HIGHLIGHTS

DEVELOPING SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS IN WALES

OECD

HIGHLIGHTS

WALES

WHAT IS OECD EDUCATION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT?

This study is part of the OECDs efforts to support countries in the design and effective implementation of their education policies, grounding these efforts on evidence, and multidisciplinary tools and approaches, such as stakeholder engagement events. Education Policy Implementation Support provides countries and jurisdictions with tailored support towards making sustainable improvements in teaching and learning, drawing from OECDs analytical knowledge base and network of international experts.

More concretely, support generally starts with an initial assessment to understand the policies in their context, followed by OECD engagement with key education stakeholders in the country to help shape or review the development of implementation strategies.

WHY AN ASSESSMENT ON SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS IN WALES?

Wales is committed to providing high-quality and inclusive education for all its citizens. It therefore in 2011 embarked on a large-scale school improvement reform that has become increasingly comprehensive and focused on the ongoing development and implementation of a new, 21st century school curriculum.

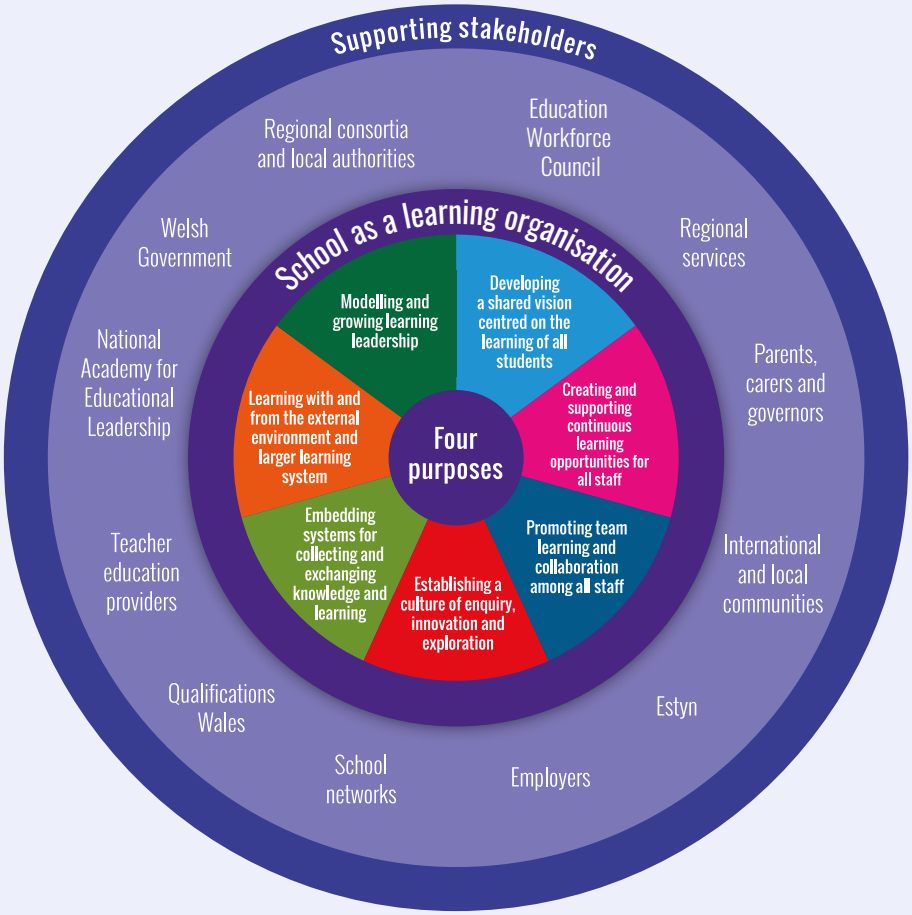
Wales considers the development of schools as learning organisations (SLOs) *(see Box 1)* a key means for realising the new curriculum. A SLO has the capacity to change and adapt routinely to new environments and circumstances as its members, individually and together, learn their way to realising their vision. Collective working and learning and expanding the skills and learning of new ones by many teachers, teaching support staff, school leaders and others involved is believed essential for bringing Wales' new curriculum to life.

This report, Developing Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales, supports Wales in realising this objective. It assesses the extent to which schools in Wales have developed as learning organisations, and identifies areas for further improvement at both school and system levels.

BOX 1 The schools as learning organisations model for Wales

The SLO model for Wales focuses the efforts of school leaders, teachers, support staff, parents, (local) policy makers and all others involved into realising seven dimensions in its schools. These seven action-oriented dimensions and their underlying elements highlight both what a school should aspire to and the processes it goes through as it transforms itself into a learning organisation.

Figure 1 The schools as learning organisations model for Wales



The realisation of the "four purposes" of the new school curriculum is placed at the heart of the model. These refer to developing children and young people into "ambitious capable and lifelong learners, enterprising and creative, informed citizens and healthy and confident individuals".

Wales' SLO model was designed through a process of co-construction. It was developed by representatives of 24 Pioneer Schools, the regional consortia (i.e. regional school improvement services), Estyn (i.e. the Inspectorate of Education and Training in Wales), the National Academy for Educational Leadership, the Education Directorate of the Welsh Government and the OECD. The developmental work was shaped through a series of workshops and meetings that were facilitated by the OECD between November 2016 and July 2017. The result of this collective effort is Wales' SLO model that was released in November 2017.

Source: Welsh Government (2017), "Schools in Wales as learning organisations", https://beta.gov.wales/schools-learning-organisations-slo-overview.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENT: METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE.

This assessment has used a mixed-methods study design, consisting of a large number of interviews with school staff, policy makers and other stakeholders, desk research of documents and data, and a purposefully designed survey, the Schools as Learning Organisations Survey. Staff from a random sample of 571 schools were asked to complete the online SLO survey. A total of 1 703 school staff – 336 school leaders, 811 teachers and 382 learning support workers – from 178 different schools did so. The assessment is furthermore part of the broader OECD Education Policy Implementation Support provided to the Welsh Government that started in September 2016 and consists of:

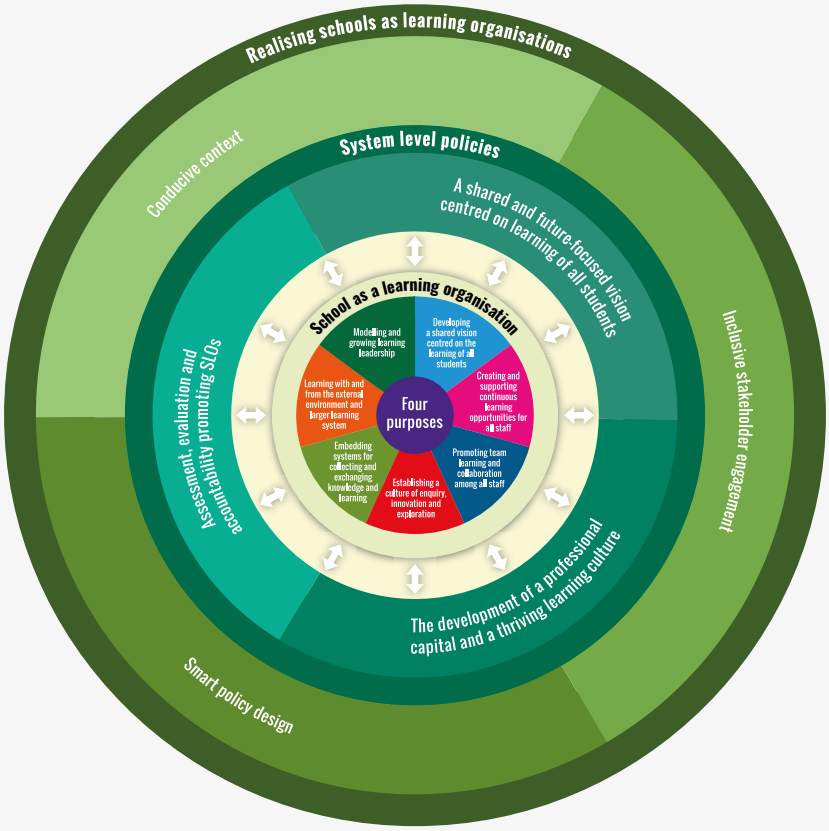
- a rapid policy assessment;
- strategic advice during policy meetings and other events and;
- tailored implementation support for developing SLOs as part of the broader curriculum reform agenda.

This broad collaboration has resulted in a rich exchange of views and knowledge which have enriched this report.

