is that of operating under the challenges posed in continuing to adapt service delivery to respond to a global pandemic.

This meant that a key feature of the review was an evaluation of the effectiveness of the organisation's response both in terms of its deployment of resources and the impact of its amended service provision. Evaluating impact also provided a unique challenge given that measures of educational outcomes such as examination results, school categorisation and Estyn inspection reports were either no longer available or, where available, did not provide a valid measure of progress.

The pandemic didn't just impact on the availability of evaluative measures it also, inevitably, impacted on the availability and capacity of the S2S delivery model over the time period covered by this review and subsequent report.

*Chronology:*

It was essential to adopt an incremental approach where each phase built on the previous phase to produce a rounded judgement of overall VfM. In essence the phases were:

- data gathering and analysis to determine economy – spending less;
- information gathering to determine the impact of the changed approach – effectiveness;
- combining the above to determine efficiency; and
- refining judgements through consideration of equity and sustainability.

### 3. Financial Overview of the EAS:

As stated earlier, time and financial constraints did not allow for a detailed consideration of VfM across the full range of activities undertaken, and services provided, by the EAS in the period under review. However, it is possible to look at the organisation holistically in terms of the overall resources -essentially people and money - at its disposal. The table below summarises the picture for the EAS over the last six years

**Summary of overall financial position:**

|                      | 2016/2017   | 2017/2018   | 2018/2019   | 2019/2020   | 2020/2021   | 2021/2022   |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| LA Funding           | £3,376,653  | £3,275,353  | £3,209,847  | £3,145,651  | £3,098,465  | £3,036,496  |
| Trading Income       | £601,974    | £447,460    | £0          | £0          | £0          | £0          |
| Total Core Funding   | £3,978,627  | £3,722,813  | £3,209,847  | £3,145,651  | £3,098,465  | £3,036,496  |
| Grants               | £56,082,261 | £52,033,572 | £51,991,066 | £49,022,408 | £51,996,479 | £60,830,062 |
| TOTAL                | £60,060,888 | £55,756,385 | £55,200,913 | £52,168,059 | £55,094,944 | £63,866,558 |
| Delegated to Schools | £50,384,126 | £46,481,315 | £48,886,304 | £46,142,076 | £48,754,009 | £58,240,283 |
| Delegation Rate      | 90%         | 89%         | 94%         | 94%         | 94%         | 96%         |
| Residual Income      | £7,668,633  | £7,278,655  | £6,314,609  | £6,025,983  | £6,340,935  | £5,626,275  |

The reduction in core funding has been continuous over the six-year period. There has been an agreed 10.07% reduction in LA funding, which, along with the elimination of trading income, has resulted in a reduction in total core funding of some £942k or

23.7% in absolute terms; although in real terms, when inflation and pay awards are taken into consideration, the reduction has been in excess of 30%. Over the same time period the amount of grant money received from the Welsh Government reduced year on year up to 2019-20 but has increased over the last two years with a very significant increase of £8.83m or some 17% between 2020-21 and 2021-22<sup>1</sup>. From a regional school improvement prospective when reductions in LA funding, elimination of trading income and increases in grant money received are added together the increase in total funding is £3.81m which represents a 6.3% increase in absolute terms over a six year period. However, when inflation and pay awards are taken into account, there has probably been very little or no increase in real terms.

When increases in the rate of delegation to schools are taken into account then residual income spent on running the organisation, including staffing costs, fell by some £2.04m or 26.6%% from 2016-17 to 2021-22. Reduced spending has inevitably resulted in a considerable reduction in staffing numbers, with the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff reducing from 111 in 2016-17 to 63.3 in 2021-22, taking the total reduction in FTE staff reduction to 47.7 over the period 2016-17 to 2020-21, representing a reduction of almost 43% in staffing levels.

This staffing reduction is a direct consequence of the decision by the EAS to refine its delivery model from a fully staffed central model to a self-improving School to School (S2S) model where schools are funded to provide support and challenge to peer schools within the region. It is this delivery modification that provided the focus for the VfM review for 2021-22.

