

SERVICE PLAN 2024 - 2025

Directorate: Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning

Service Area: Education Development

Accountable Manager: Mike Daley

Purpose

The purpose of the NPT School Support Service is to collaborate with optimism and humility to provide inspirational opportunities so that everyone in NPT schools can thrive and flourish. These outcomes are made explicit in the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales. Within the context of the new curriculum, the NPT school improvement team aims to foster sustainable school improvement through a clear framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability. Within this framework, there is a clear distinction between evaluation and improvement activities and accountability. The majority of the energy and focus in the system should be on delivering school improvement, guided by effective self-evaluation, improvement planning and support in all schools. As part of evaluation and improvement, practitioners and school leaders should have the support and confidence to learn and improve their practice continually. This will enable them to thrive in a supportive and collaborative environment that will raise standards and ensure every young person can fulfil their potential.

Fundamental to the new arrangements is robust and continuous self-evaluation by schools. Effective self-evaluation will be complemented by professional dialogue between schools, local authority and where relevant diocesan authorities, to agree on schools' improvement priorities and support. Informed by this, all schools will have a single, School Development Plan they are working towards. Underpinning the arrangements will be a broad range of high-quality information about schools, and other parts of the system, which will need to be used in a timely, intelligent and supportive way.

The accountability system, in contrast, is the safety net for when evaluation and improvement is not functioning effectively. It should not drive school improvement activity, although it should ensure that problems are identified and addressed. A self-improving system, which enables schools to focus evaluation and improvement on a wider range of evidence, will also help and encourage them to consider how they can contribute towards well-being goals when designing, adopting and implementing their curriculum and engaging learners. This will be increasingly important as schools embed a whole-school approach to health and well-being.

Bringing strategic clarity and coherence to local education systems, councils act as independent and impartial brokers and evaluators for school improvement support, resulting in stronger support for schools and ultimately lead to a self-improving system.

Vision

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Values

- Pupil centred – All our work and the work of schools should ultimately make a difference to the progress and experiences of children and young people in NPT
- Purpose driven – That there is a clear link to the Curriculum for Wales, its four purposes and the National Mission for Education
- Supportive – That the NPT school development team exists to support schools and that the priorities in the Service plan are met.
- Collaborative – That in order to meet our objectives we do not work in isolation. We work with internal and external partners and all of our schools

- Developmental – That we as a school development team are a learning organisation and aim to meet the objectives of what it is to be a learning organisation
- Innovative – That we encourage and foster creativity in order to meet the reform agenda and realise the purposes of the Curriculum for Wales and the objectives of the National Mission

How well are we doing?

1. Delivering Priorities and Outcomes:

- Each of our priorities contribute directly to the Directorate plan. Each impact report written by the school improvement service makes explicit the link between our Service plan and the three overarching Directorate priorities. Broadly these priorities are around tackling poverty, ensuring progress and creating inclusive communities. These in turn contribute to the Council's wellbeing objectives around providing NPT residents with the best start in life.
- The school improvement team has led a strategy to support schools to improve their self-evaluation processes to focus on pupils' standards, wellbeing and pupils' development of the four purposes.
- To remain in line with the evaluation and accountability framework and school improvement guidance from Welsh government we need to consider how we look at attainment as a measure of success. The guidance states quite clearly that, 'Published external examinationinformation is, limited by design in what it can convey. It should not be used in isolation or out of context, nor presented as evidence of how effective a school is. In this way, the information is useful for self-evaluation, but should not be used in isolation, either for this purpose or for accountability. These indicators are designed for a specific purpose, which is to frame data in a manner appropriate for self-evaluation and as a starting point for analysis and planning. The information is, therefore, limited by design in what it can convey.'
- The NPT support for schools' programme aims to support the wider ranging and more holistic approach to self-evaluation. Our activities support schools to identify priorities and plan for improvement. The team will verify and model if required the process of self-evaluation. This is successful in most of our schools. In a very few schools more sustained support is required with this process whether it be with supporting effective self-evaluation or with improvement planning.
- This process is going well but in many cases this is a cultural shift, particularly at secondary school because the accountability system has led to an over-reliance on data as the sole source of self-evaluation. As the draft guidance points out, 'using external examinations data, out of context, for accountability purposes can lead to perverse behaviours and choices by schools that are not necessarily in the best interests of learners.' Many of our primary schools have effective processes for evaluating pupil progress, however the process of evolving the culture at secondary schools is slower but it is moving forward.

- Nearly all primary schools and many secondary schools in NPT are at the appropriate stage regarding curriculum reform. By September 2023 all schools have developed a vision for the new curriculum and are trialling approaches to teaching. The NPT Learning and teaching strategy supports this process and has been shared and developed with all schools. The support offer that accompanies this is currently in motion and there are three cohorts (including colleagues from primary and secondary) with over sixty teachers participating.
- In a thematic visit Estyn stated that '*NPT has a strong, shared vision for the Curriculum for Wales that makes sense and is clearly articulated. The NPT team have shown bravery in asking schools to re-think and review their curriculum with a focus on the why.*

There is a strong moral purpose at its core, it is pupil-centred and there is a clear focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. There is a clear link between the language of the four purposes and the language of metacognition. There is a clear approach to deepening thinking in NPT schools and they have useful links with partners in particular a symbiotic relationship with Higher Education Institutions and the Inclusion services. There are powerful examples of how hugely helpful partnerships exist with external and internal partners when discussing curriculum design. There is clear recognition of the need to support and improve teaching and there is a strong emphasis on learning.'