The study is organised following a framework of analysis presented in *Figure 2* and is used to guide the reader throughout this highlights brochure:

- Part I, The Schools as Learning Organisations Assessment, describes and analyses the school as a learning organisation in Wales in context to explore to what extent the key characteristics already exist in schools in Wales.
- Part II, System Assessment of the Conditions for Developing Schools as Learning Organisations. This starts with an exploration of which system-level policies are enabling or hindering schools to develop as learning organisations, and offers concrete recommendations for strengthening policies, enhancing policy coherence and taking further action. This is followed by an exploration of how Wales can ensure the effective implementation – or "realisation" as it is often referred to in Wales – of its SLO policy and provides points of reflection and recommendations.

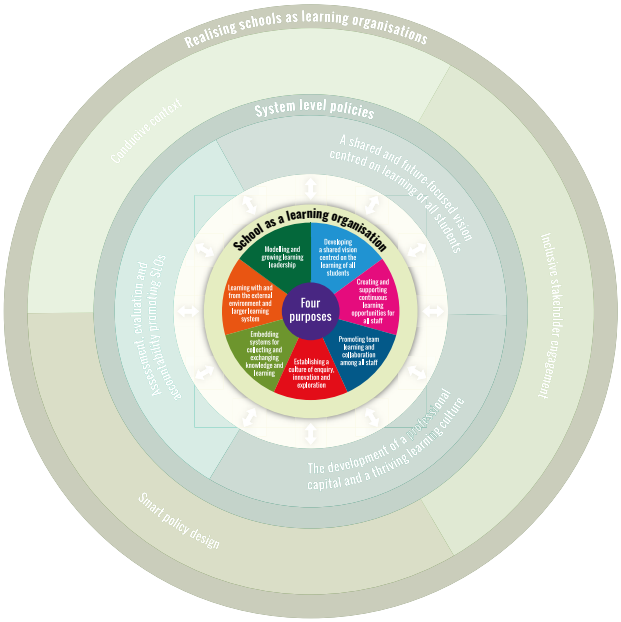
Figure 2 Framework of analysis for this assessment



©OECD

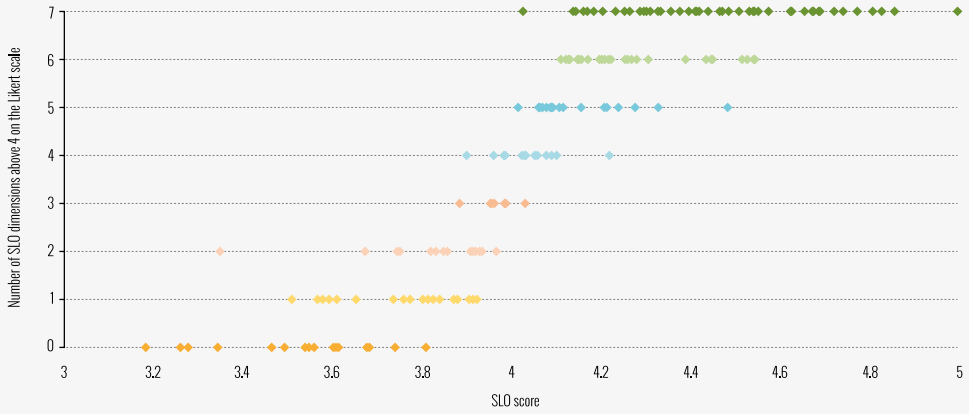
THE SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS ASSESSMENT: MAIN FINDINGS

- **The majority of schools in Wales seem well on their way towards developing as learning organisations...** The Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) survey data suggest that just under six out of ten schools (58%) in our sample of schools had put five to seven dimensions of the learning organisation into practice.
- **...however, a considerable proportion of schools are still far removed from realising this objective.** Some 42% of schools seemed to have put in practice four or less of the seven SLO dimensions, with 30% of schools reporting the realisation of only two or fewer.
- **Schools are engaging unequally with the seven dimensions that make up Wales' SLO model.** Schools appear to be progressing well on the dimensions "promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff" and "embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning". Various sources of data suggest that two dimensions are considerably less well developed in schools in Wales: "developing a shared vision centred on the learning of all students (learners)" and "establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration". Many schools could also do more to "learn with and from the external environment and larger system".
- **Secondary schools are finding it more challenging to develop as learning organisations.** The more compartmentalised structure, leadership practices and tendency of many teachers to limit collaboration within subject areas and departments are believed to be factors in this.



- **More critical reflections are needed for deep learning and sustained progress to take place.** The evidence suggests that school staff need to be more critical about their own performance and that of their schools if deep learning and sustained progress are to take place. High-stakes assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements may have been a factor influencing people's willingness, and in some cases even their ability, to critically reflect on their own behaviour, that of their peers and the school organisation at large.

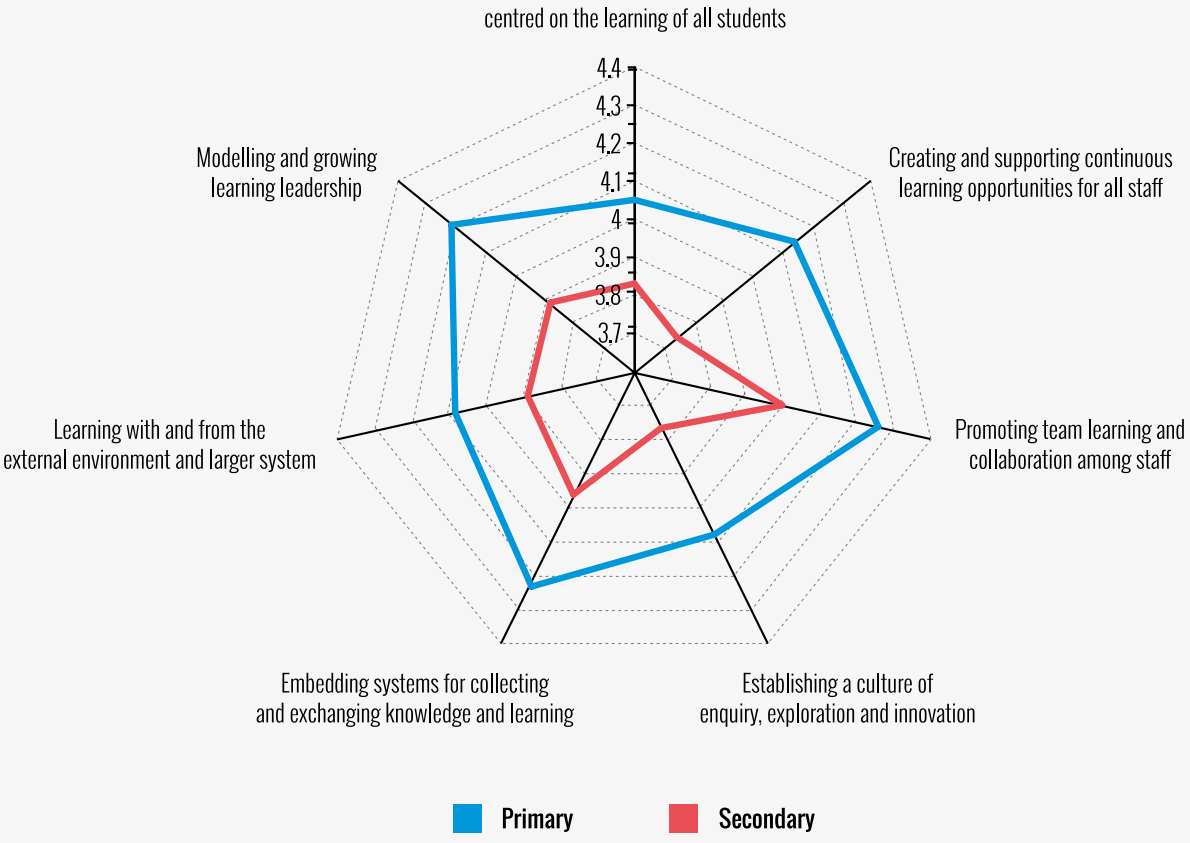
Figure 3 Schools developing as learning organisations in Wales, 2017



Note: Data are analysed at the school level. The SLO survey items were generated in the form of five-point Likert scale: 1) strongly disagree; 2) disagree; 3) neutral 4) agree; and 5) strongly agree. An average school score of 4 or more across the survey items that make up one dimension was defined as the threshold for when a school is considered to have put the dimension into practice. N: 174 schools. Each point represents a school.

Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

Figure 4 Average score per SLO dimension, by school type



Note: Data are analysed at the school level. An average school score of 4 or more across the survey items that make up one dimension was defined as the threshold for when a school is considered to have put the dimension into practice.

Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

©OECD

THE SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS DIMENSIONS: KEY FINDINGS

Developing and sharing a vision that is centred on the learning of all students

Many schools in Wales could do more to improve their development and realisation of a shared vision centred on the learning of all students. Some 53% of schools in our sample seemed to have developed such a vision (an average school score of 4 or more on the SLO survey Likert scale) – the lowest proportion of the seven SLO dimensions.

Nine out of ten school staff (92%) reported that their school has a vision that focuses on students' cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes, including their well-being – an encouraging finding considering the ambitions set out in Wales' new school curriculum. Various sources however with that many schools in Wales are yet to put this vision centred on the learning of all students into practice. Schools in Wales are faced with relatively high levels of child poverty and a high proportion of low performers in PISA 2015, and there are areas of student well-being where further progress could be made, such as in reducing students' schoolwork-related anxiety and increasing sense of belonging in school.

Further work is also needed to make such a vision into something that is truly shared among schools' staff and other key stakeholders. The involvement of staff, parents and external partners in the shaping of the vision are areas for improvement, in particular for secondary schools.

Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff

High-quality induction and mentoring and coaching support are not common practice. The evidence suggested that many schools in Wales have, or are in the process of developing, a culture that promotes professional learning for their staff. Around 59% of schools in our sample would seem to have created and supported continuous learning opportunities for all staff (i.e. put this dimension into practice). The data however revealed significant differences between the levels of education: 64% of primary schools and 26% of secondary schools seem to have put this dimension into practice.

Various sources of data showed that induction and mentoring and coaching need to be strengthened in many schools across Wales. For example, 35% of respondents to the SLO survey disagreed or were unsure whether their school had mentors or coaches available to help staff develop their practice.

Table 1 Induction and mentoring and coaching support

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
All new staff receive sufficient support to help them in their new role	2.3%	7.8%	19.6%	44.5%	25.8%
Mentors/coaches are available to help staff develop their practice	2.5%	10.8%	22.1%	42.7%	22.0%

Note: Data are analysed at the individual level. N: 1 633 and 1 634 individuals respectively for the presented SLO survey statements.

Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

As Wales has embarked on a curriculum reform, teachers and learning support workers will need to expand their pedagogical and assessment skills. This will make mentoring, coaching and other forms of continuous learning – and collaborative learning and working – essential.

Promoting team learning and collaboration among all staff

More needs to be done to promote team learning and peer review and encourage staff to tackle problems together. The evidence suggested that about seven out of ten schools in our sample (71%) are promoting team learning and collaboration among all its staff. Primary schools however fare better: 75% of primary schools in our sample appeared to promote team learning and collaboration among all staff, compared to 48% of secondary schools. Furthermore, schools could do more to ensure that staff learn to work together as a team, observe each other more regularly and tackle problems together.

For several of the elements that make up this dimension, there were also different perceptions depending on staff categories. For example, 92% of secondary head teachers in the SLO survey agreed that staff in their schools observed each other's practice and collaborated in developing it, compared with only 67% of teachers.

Although there are bound to be some differences in perceptions between staff categories, as some staff may simply be better informed due to the nature of their work, the sometimes sizable differences reported in this dimension (and others) suggest the need for more professional dialogue and sharing of information. This is again particularly an area for improvement in secondary schools.

Establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration

A culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration is underdeveloped in many schools, particularly in secondary schools. The OECD team were struck by a change in attitudes compared to the OECD 2014 review. At that time, it found an education profession that seemed less open and willing to change and innovate their practice, with some school staff reporting signs of reform fatigue. This situation appears to have changed considerably. However, the OECD team found that this general change in mindset is yet to result in a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration in a significant proportion of schools in Wales. Four out of ten schools from our sample (41%) do not yet seem to have established such a culture.

These findings may partially be explained by the high-stakes assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements that are believed to have tempered people's willingness and confidence to do things differently and innovate their practice. This would seem particularly the case for secondary schools – the SLO survey data found just 26% of secondary schools in our sample had established a culture of enquiry, exploration and innovation, compared to 63% of primary schools. Other data sources corroborated this finding.

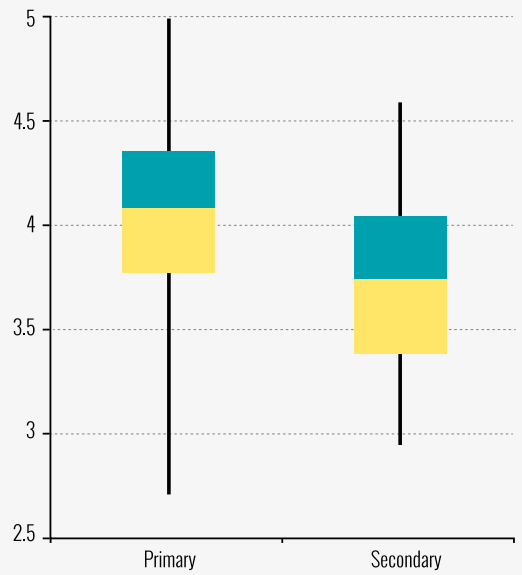


Figure 5 Average school scores on establishing a culture of enquiry, exploration and innovation, by school type

Note: The SLO survey items were generated in the form of five-point Likert scale: 1) strongly disagree; 2) disagree; 3) neutral 4) agree; and 5) strongly agree. The box plots show the average school scores sorted into four equal sized groups, so 25% of all scores are placed in each group. The middle "box", in green and yellow, represents the middle 50% of scores for the group. The median marks the mid-point of the data and is shown by the line that divides the box into two parts, in green and yellow.

Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

©OECD

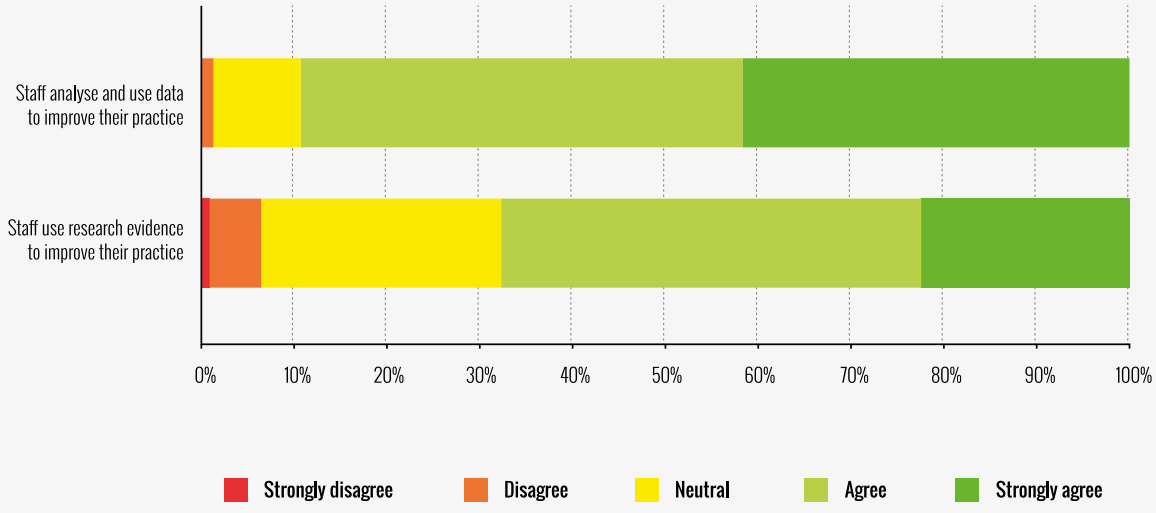
Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning

Systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge are well established, but the quality of school self-evaluations and development planning is variable. Systems for measuring progress seem well established in schools across Wales. The SLO survey data suggested that 70% of schools in our sample had put this dimension into practice, with embedded systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning. Again, there were significant differences between primary and secondary schools: 76% of primary schools and 30% of secondary schools would seem to have embedded such systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning (the largest difference of all SLO dimensions).

The evidence also suggested that, while the use of data is common in many schools across Wales, considerably fewer schools seem to have staff that are using research evidence to inform their practice.

Interviews and a review of policy documents and reports revealed that another area for improvement is the quality of school self-evaluations and development planning. Schools – as well as other parts of the system – spend considerable time and effort on analysing and reporting upwards on a wide variety of mostly quantitative data, with far less attention being paid to qualitative sources, like classroom observations or peer review, for learning. Wales' assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements, which have focused attention on quantitative performance measures, are believed to have contributed to this practice. Part of the challenge lies in the fact that there is no common understanding of what good school self-evaluation and development planning entails in Wales *(see below)*.