#### **4. School to School Delivery Model:**

Essentially the review distilled down to gathering evidence that allowed the following questions to be answered:

- What does the delivery model comprise?
- How has it been refined?
- What are the cost implications?
- How effective is it?
- Is it demonstrably equitable and sustainable?
- What lessons have been learned that will inform future refinement and improvement?

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<sup>1 1</sup> Additional grant funding represented part of the Welsh Government's response to the impact of the pandemic and curriculum reform.

The remainder of this report will detail the evidence that was gathered to answer the above questions and allow a summative evaluative judgement of VFM to be made.

### *The delivery model:*

Broadly speaking the S2S delivery model is broken down into four areas of support and challenge designed to enable teachers and leaders to learn from each other, try out new approaches and engage with educational research, as the backdrop for improvement. The four areas of support and challenge are:

#### *School Improvement Partner (SIP)*

This role is usually, but not exclusively, undertaken by more experienced headteachers whose knowledge and experience is used to support and challenge headteachers in allocated schools and to plan and monitor support. They record their activity with the allocated school, agreed actions aligned to the school's own plan for improvement (School Development Plan) and evaluation of the progress made against the plan, through the Notes of Activity system, and through their contacts with a nominated Principal School Improvement Partner (PSIP). While most SIPs are experienced headteachers, some are 'newer' headteachers who have demonstrated their ability to make a significant contribution to improvement, both as headteachers and in senior leadership roles previously.

#### *Learning Network Schools (LNS).*

The LNS programme has become established over the last 5 years engaging over a hundred schools across the region both as facilitators and participants. The decision to adopt the Learning Network Schools programme is based on research evidence which highlights the need for well-resourced school to school collaboration in a transparent and supportive culture. premised on the belief that support for school improvement is at its most effective when schools are learning from each other. Schools within the programme perform the following differentiated roles:

- support on a subject specific basis;
- specialised health and well-being support; and
- headteacher and school leader support for teaching, learning and governance.

All participating LNS in the secondary sector perform a single role but within the primary sector some schools provide both subject specific/ health and wellbeing and support for teaching, learning and governance.

All schools within the region are given the opportunity to apply to become an LNS. Applications are vetted and applicants are subsequently subjected to a quality assurance process to determine their suitability for the role. Potential SIPs are identified by the EAS based on data that provides evidence of sustained improvement or high achievement within their schools over a period of time. Recognising improvement as a criterion as well as high achievement is important because it



provides the opportunity to recognise those headteachers who have been successful in turning around under-performing schools and who might, therefore, be ideally placed to support and challenge another school embarking on a similar journey. This approach is a good example of possibly the single most important perceived advantage of the S2S approach to school improvement – the credibility of those providing support because ‘*they have walked in your shoes*’.

It is also important to note that the identification of LNS and SIPs has not been confined to the South East Wales region. In the secondary school sector, and for Welsh medium provision, there was a recognition that the necessary expertise did not exist in sufficient numbers and that there was a need to widen the search to identify potential contributors from outside the region.

#### *Professional Learning Networks (PLN)*

The EAS Early Years team employs the knowledge, skills and experience of three lead network settings to support leadership in non-maintained nursery settings across the region. The lead settings offer bespoke coaching and mentoring to new leaders or those who have been identified through setting improvement partner visits as requiring support with leadership and management.

In addition, the lead network settings offer professional learning to leaders who require it. These take the form of three sessions on leadership, managing a team, self-evaluation and improvement planning. The final session is offered in situ at the lead setting site – to see the impact of leadership in action and to share documentation at first hand.