Figure 6 Staff use of data and research evidence to improve their practice



Note: Data analysed at the individual level. N: 1 604 and 1595 individuals respectively for the presented SLO survey statements.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

Learning with and from the external environment and larger system

School-to-school collaborations are common practice, but collaborations with some external partners need to be strengthened. Learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system is common practice in just over half of schools in our sample (55%): 57% of primary schools and 39% of secondary schools in our sample of schools seemed to have put this dimension in practice.

One area for improvement is the engagement of parents and guardians in the educational process and organisation of the school. This was found to be a particular challenge for secondary schools: only 57% of secondary school staff agreed that parents or guardians were partners in their schools' organisational and educational processes, compared to 71% of staff in primary schools. The OECD team recognise it may be more challenging to

engage parents of secondary students in the school organisation and education process, than at the primary level. However, there are examples in this report that show that it is possible for schools to increase parental engagement, even at the secondary level.

Another area for improvement is the collaboration with higher education institutions. The interviews revealed that stakeholders across the system are well aware of this challenge and are taking measures to improve the situation.

Furthermore, the SLO survey found that close to nine out of ten respondents (87%) reported that staff in their school actively collaborated with social and health services to better respond to students' needs. However, interviews with various stakeholders and the figures on average student expenditure per school suggest that the school funding and governance model in Wales affects schools' ability to respond to the learning needs of all students.

Modelling and growing learning leadership

There is a need for continued investment in the capacity of school leaders to model and grow learning leadership. The SLO survey data suggested that about two-thirds (67%) of schools in our sample have leaders that are modelling and growing learning leadership. Primary schools also appeared to be doing better: 70% of primary schools seemed to have leaders that are modelling and growing learning leadership, compared with 39% of secondary schools.

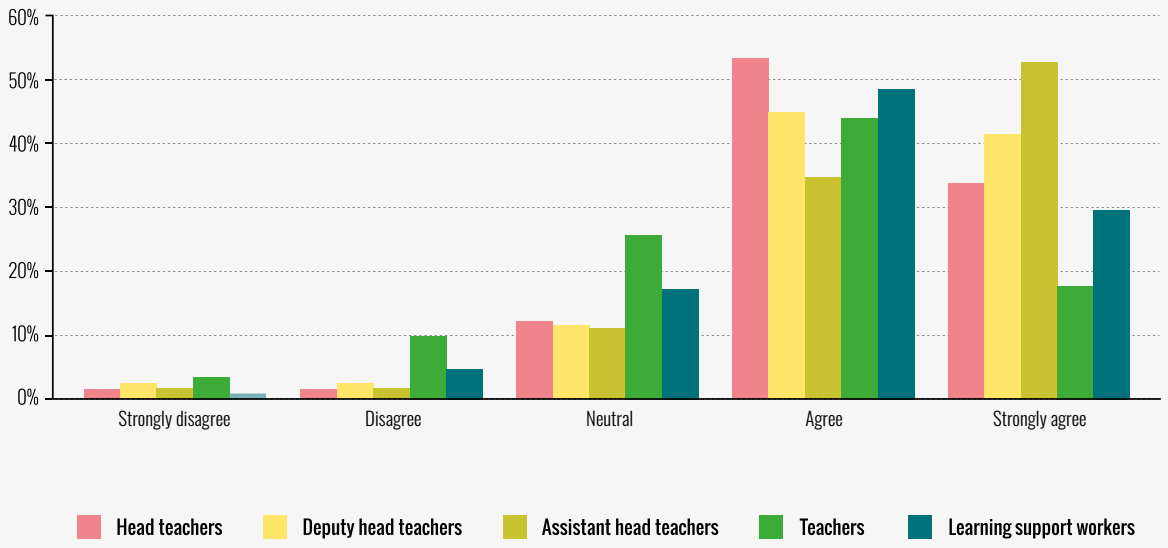
Particular areas for development are the coaching by leaders of those they lead and the creation of settings in which trust can develop over time so that colleagues are more likely to engage in mutual learning. The data revealed significant differences on several of the elements that make up this dimension, with teachers being most critical.

In addition, the evidence suggested that secondary head teachers in Wales could place a greater emphasis on ensuring their schools' actions reflect its vision and goals, and communicating these efforts better with their staff.

The generally high scores on this dimension contrasted with other data sources like OECD team interviews and Estyn reports. The analysis of other SLO dimensions also pointed to several areas for further improvement. School leaders play a vital role in the promotion and strengthening

Figure 7 Coaching by leaders, by staff category

Responses to the statement "Leaders coach those they lead"



Note: Data analysed at the individual level. N: 1 570 individuals.
Source: OECD Schools as Learning Organisations Survey, 2017.

©OECD

of induction programmes, mentoring and coaching, peer review and creating a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration in their schools. The establishment of these and other conditions for a learning culture to develop across the whole school organisation is particularly an area of improvement for leaders in secondary schools.

POINTS OF REFLECTION AND ACTION FOR SCHOOLS

The evidence suggests that the majority of schools in Wales are well on their way in developing as learning organisations. Two dimensions however are considerably less well developed and deserve particular attention: "developing a shared vision centred on the learning of all students" and "establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration". Many schools could also do more to "learn with and from the external environment and larger system".

Although schools need to be adequately supported and enabled to develop into learning organisations, many actions are within the control of schools themselves. School leaders play a vital role in creating the conditions for a learning organisation to develop. They need to be supported in taking on this responsibility. Teachers and learning support workers however need to also do their part to work and learn with colleagues beyond their department, subject area or school. Engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues, learning with and from staff in other schools – including between primary and secondary schools – and external partners, and drawing from the support provided by regional consortia are some of the means that staff have at their disposal.

Staff also need to more critically reflect on their own and their school's performance if deep learning and sustained progress to take place – and they need to be empowered to do this. School leaders play a pivotal role in creating a trusting and respectful climate that allows for open discussions about problems, successful and less successful practices, and the sharing of knowledge. This will also be essential to narrow the gaps in perception between staff about their own and schools' performance. The ongoing review of assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements should be used to encourage and give people the confidence to do things differently and engage in critical reflections.

Secondary schools also clearly face more challenges in developing as learning organisations. Their more compartmentalised structure, which makes it harder to collaborate across departments and the organisation as a whole, is believed to be a factor in this. Also some leaders in secondary schools do not do enough to encourage a learning culture across the whole school organisation. This while the success of the curriculum reform will (among other things) depend on staff engaging in collective and cross-curricular learning and working, within and across schools. However, this assessment also identified several examples of secondary schools that exhibit the dimensions of a learning organisation, demonstrating that it is possible.

Finally, although policy action will be required to reduce the variability in school funding between schools in similar circumstances, schools have the ability to take measures to ensure staff have the time and resources to engage in collaborative working and learning. The examples presented in this report show how budget pressures do not need to lead to a reduction in ambitions. Such examples should be systematically collected and shared widely to inspire and inform other schools in their change and innovation efforts.

SYSTEM ASSESSMENT FOR DEVELOPING SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

System-level policies enabling schools to develop into learning organisations

This section explores which system-level policies are enabling or hindering schools to develop as learning organisations, and offers concrete recommendations for strengthening policies, enhancing policy coherence and taking further action.

◻ Promoting a shared vision centred on the learning and well-being of all students

The development of an inclusive and shared vision that promotes equity and well-being is central to the first dimension of Wales' SLO model. The realisation of the "four purposes" of the curriculum is also at the heart of the model. These refer to developing children and young people into "ambitious capable and lifelong learners, enterprising and creative, informed citizens and healthy and confident individuals". The evidence suggests that this vision is widely shared throughout the school system. This is a strength of the curriculum reform effort.

Wales' school system has expressed a strong commitment to equity and student well-being and has implemented various policies such as the Pupil Deprivation Grant and free school meals to target equity challenges in the school system. However, two issues call for further policy attention: the school funding model and the lack of a common understanding of what student well-being entails.

Wales' school funding model challenges equity

The evidence suggests that differences in local funding models are causing unequal treatment of schools in similar circumstances. Recognising that a large overhaul of the funding model may not be feasible in the short or medium term, a concrete action could be to conduct an in-depth analysis of school funding in Wales to explore a funding model that promotes greater equity and efficiency. It could look to education systems like the Flemish Community of Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania and the Netherlands that have established funding formulas to promote equity while increasing efficiency. For example, Lithuania defined the maximum proportion of funding municipalities can reallocate. This was adjusted several times to ensure sufficient funding was allocated to schools.

Student well-being needs to be defined and measured

Another challenge to realising Wales' commitment to equity and student well-being is the lack of a common understanding of and way(s) of monitoring student well-being in Wales. The lack of clarity on and measurement of the concept has been recognised in Wales' strategic education plan. The first step will be to reach a common understanding of the concept, considering the equity and student well-being challenges in Wales. Schools will need guidance and support to respond to these challenges. The pilot of a national school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit that is scheduled to start in autumn 2018 provides a further reason to speed up this work.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING A SHARED VISION CENTRED ON THE LEARNING OF ALL STUDENTS

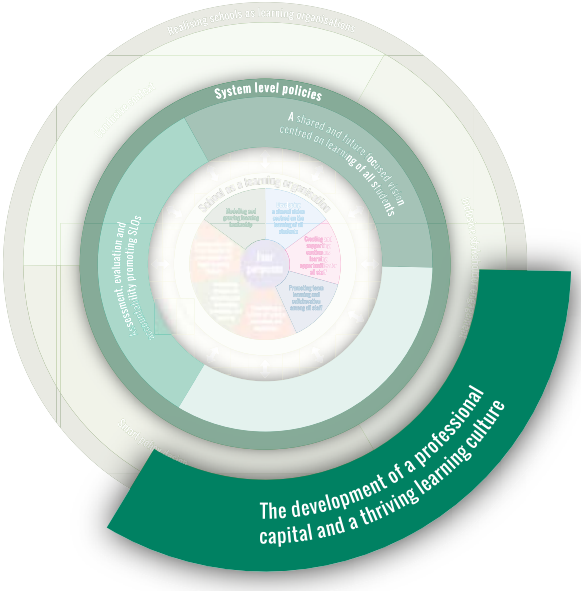
- Review the school funding model to realise Wales' commitment to equity and student well-being. The Welsh Government should consider conducting an in-depth analysis of school funding in Wales to explore a funding model that promotes greater equity and efficiency.
- Develop a national definition of student well-being and provide guidance and instrument(s) for monitoring it.

©OECD

Promoting the development of professional capital and a thriving learning culture

SLOs reflect a central focus on professional learning of all staff, aimed at creating a sustainable learning culture in the organisation and other parts of the (learning) system. Wales has made good progress in several areas, including the promotion of school-to-school collaboration and the clarification of professional expectations through its teaching and leadership standards.

Several issues deserve further policy attention, however, including the consolidation of high-quality induction, coaching and mentoring, peer review, and enquiry-based teaching and learning across schools in Wales. Collaboration with higher education institutions also leaves scope for improvement. There also seem to be capacity challenges for school leaders, in particular among secondary school leaders, and those in leadership positions at other levels of the system.



Establishing stronger collaborations between schools and teacher education institutions

Many OECD countries have in recent years raised entry requirements for teacher education programmes, including Wales. However, this has been limited to raising entry grades. Teaching in the 21st century is a complex and challenging profession that calls on a mix of high-level cognitive and socio-emotional skills on a daily basis. Following the examples of countries like England, Finland and the Netherlands, Wales should consider making use of intake procedures and selection options that go beyond grade requirements.

Furthermore, partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools can benefit both partners but they are not common practice in Wales. One positive development is that the new accreditation requirements for higher education institutions offering initial teacher education programmes emphasise partnerships with schools. Schools should also play their part in establishing such potentially fruitful collaborations. The school self-evaluation process should recognise the contribution of schools to teacher education institutions more publicly. Furthermore, schools, higher education institutions, regional consortia and the Welsh Government should continue to invest in specific projects that promote such collaborations.

Promoting learning throughout the professional lifecycle

This assessment identified three priority areas for professional learning where further policy action would seem warranted. First, is the development of the skills and mindset for engaging in enquiry, exploration and innovation. This is important for putting in practice the new curriculum that is being shaped around "big ideas" or, as it is often referred to in Wales, "what matters", and is particularly a challenge for secondary schools. Recognising that enquiry-based approaches are challenging to implement and that there are concerns about teachers' abilities to conduct quality assessments, Wales needs to make a concerted effort to develop practitioners' skills in enquiry-based teaching and learning. The national approach to professional learning that is under development to support the curriculum reform should also focus on developing practitioners' skills in enquiry-based approaches. Higher education institutions are well placed to contribute to this effort. Wales could look to British Columbia, Canada where school-to-school networks promote enquiry-based approaches on a large scale, while investing in developing leadership capacity.

Second, the evidence suggests there are challenges in terms of the number and quality of induction programmes in Wales. Wales has a mandatory one-year induction period for all newly qualified teachers – although not for learning support workers, who make up a large proportion of the school workforce. Welsh Government and the regional consortia should explore ways to strengthen induction programmes to safeguard and enhance the quality of Wales' future education workforce. They could look to the Netherlands, which has piloted providing new secondary teachers with a three-year induction programme that has been shaped in a collaboration between teacher education institutions and schools – a partnership of benefit to both partners.

Third, the evidence suggests that coaching and mentoring, classroom observations and peer review are not yet well established in schools throughout Wales. School leaders play a pivotal role in establishing the conditions for such collaborative practice to thrive, but will need the support and capacity development to take on this role. Part of the challenge is that school evaluations have insufficiently promoted such collaborative practice. The ongoing review of school evaluation processes should take these findings into consideration. The integration of Wales' SLO model into the national school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit that is under development will be important for promoting such collaborative practices.

Developing learning leadership in schools and other parts of the system

The need to invest in present and future school leaders and leaders at other levels of the system is well recognised in Wales, which has taken several steps recently to support their capacity development. These include the launch of the National Academy for Educational Leadership, the decision to integrate Wales' SLO model into all leadership development programmes and the commitments made by the Welsh Government's Education Directorate and several middle-tier organisations to themselves develop into learning organisations.

However, many secondary schools are finding it more challenging to develop into a learning organisation than primary schools. The recently established National Academy for Educational Leadership, which oversees the roll-out for support and development of education leaders in Wales, should pay particular attention to secondary school leaders. The regional consortia also need to focus more on the secondary sector and promote school-to-school collaboration not only between secondary schools but also with primary schools.

Many governors are not effectively fulfilling their role as critical friend. The ongoing review of school self-evaluation and development planning provides an opportunity to revisit governors' roles and identify their developmental needs. In addition, many local authorities have undergone high levels of staff turnover in leadership positions. The evidence points to the need for further investments in the capacity of middle leaders and challenge advisors in the regional consortia.

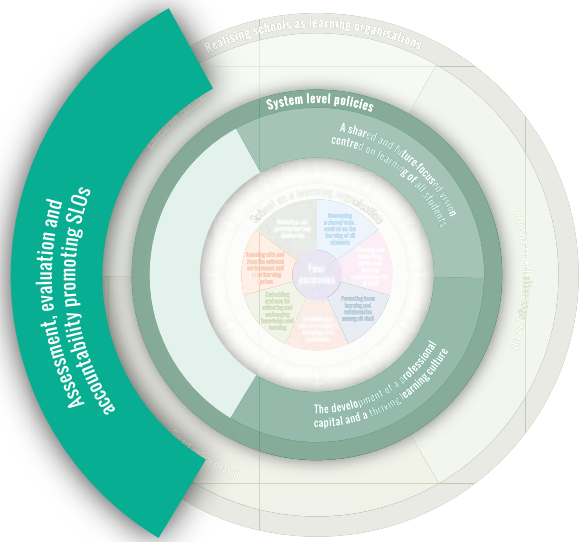
A concerted effort is needed to develop the leadership capacity across all levels of the system and to make leadership a driver of the development of SLOs and the curriculum reform. The National Academy for Educational Leadership and other stakeholders may therefore look to education systems like Ontario, British Columbia in Canada, and Scotland, that have made significant investments in developing the capacity of school and system-level leaders, including those of middle-tier agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS PROMOTING PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL AND A THRIVING LEARNING CULTURE

- **Base selection into initial teacher education on a mix of criteria and methods.** In line with the teaching and leadership standards, teacher education institutions should expand and pilot more elaborate, well-rounded selection criteria and intake procedures that cover a mix of cognitive and socio-emotional skills, values, and attitudes.
- **Promote strong collaborations between schools and teacher education institutions.** The ongoing reviews of school evaluation (i.e. of self-evaluations and Estyn evaluations) should be used to encourage schools to establish sustainable partnerships with teacher education institutions. Schools, higher education institutions, regional consortia and the Welsh Government should continue investing in specific projects to help grow such innovations.
- **Prioritise the following areas for professional learning:**
  - » **Investing in the skills and mindset for enquiry, exploration and innovation to thrive and putting the new curriculum into practice.**
  - » **Strengthening induction programmes.** Partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools should be promoted ecause of the benefits to both partners. Learning support workers should not be overlooked.
  - » **Promoting mentoring and coaching, observations and peer review.** The integration of Wales' SLO model into the national school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit will be important for promoting such collaborative practice.
- **Develop and implement a coherent leadership strategy that promotes the establishment of learning organisations across the system.** Under the leadership of the National Academy for Educational Leadership, Wales should consolidate and speed up efforts to strengthen leadership capacity at all levels in the system.
- **Provide greater support to secondary school leaders and ensure they have the capacity to develop their schools as learning organisations.** The National Academy for Educational Leadership should pay particular attention to the capacity development of secondary school leaders, making sure to include middle-level leaders. The regional consortia should also focus on supporting secondary school leaders.