#### *Curriculum for Wales Professional Learning Schools:*

This programme has been established over the last 7 years engaging with schools within and across the region to design and facilitate the support to all aspects of the Educational Reform in Wales. Across the EAS there are 46 Curriculum for Wales Schools representative of primary, secondary, special, faith and Welsh medium schools. These schools receive a sliding scale of funding across three tiers, with an approximate outline of time expectation of their role. During this time they support the co-construction, facilitation and evaluation of the regional and national professional learning offer linked to teaching and leadership. Lead schools contribute to the whole regional and national offer, and partners and associate contribute to the core and optional work programme.

#### *Refinement of the delivery model:*

Refinement has been largely a process of evolution over time rather than a ‘big bang’ change of direction. Evolution has been both quantitative and qualitative. The model has been both expanded and refined over a number of years. Expansion is illustrated through the increase in the number of participating schools, the concomitant reduction in the number of Challenge Advisors – now referred to as School Improvement Partners - and an increased rate of delegation of funds to schools.

Refinement has been a learning process of gathering and evaluating evidence to identify what works well and what could be refined to further improve the effectiveness of the model. One area of refinement has been the inclusion of a growing number of secondary schools in the LNS S2S model, with a few secondary schools taking on a number of other secondary schools as recipients, rather than just one school. This has built capacity within their own schools through resourcing and has helped grow future leaders. This is a positive by-product of the LNS system that as well as supporting other schools, participant schools also grow and develop their own internal leadership structures.

A further refinement has been differentiating the models of support to reflect the needs of individual schools rather than a one-size fits all approach. This differentiation is closely aligned to the recipient school's Estyn category and to the needs analysis undertaken with the school and Local Authority through partnership meetings, professional discussion and Team Around the School Meetings.

Cost implications:

The earlier evaluative criteria stated that for the purposes of this review VfM would be demonstrated if the S2S approach ensures that either effectiveness remains unimpaired or improves while costs have been reduced, effectiveness improves while costs remain constant or increased spending is offset by improved effectiveness. To begin this analysis it was necessary to gather evidence that would allow a comparison between the costs associated with a decentralised S2S approach with the previous more centralised approach.

The evidence that was gathered is presented in the table below to reflect the three component areas of expenditure:

- School Improvement – Challenge Advisers or School Improvement Partners as they have been re-titled and S2S (delegation to headteachers to support allocated headteachers)
- Curriculum and Wellbeing – Mainly subject specific advisers and LNS (departments in schools providing support to departments in other schools)
- Leadership and Teaching – Mainly former headteachers undertaking professional learning for schools (building future leaders at all levels) and delegation to schools within clusters to embed and continue practice.

**Comparing the costs associated with a decentralised school to school approach with the previous more centralised approach:**

| <b>Area of Expenditure</b>   | <b>2020-2021</b>  | <b>2021-2022</b>  | <b>Change</b>   |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| School Improvement (core)  | £1,326,035        | £917,771          | -£408,264       |
| School to School (S2S) (schools)   | £1,352,903        | £1,826,747        | £473,844        |
| Curriculum (core)  | £1,414,510        | £1,156,663        | -£257,847       |
| Equity, Health and Wellbeing (core)  | £137,485          | £296,522          | £159,037        |
| Curriculum for Wales - Learning Network Schools (LNS) (schools)                        | £218,725          | £401,320          | £182,595        |
| Leadership and Teaching (core)   | £405,833          | £370,176          | -£35,657        |
| Curriculum for Wales Professional Learning Schools – Leadership and Teaching (schools) | £344,960          | £510,000          | £165,040        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>£5,200,451</b> | <b>£5,479,199</b> | <b>£278,748</b> |

The evidence shows that spending has increased by some 5% between 2020-21 and 2021-22 to support the organisation’s investment in refining its delivery model from a fully staffed central model to a model where schools are funded to provide support and challenge to peer schools within the region.

The above table provides an important quantitative overview of spending on the ever-expanding S2S delivery programme. However, this needs to be supplemented with an understanding of the funding mechanism that underpins the quantitative changes.