Assessment, evaluation and accountability should promote schools developing into learning organisations

Major improvements can be achieved when schools and school systems increase their collective capacity to engage in ongoing "assessment for learning", and regularly evaluate their interventions. Wales' assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements are currently undergoing review. This review is essential, as the existing arrangements lack coherence and are driven by accountability demands, rather than serving the purpose of learning and improvement. As a result, they do little to encourage schools to engage in enquiry, innovation and exploration and develop as SLOs more generally – a particular area for improvement for many schools in Wales.



Student assessments should put student learning at the centre

A range of recent measures have the potential to help place student learning at the centre. The work of the Pioneer Schools and other measures proposed in Welsh Government's strategic action plan Education in Wales: Our National Mission to strengthen teachers' assessment skills are important considering long-standing concerns about the capacity of teachers to conduct quality assessments. Another promising step forward is the ongoing development of adaptive online personalised assessments that will replace paper-based reading and numeracy tests and that are scheduled to be extended to other areas of the new curriculum in the coming years. In addition, the planned review of qualifications will be essential for aligning assessments and evaluations to the new curriculum.

Furthermore, the Welsh Government has indicated its plans to measure student well-being. This should start with defining the concept and developing guidelines and instruments for schools to use (as recommended above).

School evaluations should serve the primary purpose of learning and improvement

School performance is externally evaluated in Wales through Estyn inspections and the national school categorisation system, which are considered by many to not be well aligned and leading to "gaming". There are also a variety of self-evaluation and development guidelines and tools, and self-evaluation is often seen as something done "for Estyn". The result is that schools do not have a clear picture of what is expected of them in terms of self-evaluation and development planning, which has contributed to the variable quality of these activities.

The ongoing development of a national school self-evaluation and development toolkit is an important policy response to these challenges. A working group has been charged with its development and could follow the example of many OECD countries and use the question "what is a good school?" to inform the establishment of common criteria for school self-evaluations and Estyn evaluations. Aspects to consider when developing criteria or quality indicators should include: focusing attention on student learning and well-being across the curriculum; Wales' SLO model and its underlying dimensions; staff professional learning and well-being and; student and parental engagement.

Contrary to common practice in many schools in Wales, self-evaluations should also engage the broader school community, including school governors, parents, other schools, to identify strengths, challenges and priorities for improvement. Following the examples of countries like Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands, peer reviews among schools should complement this process.

The regional consortia's current review of school self-evaluations and development planning (as part of the national categorisation system) could be continued. Discontinuing the colour coding of schools would seem needed to give schools the confidence to do things differently and innovate their practice – as long as sufficient checks and balances are built into new assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements to monitor progress and identify those schools that are in need of additional support.

Furthermore, Estyn has a key role to play in promoting SLOs through its external evaluation arrangements. It should encourage schools to develop their own capacity

©OECD

for self-evaluation (i.e. to actively promote learning) and focus on identifying strengths and priorities for improvement. The proposed criteria for school self-evaluations and Estyn's external evaluations will be an important means for this and could allow Estyn to focus on monitoring the rigour of the process of school self-evaluations and development planning, as is done in countries like Ireland, Scotland and New Zealand. There will still need to be sufficient checks and balances in place though to safeguard the quality of schools.

Schools should also be provided with clarity on the transition to the new system of school self-evaluation and Estyn evaluations.

System-level monitoring and evaluation should promote learning – at all levels of the system

During the course of this assessment the Welsh Government's Education Directorate revealed its initial ideas for system-level evaluation through a number of "quality indicators" – rather than through the current range of mostly quantitative indicators. This is a positive development but initial proposals do not seem to align sufficiently with the ambitions of Wales' SLO model and the new curriculum. For example, while the suggestion was made to give schools the freedom to determine key performance indicators based on local needs, national indicators for the key subjects of English/Welsh, mathematics and science would remain. These indicators are likely to continue to drive behaviour if no further actions are proposed. One option would be to consider indicators on student and staff well-being. This would underline the message that the intent is to move towards a new assessment, evaluation and accountability framework that responds to the full breadth of the curriculum, while recognising the importance of staff well-being.

Furthermore, teacher assessments of student performance at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3 are currently also used to monitor progress of schools and the system. This double purpose has made them high stakes and has challenged their reliability. Therefore, reiterating the recommendations of the Successful Futures report by Graham Donaldson and following the examples of education systems like the Flemish Community of Belgium, Finland and New Zealand, national monitoring of student learning and well-being could be informed by sample-based assessments that cover the full breath of the curriculum instead.

In addition, Estyn could play a more prominent role in the system-level monitoring of progress towards meeting the four purposes of the curriculum. Estyn's annual and thematic reports lend themselves well for this and should draw on a wider range of evidence, including the proposed sample-based assessments, PISA and relevant research.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY PROMOTING SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

- **Develop national criteria for school quality to guide self-evaluations and Estyn evaluations.** These criteria or quality indicators should promote Wales' SLO model, monitor student learning and well-being across the curriculum, recognise staff learning needs and their well-being in staff development plans. These and potentially other criteria should encourage schools to give account of their own strengths and priorities for improvement.
- **School self-evaluations should be shaped through a participatory process involving the wider school community.** Peer reviews among schools should complement this process. Regional consortia should continue to review school self-evaluations and development planning, but this process should no longer result in the public colour coding of schools. A condition is that sufficient checks and balances are built into new assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements. These changes call for substantial investment in the capacity of all those involved in self-evaluations and development planning. Guidelines and tools should be offered to schools.
- **Estyn evaluations should safeguard the quality of schools, while focusing on the rigour of schools' self-evaluation processes and development planning.** Estyn should promote schools' development of their own capacity for self-evaluation and focus on identifying strengths and priorities for improvement. Sufficient checks and balances need to be in place, however, to monitor progress and identify those schools that are in need of additional support. These changes also call for sustained investment in developing the skills and attitudes of Estyn inspectors.
- **Provide clarity to schools and other stakeholders on the transition to the new system of school self-evaluation and Estyn evaluations.**
- **Performance measures should go beyond the key subjects of English/Welsh, mathematics and science – also in the transition period.** The Welsh Government should consider performance measures (indicators) on student well-being and staff well-being to align assessment, evaluation and accountability with the ambitions of the new curriculum and Wales' SLO model.
- **National monitoring of student learning and well-being should be informed by a rolling programme of sample-based assessments and Estyn reports, as well as research.**

REALISING SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

This section explores how Wales can ensure the effective implementation – or "realisation" as it is often referred to in Wales – of its SLO policy and provides points of reflection and recommendations. For this we look at the four determinants that can facilitate or hinder this process: smart policy design, stakeholder engagement, a conducive context and an effective implementation strategy.

Policy design: enhance the policy justification, its logic and its feasibility

To enhance a policy's implementation potential – in this case the policy to develop all schools in Wales as learning organisations – it is important for it to be well justified, that is to be built on evidence and respond clearly to a need; to complement other policies; and to be feasible. The evidence suggests Wales' SLO policy has been well received by the education profession. Its justification, logic and its place in the larger curriculum reform effort is starting to be understood by parts of the education profession and other stakeholders in Wales, although there is clearly more work to be done here. Progress has also been made in recent years to strengthen the system infrastructure that is to support schools developing as learning organisations.

©OECD

Three issues call for further attention however: better communication on the "why" and "how" of the SLO model, careful monitoring of the education budget and a review of the school funding model to ensure adequate funding for all schools to develop as learning organisations, and continuing the strengthening of the system support infrastructure.

Improving the communication of the reasons behind Wales' SLO policy in relation to the curriculum reform and other policies

Welsh Government has been striving for policy coherence and has been increasingly successful, but has not always been that good in communicating its achievements in this area. It needs to do more to explain to schools and others at different levels about why Wales' SLO model was developed, how it can guide schools in their development and how it forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform effort and relates to other policies such as the new teaching and leadership standards.