In the past, the level of support provided to schools, via their appointed Challenge Adviser, was dictated by school categorisation. Those schools judged to be most in need of support received the highest number of days of support. The suspension, and subsequent scrapping, of categorisation has led to the development of a multi-layered funding model that continues to be support-need based.

The current, but constantly evolving, funding model comprises a universal baseline of funding for eight days support for every school in the region. Five days funding is provided directly to the support school or person while the remaining three days funding can either be retained by the recipient school or used to buy-in additional SIP support. Currently, the majority of schools are opting to retain the funding to use as peer-to-peer work with schools of their choice.

In addition to the universal baseline support, extra funding is also distributed on a support-need basis. Schools that are providing support to those schools most in need of support, are funded to provide that support. The amount of funding provided is determined by the amount of support deemed to be necessary and reasonable. Thus, as an example, a secondary school providing high levels of 'wrap-around' support to a school judged to need the highest level of support will receive £30,000 to provide that support; while a secondary school providing a more targeted medium levels of support will receive £17,000 to provide that support. A primary school providing high levels of 'wrap-around' support to a school judged to need the highest level of support will receive £13,500 to provide that support.

In addition to the funding provided to schools providing bespoke support, funding is also allocated to all recipient schools. It ranges from £1000 to £6000 per school, based on need. This funding was introduced to eliminate any potential cost barriers to engagement.

The distribution of this funding for 2021-2022 is shown in the table below.

|                                     |           |                    |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| Delivery - 8 days universal support |           | <b>£ 575,350</b>   |
| Delivery - bespoke SIP/LNS          | £ 680,500 |                    |
| Delivery - bespoke SIP              | £ 71,200  |                    |
|                                     |           | <b>£ 751,700</b>   |
| Recipient engagement                |           | <b>£ 119,000</b>   |
| <b>Total</b>                        |           | <b>£ 1,446,050</b> |

The table shows that £870,700, or some 60%, of the funding went to targeted support for those schools most in need of support; compared to the 40% going to universal support.

## **5. Illustrative Case Studies:**

The next phase of the review required gathering evidence to enable an evaluation of the impact of this increased investment. Essentially, what was needed was the gathering of valid evidence to enable the impact on schools and their pupils to be identified. This in turn would enable a judgement to be made regarding the effectiveness of the redirected spending and deployment of resources.

As with all evidence-based reviews, triangulation of evidence is a necessary condition for ensuring validity. In this review triangulation comprises gaining evidence from participating schools to verify the evidence provided to the review by the EAS. The most comprehensive form of triangulation involves a multi-layered approach of gathering evidence from both schools that are providing support and schools that are receiving support. For reporting purposes, a small number of representative case studies will be used to examine the effectiveness of the approach based on actual experience of involved schools.

To ensure that the selected case studies are as representative as possible within time and resource constraints it was decided to include case studies that featured:

- a relatively new headteacher as a SIP within the primary/infant sector;
- an experienced headteacher from outside the region as a SIP working across multiple schools in the secondary sector; and
- an experienced headteacher as a SIP working with a newly appointed headteacher in a Welsh medium primary school.

### ***Case Study 1:***

Participating schools -Llanyrafon Primary School and Ysgol Fabanod Cwm Glas Infants School

As mentioned previously, in the main body of the report, the majority of School Improvement Partners (SIPs) are experienced headteachers. However, some are less experienced individuals who have demonstrated their ability to make a significant contribution to improvement, both as headteachers and in senior leadership roles previously.

It is also mentioned previously in the report that the EAS provides universal support for all schools of five days input from a School Improvement Partner (SIP); with further support being provided to those schools judged to need of greater support.

This case study reflects an example of a SIP who is less experienced and a recipient school judged to need no additional support.

Llanyrafon Primary School has 420 pupils on roll and is situated in Cwmbran within Torfaen County Borough Council. The headteacher took up post in September 2021

having previously been the Head of Raglan Church in Wales Primary School in Monmouthshire from 2017 to 2021.