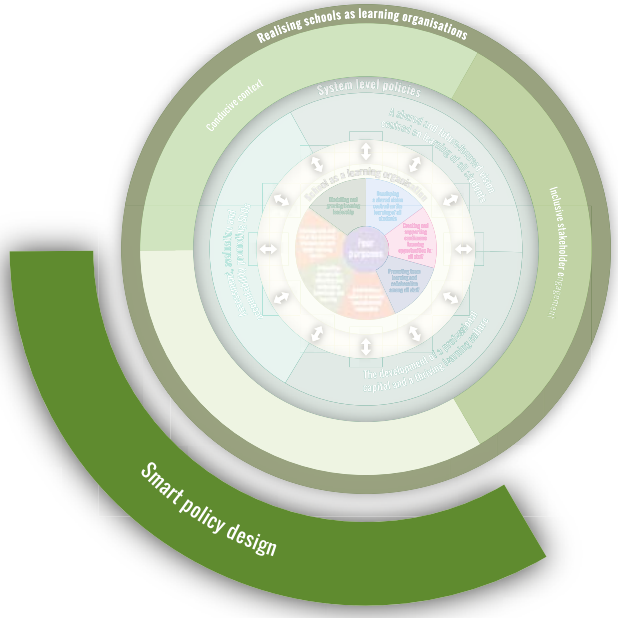
Ensuring the education budget and school funding model support schools developing as learning organisations and putting the curriculum into practice

Although many schools in Wales seem to be making good progress towards developing as learning organisations, a considerable proportion are still far from achieving this objective and need substantial support. Long term resource implications have to be carefully estimated to inform the development and sustainability of the proposed SLO implementation plan (see below).

The Welsh Government's fiscal situation – a decrease in the education budget compared to previous years, a trend that is expected to continue in the future – places further emphasis on increasing efficiency in public spending in education. It also calls for exploring creative and innovative ways of establishing a learning culture in and across schools with the resources available to them. In the proposed review of its school funding model, concerns about unequal treatment of schools in similar circumstances as a result of different local funding models should be explored (– see recommendation above).

Continuing to strengthen the system infrastructure for supporting schools in their change and innovation efforts

A positive development is the progress made in recent years in developing Wales' system infrastructure, especially the school improvement services provided by regional consortia. Several challenges and areas for further improvement remain however.



- Realising the curriculum reform and developing SLOs are both likely to increase demand for support by schools, meaning the regional consortia will all need to be well organised and managed to respond to these demands.
- Regional consortia, to varying degrees, still emphasise challenging schools rather than providing them with support and promoting a learning culture, although they have recently started changing their operations to shift the balance. The consortia should continue investing in their staff, especially their challenge advisers who are the first points of contact for schools to enhance their ability to develop as learning organisations and support schools in putting the new curriculum into practice.
- While there are examples of good collaboration between the consortia there is scope for deepening their collaboration and co-ordination – and lessening the competition between them.
- More progress could be made on the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the regional consortia's school improvement services.

Furthermore, Estyn should continue to monitor the progress consortia are making and ensure they collectively look for ways to enhance their services to schools. The same applies to the continued monitoring of local authorities.

Higher education institutions have also increasingly engaged with the school system, thereby expanding Wales' system infrastructure. This development however is still in its infancy. Several recommendations have been made in this assessment report to promote such "win-win" collaborations.

Inclusive stakeholder engagement

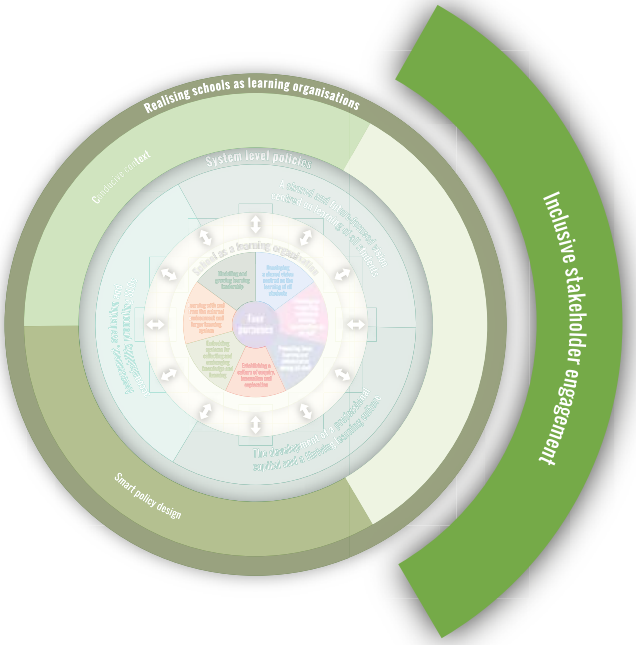
Continuing the process of co-construction for the realisation of SLOs across Wales, while supporting greater policy coherence

Whether and how key stakeholders are recognised and included in the design and implementation process is crucial to the success of any policy. The process of co-construction which characterises the reform approach in Wales has played a pivotal role in ensuring a strong ownership of policies and has helped bring about greater policy coherence.

Despite the progress made, the OECD team identified several examples where there is scope for greater policy coherence. One such example is the ongoing development of the assessment, evaluation and accountability framework which does not seem to be sufficiently connected to the work on the development of the curriculum. There is also a need to better co-ordinate the ongoing work on the development of system-level key performance indicators with the development of the school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit. Failing to co-ordinate and align these strands of work may result in a lack of coherence between the curriculum and the assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements which in turn puts the whole curriculum reform effort at risk.

Wales' SLO policy was also initially not directly linked to related policy areas, as had it not been integrated into the reform narrative. However, the Welsh Government and other stakeholders have recognised the need for greater coherence with other policies and have taken steps to bring it about, such as integrating the SLO model into leadership development programmes.

Furthermore, the OECD team found significant differences in the extent and ways in which regional consortia have engaged with schools in their regions to disseminate the model and support them in putting it in practice. Continuing the work of the SLO Implementation



Group may help ensure co-ordination and collaboration between the regional consortia and other stakeholders, to collectively look for the best ways to support schools in developing as learning organisations. Although room needs to be left for regional variance, one important step forward will be the intended joint formulation of a national SLO implementation plan that allows for regional action plans.

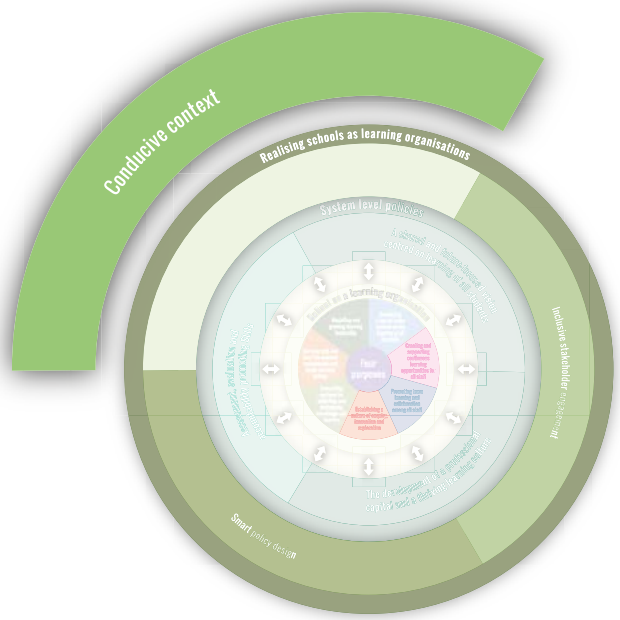
However, the implementation group should have a clearer role in supporting the Welsh Government's efforts for greater policy coherence, aimed at realising the curriculum in schools throughout Wales. This includes co-ordinating and collaborating with those working on the establishment of a national professional learning model, the development of a school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit, and other related working groups.

©OECD

A conducive institutional, policy and societal context

◻ Continue shaping, monitoring and responding to the changing institutional, policy and societal context

The successful implementation, or realisation, of a policy is more likely when it takes into account the institutional, policy and societal context in which the policy is to be put into practice. In Wales, the institutional, policy and societal context has been conducive to large-scale education reform, and a wide range of stakeholders from all levels of the system have been engaged in shaping the process.



The involvement of schools and other stakeholders in the development of Wales' SLO model has supported its ownership by the education profession. Furthermore, increasing alignment with and integration into other policies as mentioned have helped place the SLO on the agenda of regional consortia and Education Directorate governance bodies like the Change Board.

This current fertile ground for reform is also contributing to schools' willingness to engage with Wales' SLO model. There are some contextual issues, however, that should monitored and responded to in order to realise the SLO policy. First, there is a need to expand the public dialogue generated by PISA results to align it to the ambitions of the new curriculum. Second, Wales should ensure its governance arrangements enable all schools to develop as learning organisations and as such respond to the learning and other needs of all its students.