During her tenure at Raglan Church in Wales Primary School:

- a significant deficit was transformed into a healthy surplus;
- categorisation had improved from amber to yellow (with every likelihood of progression to green had categorisation not been suspended); and
- a reputation was gained for excellence in maths and numeracy which would have resulted in the school being designated as a Learning Network School (LNS) if the pandemic had not intervened.

In the summer term 2021 the headteacher was approached by the Principal School Improvement Partner (PSIP) for Monmouthshire regarding the possibility of becoming a SIP. The headteacher agreed and completed her SIP induction training in June 2021.

As a newly appointed SIP the headteacher was, in the first instance, allocated a single school to work with for the academic year 2021-2022

Ysgol Fabanod Cwm Glas Infants School ('Cwm Glas') is situated in Llanbradach within Caerphilly County Borough Council and has 62 pupils on roll. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2009. The school is not in any Estyn category and was judged to be a green school in the last round of school categorisation in January 2020, prior to the suspension of categorisation in response to the global pandemic.

For the autumn term 2021 and spring term 2022 contact was, at the request of Cwm Glas, via Microsoft Teams rather than in-person but subsequent meetings have been in-person. The support provided has encompassed sharing practice and suggestions on generic issues such as School Development Plans, performance management, grant monitoring, professional learning, and wellbeing. Much of this support has been based on a '*you might want to look at this*' as opposed to a '*this is how to do it*' approach. This has encouraged the development of a support culture centred around '*pick and share*', which Cwm Glas has found very beneficial.

The SIP has also been involved in the personal appraisal process for the headteacher at Cwm Glas and pupils' book scrutiny is planned for June 2022. Where the schools have a shared focus, for example, the school environment then reciprocal visits are planned to provide new learning opportunities for both parties.

As with all S2S partnership working forming good professional relationships has been vital; and the key to this is the perceived credibility of the SIP allied to the receptiveness, to new ideas and suggestions, of the headteacher in Cwm Glas. The

SIP is respected as a successful headteacher with a background in early years lecturing in a university which confers added credibility.

However, most important of all is the sense of a shared understanding of reality in the current educational environment. Both participating headteachers are receiving the same emails at 10am on a Monday morning and facing the same challenges, for example, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reform. This all lends to an appreciation that the SIP *'really gets it'*.

While this case study concentrates on the relationship between two schools it is important to note that inter-school working within the region is not confined to these specific arrangements. Thus, Cwm Glas is a member of a proactive cluster of schools that includes secondary schools, primary schools and infants schools who network among themselves to share ideas and emerging practice in relation to major challenges they face, for example, implementing the Curriculum for Wales.

### **Case Study 2:**

Participating Schools: Cardiff High School – Chepstow School

Cardiff High School (Cardiff High) is a mainstream local authority run school with 1800 pupils on roll. The school has an experienced headteacher who has been in post since 2011. In 2019 the school was inspected by Estyn and identified as being excellent across all five inspection areas. The report stated that:

*'Cardiff High School is an exceptional school. Pupils' achievements have been amongst the highest in Wales over recent years, and yet the school has striven relentlessly to improve in every aspect of its work. In particular, the school has focused on refining its approaches to supporting all teachers to hone their craft'.  
.....Pupils respond extremely positively to the inspirational teaching and high levels of challenge. ....As a result, pupils' outcomes are well above expectations. High quality teaching, care, support and guidance combine effectively to enable pupils to become confident, capable and ambitious learners. Leadership is outstanding. It is distributed widely and effectively and all know their part in developing the school. Leaders emphasise and promote the importance of wellbeing for staff and pupils. As a result pupils enjoy school and staff morale is high'.*

The school's performance was judged to be such that no recommendations for improvement were issued – instead the report stated that:

*'The school should continue on its improvement journey. There are no specific recommendations following this inspection'.*

Chepstow School (Chepstow) is a mainstream local authority run school with 733 pupils on roll. The current headteacher has been in post since April 2019 and had been a headteacher in another school in the region for five years prior to his appointment to Chepstow. Following inspection in December 2017 the school was

placed into Estyn Monitoring; and was judged to be an Amber school in need of the second highest level of support in the last round of categorisation in January 2020. Prior to the appointment of a substantive headteacher in April 2019 the school had an acting headteacher and Senior Leadership Team.

The 2019 Estyn report on Cardiff High attracted attention and led to an approach to the school by the EAS to ascertain if the school – despite sitting outside the geographical remit of the EAS – would be prepared to participate in the S2S delivery model that sits at the heart of its school improvement programme. In the first instance the invitation was confined to the provision of digital technology and skills support.

However, over time the support provided by the school has grown exponentially, to the point where six schools are now being supported. The support model is not a one size fits all offer, but a bespoke, tailored programme of support agreed with recipient schools to meet their needs. The support package varies both quantitatively and qualitatively; from a 40-day commitment to provide ‘wrap-around’ support through a 20-day commitment to provide more targeted support down to a School Improvement Partnership offer.

In late 2019 and early 2020, just before the impact of the pandemic on schools across Wales, an agreement was brokered by the EAS for Cardiff High to provide support to Chepstow based on a 20-day commitment.

Fundamental to effective partnership working between the schools was the initial stage of gaining trust and building relationships. This provided the necessary foundation for agreeing needs and designing an appropriate and agile support package. The role of Cardiff High within the partnership has encompassed providing a sounding board, offering mentoring and acting as a critical friend in relation to leadership, planning, performance management, quality assurance, teaching and learning and subject specific classroom delivery. The overriding aim is to build capacity and ensure that it is entrenched to provide a platform for sustained improvement rather than a sticking plaster short term fix.

Central to the aim of building capacity has been the professional learning development programme for Middle and Senior Leadership Teams in Chepstow. This has involved one-to-one working with peers in Cardiff High with a concentration and focus on *‘things that matter’* and reciprocal staff visits. The most rapid improvement has been in the accelerated development of Middle Management based on engagement with the OLEVI Teacher Development and Leadership Courses with Cardiff High School as the principal deliverers.

Having a clear focus was a substantial feature of the support from Cardiff High and this helped to identify and streamline what was needed to prevent attention being diverted and progress on school improvement being slowed down. One example of this is school attendance during the pandemic. Chepstow had one of the highest attendance rates in Wales; attributable in part to a focused approach that allowed the school to further develop this aspect of school improvement.



The schools have worked together on a range of upskilling initiatives, based on the adaptation of generic development models, for example, Dr ICE, to ensure they are interlinked with the values that are integral to Chepstow. Role-modelling has been an important feature of the adaptation and delivery, with senior leaders from Cardiff High working alongside peers in Chepstow in a partnership where engagement is deepening.

As mentioned previously, establishing good personal relationships is essential to the provision and acceptance of constructive challenge. This is evident in the termly reviews carried out by Chepstow School where senior leaders from Cardiff High perform the role of critical friend in validating judgements arrived at internally.

One source of evidence of the improvement in pupil outcomes within Chepstow comes in the form of results in GCSE Mathematics where A-A\* grades have risen as follows:

- 2019 30%;
- 2020 Centre Assessed Grade 42%;
- 2021 Centre Determined Grade 46%.
- 2022 Extremal examined 45% (40% validated<sup>2</sup>)

Evidence of the cultural change that has been brought about in Chepstow comes from the most recent iteration of their School Development Plan. This now includes improvement targets that mirror comments contained in the 2019 Estyn report on Cardiff High as an illustration of increased aspiration and a belief in the achievement of excellence.

However, it is important to note that benefits are not confined to recipient schools. There are benefits for the supporting school in terms of leadership development gained from providing support, learning from practice in other schools and accelerated leadership opportunities through promotion to an expanded Senior Leadership Team (SLT) as part of backfilling to cover SLT members most heavily involved in providing external support and challenge.