The need to broaden the public dialogue generated by PISA results

The broad support for education reform in Wales was initially triggered by the disappointing 2009 PISA results. The resulting school improvement reform has evolved into the current curriculum reform, of which Wales' SLO policy is a part. This reform is ongoing and it will surely take time for its results to transpire.

There were concerns expressed to the OECD team that if the PISA 2018 results did not show sufficient improvement in student performance, some may use this as evidence against the curriculum reform. However, it would be too soon to draw such conclusions as the whole curriculum will only be made available in April 2019, so the PISA 2018 results would not yet reflect any change.

Furthermore, attention should be paid to broadening the public dialogue on student performance to align it to the ambitions of the new curriculum. International comparisons of literacy, numeracy and science could be complemented with more in-depth analysis of the data in areas such as factors influencing student performance, collaborative problem-solving skills, and student motivation for learning and well-being. These are at the heart of Wales' ambitions for the new curriculum but are often overlooked in the public debate when PISA results are released in Wales. A more explicit recognition of such skills in the system-level monitoring by the Welsh Government and Estyn may support a broader discussion on the learning and well-being of students in Wales.

The need to optimise governance arrangements to enable all schools in Wales to develop as learning organisations

The deployment of Wales' SLO model has been designed with the current institutional arrangements in place. Representatives from various institutions of the three tiers of the education system have been engaged in its development and will play a key role in helping schools make this transformation and shaping how Wales' SLO model is used in the future to support the wider curriculum reform effort.

There are concerns about the school governance model hampering the provision of services for students with additional learning needs (ALN). Evidence suggests that several of the 22 local authorities, especially the smaller ones, lack the capacity – both human and financial – to

respond to the growing need for support for this group of students.

A new system for ALN is intended to respond to this challenge. Wales has developed an ALN Transformation Programme to support its realisation. This includes the establishment of five new positions, the "ALN transformation leads". Four of these are operating at the regional level and are responsible for supporting local authorities, schools, early years settings and local health boards as they prepare for and implement the new system. The Welsh Government should – as it intends to do – carefully monitor the progress made in developing the cross-sector collaboration and multi-agency work practices that are fundamental to the success of the new ALN system. If progress is lacking further action should be taken. This may require further optimisation of the governance structure.

A second potential barrier to the curriculum reform effort could be the possible reform of public services that is currently being considered in Wales. If this decision is indeed made to consolidate the number of local authorities, the Welsh Government should consider delaying any immediate action on it, to help ensure all efforts remain focused on bringing the new curriculum to life in schools across Wales.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REALISING SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

- **Develop an easy-to-understand narrative that explains how Wales' SLO model can guide schools in their development, forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform and relates to other policies.** This narrative should be shared widely through various means.
- **Continue strengthening the capacity of the regional consortia to support schools developing as learning organisations.** The consortia should:
  - **Continue efforts to provide greater support to schools and promote a learning culture,** with less emphasis on challenging schools and greater attention to the secondary sector.
  - **Continue expanding and deepening collaborations and co-ordination between consortia.**
  - **Continue improving the monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of their services provided to schools.**
- **Estyn should continue monitoring the progress consortia are making in enhancing and streamlining of their services to schools.** Local authorities should continue to also be monitored by Estyn.
- **Enhance the collaboration and alignment between the various work strands on the development of assessment, evaluation and the curriculum.**
- **The SLO Implementation Group should continue to support the realisation of Wales' SLO policy, while striving for greater policy coherence.** It should co-ordinate and collaborate with other working groups, most immediately in the areas of professional learning and school self-evaluation and development planning, and agencies such as the Education Workforce Council.
- **Expand the public dialogue generated by PISA results to align it to the ambitions of the new curriculum.** More explicit recognition of skills such as collaborative problem solving, and student motivation for learning and their well-being in the system-level monitoring could support a constructive and broader discussion on the learning and well-being of students in Wales.
- **Continue monitoring the effectiveness of recent and possible further changes to governance structures** to ensure all schools in Wales are able to developing as learning organisations and realise the ambitions of the new curriculum for all students.

©OECD

The need for a coherent implementation plan

While this report was being finalised, work had started on the development of an SLO implementation plan intended to form an integrated part of larger reform effort. Several activities have been undertaken already, are planned or ongoing that should be part of this plan. These include: the inclusion of the objective to develop all schools and other parts of the system into learning organisations in the education strategic action plan Education in Wales: Our National Mission (September 2017); the co-construction and release of Wales' SLO model (November 2017); the integration of the SLO model into leadership development programmes (autumn 2018); the ongoing development of the school self-evaluation and development planning toolkit in which the model is likely to be integrated (started in May 2018); ongoing development of an online SLO self-assessment survey that can be freely used by school staff (scheduled to be launched November 2018); and ongoing efforts by the Welsh Government and several middle-tier organisations to develop into learning organisations.

The OECD team agree these are all important activities to support schools in their development efforts. However, this assessment has identified several other issues that call for further action for which recommendations are provided and that aim to inform the development of the SLO implementation plan.

REALISING SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

- **Develop and put in practice a national SLO implementation plan to empower schools across Wales in developing as learning organisations.** The SLO Implementation Group should lead the development of an SLO implementation plan, monitor progress in realising Wales' SLO policy, and ensure further action is taken when necessary. The national action plan – that could be partially made up of four regional action plans – should ensure all schools have the opportunity to develop as learning organisations and ultimately put the new curriculum into practice. Furthermore, attention should be paid to:
  - **The setting of objectives and the monitoring of progress should not become a high-stakes exercise for schools.** One option could be to regularly mine the anonymised data that will be collected through the online SLO self-assessment survey. Qualitative research could complement the analysis, aimed at exploring progress, including identifying good practices that should be widely shared, challenges and areas for further improvement.
  - **Task allocation.** The regional consortia play a pivotal role in supporting schools in their change and innovation journeys. However as highlighted through this report, higher education institutions and other parties could do their part and complement the system infrastructure.
  - **The timing and sequencing of actions will require prioritisation.** Phasing in actions allows efforts to be focused, bearing in mind schools' capacity to develop as learning organisations and bring the new curriculum to life. One action that requires immediate attention, as recommended above, is clarifying the transition period to the new approaches to school self-evaluations and Estyn evaluations.
  - **Communication and engagement strategy with education stakeholders.** An important first step will be, as recommended above, to develop and widely share an easily understood narrative that explains how Wales' SLO model forms an integrated part of the curriculum reform and relates to other policies. The systematic collection and sharing of good practice is another area to consider.

ABOUT THE DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS

The OECD Directorate for Education and Skills helps countries to identify and develop the knowledge and skills that drive better jobs and better lives, generate prosperity and promote social inclusion. We encourage countries to compare their experiences and learn from each other, and we accompany them in the difficult process of policy implementation.

Our global metrics help policy makers to see what is possible in education and to set meaningful aspirations in terms of measurable goals achieved by the world's education leaders. Our Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys show how much school systems vary in their progress towards equipping learners with the critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills that are so crucial at a time when the kinds of things that are easy to teach and easy to test are also easiest to digitise, automate and outsource. Through the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), we seek to strengthen the teaching profession and to devise more innovative learning environments with the 21st-century pedagogies that will shape 21st-century learners.

Our in-depth policy analysis and advice help countries understand how their national education system is faring in comparison to others, and learn what policies and practices have made a difference for strong performers and successful reformers in education. We also engage in national policy dialogues to help policy makers raise awareness for the need of reform and build agreement among stakeholders. Recognising that educational improvement is not just about new ideas and legislation, we support policy makers through the journey of change to improve teaching and learning outcomes for all.

Our aspiration is to help every learner, every parent, every teacher and every policy maker see that only the sky is the limit to improving education – and that improving education is the key to a better and fairer society.

Write to us
Directorate for Education and Skills
OECD
2, rue André Pascal
75 775 Paris Cedex 16
FRANCE
edu.contact@oecd.org

Visit our website
www.oecd.org/education

Explore our data on education and skills
gpseducation.oecd.org

Read our books on line
www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/books

Subscribe to our online library
www.oecd-ilibrary.org

Order our publications
OECD online bookshop:
www.oecd.org/bookshop

Connect with us on
Education and Skills Today:
Global perspectives on Education
oecdeducationtoday.blogspot.fr

@OECDEduSkills

Subscribe to our newsletter
oe.cd/edunewsletter

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of the OECD member countries. This document, as well as any data and any map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area. The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.