In conclusion it should be noted that while the headteacher of Chepstow believes the school would have arrived its present destination without external support, he acknowledges that without the additional capacity that Cardiff High brought to the school, it would have taken much longer.

### **Case Study 3:**

Participating Schools: Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Gaerfilli - Ysgol Panteg Torfaen

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Caerffilli (YGGC) is a mainstream local authority run Welsh medium primary school with 439 pupils on roll. The school has an experienced headteacher who has been in post since 2002. In February 2022 the school was inspected by Estyn and identified, in the subsequent report, as a school which *'provides valuable experiences for its pupils. Strong leadership and enthusiastic*

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<sup>2</sup> Early entry results published in January 2022

*teachers and assistants, support pupils' well-being very effectively. This helps pupils to become conscientious, confident, citizens of Wales. Staff offer exciting learning experiences that engage pupils' interest and help them to develop the skills they need to access the whole curriculum and learn effectively. As a result, pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and most make good progress during their time at school'.*

Ysgol Panteg (Panteg) is a mainstream local authority run Welsh medium primary school with 413 pupils on roll. In the last round of school categorisation (January 2020) the school was categorised as Red, indicating that it had been judged to be one of only twenty primary schools in Wales in need of the highest level of support. The overwhelming probability is that it would have gone into Estyn monitoring if school inspections had not been suspended due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

This case study centres around the support that YGGC has been providing to Panteg. This support has been in place since May 2020, but the impact was limited in the academic year 2020-21 because of:

- the long-term sickness absence of the headteacher in Panteg;
- subsequent appointment of a part-time headteacher; and
- the inability to have face-to-face meetings between the respective staffs because of the pandemic.

The latter issue was a significant factor in inhibiting the development of the necessary relationship – based on support rather than challenge and criticism – that was required between the schools.

The appointment of a full-time substantive headteacher in Panteg in June 2021 provided the opportunity for the necessary relationships between the schools to develop. The subsequent support that has been provided has encompassed all levels including Teaching Assistant, Higher Level Teaching Assistant, Middle Leader and Senior Leader. Support has also included strategic support for performance management and quality-assurance; and at a more detailed and specific level, for example, the teaching of phonics via Tric a Chlic in Welsh and Read Write Inc in English.

Support has also been provided more generally in relation to care support and guidance. The Estyn inspection report on YGGC recognised that this area was one of the school's particular strengths as the following extracts illustrate:

*Pupils' well-being and attitudes to learning are one of the school's obvious strengths.... The school provides a caring, supportive, and welcoming environment where all pupils take pride in being a valued member of the school family..... Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is a strong feature. All pupils with additional learning needs have an individual education plan, which includes specific targets that staff review with parents regularly. Effective links with a range of external agencies, such as the speech and language service, provide specialist and beneficial support for pupils.*

The existence of expertise in this area within YGGC has allowed the transfer of good practice through the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCO) in YGGC

undertaking a quality assurance role for Panteg to provide re-assurance to them in terms of their emerging practice.

Provision of effective support requires a willingness to participate on the part of both providers and recipients. This has been the case as both parties recognise the professional development opportunities that sharing practice can provide. It is important to note that the benefits from providing support are not confined to the recipient school and its staff. The Estyn inspection report for YGGC noted *that ‘Staff at all levels contribute to professional learning sessions regularly and share their expertise successfully’*. The opportunities to work with Panteg on a S2S basis increased the professional learning opportunities of YGGC staff who also benefitted from working professionally with colleagues from Panteg.

A critical factor in effective S2S working is the forging of good working relationships underpinned by mutual respect. In this case study that is reflected in Panteg's sense of participating in a partnership where support and challenge is *‘being done with not done to’*. This stems from an appreciation that guidance, support and advice is being offered and that they are not being forced into doing things that they potentially might disagree with. They are able to take what fits for them and not just become a mirror of YGGC.

A key indicator of the effectiveness of the support that has been provided is the fact that both school leadership in Panteg, and their SIP, believe that there is sufficient evidence to show that capacity building has resulted in the level of support being no longer required to the same extent. A meeting with the Principal School Improvement Partner is scheduled for 30 June 2022 where the level of support required will be discussed and it is likely that the current level of S2S support will cease for 2022-2023.

However, this will not signal an end to inter school collaboration with the intention to continue to share practice, raise staff aspiration within Panteg, develop a joint project and enjoy the beneficial dialogue.

One further source of evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of this example of S2S working comes from comparison of the results of completed staff surveys within Panteg. The ‘Schools as Learning Organisations’ survey maps Panteg’s professional learning offer and culture of self-improvement by looking at 7 areas (Sections A-G).

|  | 2019 Average Rating | 2022 Average Rating | Commentary       |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Overall  | Neutral 3.2/5.0     | Agree 4.4/5.0       | Increase 34.38%  |
| A: Developing a shared vision centred on the learning of all learners      | Neutral 3.5/5.0     | Agree 4.6/5.0       | Increase 31.43%  |
| B: Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff | Neutral 3.3/5.0     | Agree 4.4/5.0       | Increase 33.333% |

|  | 2019 Average Rating | 2022 Average Rating | Commentary      |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| C: promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff                 | Neutral 3.3/5.0     | Agree 4.3/5.0       | Increase 30.30% |
| D: Establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration             | Neutral 3.3/5.0     | Agree 4.2/5.0       | Increase 27.27% |
| E: Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge for learning    | Neutral 3.3/5.0     | Agree 4.3/5.0       | Increase 30.30% |
| F: learning with and from the external environment and wider learning system | Neutral 3.3/5.0     | Agree 4.2/5.0       | Increase 27.27% |
| G: Modelling and growing learning leadership                                 | Neutral 3.2/5.0     | Agree 4.4/5.0       | Increase 37.5%  |

## 6. Conclusion:

The detailed information provided by the EAS, supplemented by feedback gathered from the representative case studies, provides sufficient triangulated evidence to enable a summative VfM evaluation based on consideration of the following criteria:

- Economy - cost compared to alternative support models
- Effectiveness – impact on participating schools
- Efficiency – combination of above
- Equity – provision of support based on need
- Sustainability – securing long term improvement

**Economy:** There was a slight increase of some 5% in spending to fund further investment in the shift from a centrally funded model of school support to a devolved model of S2S support.

**Effectiveness:** The lack of valid quantitative data to enable a meaningful analysis of effectiveness meant that the focus had to shift to qualitative evidence. This evidence was gathered from in-depth discussion with headteachers in participating schools to inform a number of representative case studies. This evidence was unequivocally positive from both the providers and recipients of support.

**Efficiency:** The evidence from the case studies suggests that gains in effectiveness far outweigh any marginal increase in spending. These gains include accelerated progress in supported schools resulting in the level of support they require being reduced more quickly and hence creating a cost saving in the longer term.

**Equity:** This does not mean that all pupils will achieve equal outcomes but rather that support is provided to overcome barriers they may face which are outside of their control, but within the remit of a school improvement consortium. The effectiveness of the S2S delivery mechanism in accelerating progress means that potential barriers are removed quicker while the funding mechanism for the S2S delivery model ensures that schools that need the most support, to provide equality of opportunity for their pupils, receive the most support.

**Sustainability:** In contrast to some models of support that provide short term 'sticking plaster' solutions, this model has capacity building, through leadership development, at its heart. This helps to ensure that improvements are entrenched and sustainable into the future and also helps to build a pool of high-quality leaders who can be the support providers of the future.

Taken together the above component judgements demonstrate that the model provides good value for money because it meets the evaluative criteria set out earlier in the report of:

- Increased spending being offset by improved effectiveness
- equity being preserved; and
- sustainability being demonstrated.