- Evaluation in schools has identified the need to develop an agreed approach to literacy and numeracy. High levels of support in collaboration with Read, Write Inc. have established a long-term approach to tackling inconsistent approaches to teaching early literacy. This is expensive, however there is a significant impact on pupils' reading skills and their wider literacy. A majority of schools have also adopted the CPA (Concrete, Pictorial, Abstract) approach to mathematics, supported by White Rose Maths. This is going well, however all training stresses the need to maintain a broad and balanced approach to mathematics, so that it is not just number that is being taught.
- An enhanced Local Authority Lead Inspection visit in June 2024 Estyn reported the following:
- You have developed a vision for curriculum in NPT and communicated this widely and regularly with your schools and stakeholders.
- You have continued to support schools to develop their curriculum in line with the local authority's vision and interpretation of the principles of the Curriculum for Wales.
- The officers and headteachers we met were positive about the approach and are embracing these changes. They said that they valued the way you support clusters of schools to engage in discussions about curriculum design and progression.
- In our discussions, your teams were able to provide a few examples of areas and subjects where good practice has been identified.
- You are continuing to provide schools with a range of professional learning, including for governors. The headteachers we met were generally positive about this, although this support tends to be more focussed on primary whole school approaches than it is on secondary schools with distinct departments. Although they were able to give instances of activities they have introduced, they found it harder to explain how this professional learning has improved the quality of teaching or learning in their schools.
- The headteachers said that they value the support from ESOs to discuss curriculum approaches and welcome that officers are research-informed and allow each headteacher to plan their own approach.

Estyn also asked us to consider the following:

- How well does the range and quality of the evidence your ESOs gather support you to consider the impact of the local authority's work?

- How well is your evaluation recognising strengths and areas of development within a whole school approach to developing their curriculum and the impact that professional learning has on this?
- How will you ensure that schools do not mainly focus on planning for the four purposes or a specific approach, for example developing of concepts, but also consider pupils' learning and progress? Some headteachers we met talked about a specific approach to curriculum but did not talk as much about the difference that their curriculum is making to teaching or pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.
- How will you ensure that schools, in particular secondary schools, have access to subject and phase specific support to develop the teaching and learning as they develop their curriculum? How could you strengthen your subject networks to support this more effectively?
- How will you ensure that Welsh-medium schools have access to all professional learning and support through the medium of Welsh?
- How are you supporting schools to share and learn from practice in other local authorities?

2. Understanding needs and engaging:

- The levels of engagement in NPT are very high. The school support service works daily with the Chair of the primary headteacher group (Llan) and regularly with the secondary Chair (NAASH).
- Regular sessions to support progression and assessment are well attended by all schools at Camau (Welsh govt. in collaboration with UWTSD and Glasgow university) cluster meetings
- Termly governor training sessions are provided by the school support service on mandatory issues such as data training as well as Curriculum for Wales training and school development plan training.
- Elected members receive helpful reports for scrutiny/information on a wide range of issues including support for Welsh in English medium schools, the Seren programme, community focussed schools and the roll out for the curriculum for Wales.
- The school standards and partnership group meet every half term with two NPT schools where their context, successes, challenges and priorities are discussed.
- The needs of schools are identified through a range of activities primarily by supporting schools with their self-evaluation process. Regular (at least termly) visits support schools to monitor progress against agreed priorities. Schools is a form of follow-up with Estyn also receive additional support to address the recommendations.

3. Collaboration:

- The school support service collaborates with a wide range of partners – Primarily all schools and their governing bodies within NPT
- Fortnightly collaboration with UWTSD and Glasgow university as part of Camau i'r dyfodol help to inform the approach to progression, assessment and curriculum design in NPT schools as well as informing the national picture

- A long-term collaboration with Geoff Cresswell who offers bespoke one to one support for senior leaders in NPT schools has been a very successful model for both leadership and their well-being
- Strong links exist with colleagues in Welsh government and there are frequent discussions and meetings with them to support the roll-out of the curriculum for Wales. This has been further strengthened by the Lead ESO being seconded as a professional adviser to the Welsh government for two days a week to support curriculum design across Wales
- Strong links exist with different forums within the county borough for example presentations and discussions around the curriculum for Wales have taken place with the local SACRE group, BAME group, VAWDAAW group and teams within the education directorate.

4. Decision Making, Planning and Risk:

- The service has four clear objectives which align with Directorate, Corporate and national priorities (see below – key actions).
- The service contributes effectively to delivery of the council’s well-being objectives and corporate priorities, particularly around the priority for the best start in life but also to ensuring our local environment, culture and heritage can be enjoyed by future generations.
- All recommendations arising from inspections have been addressed/implemented.
- The service can evidence it has a culture which promotes performance and accountability and delivers continuous improvement through Estyn inspections, Welsh government discussions, local government scrutiny as well as each school’s governing body.
- The service has a regularly reviewed continuity and succession plan
- Employees are clear on what their expectations are

5. Value for Money:

The service uses its resources, including assets such as the training centre in Baglan well. We achieve good value for money and we securing Welsh government grants well. We know this because of our continual monitoring of NPT schools and this is nearly always supported by Estyn judgements. The budget is continually monitored throughout the year and the budget supports priorities being delivered.

6. Duties and Standards:

- The service follows integrated impact assessment procedures when required to do so. Several members of the team have received appropriate training.

- The team fully complies with the Welsh language standards particularly in terms of training and recruitment but also in terms of the day to day operation of the service.

7. Socio-Economic Duty:

Strategic decision involving learners who are likely to be impacted by socio-economic disadvantage are at the heart of much of our work. Research into how the curriculum for Wales could further disadvantage socio-economically disadvantaged young people has been considered and the effective use of the Pupil Development Grant is central to one of our four priorities (i.e. To ensure that parents are involved in pupils' learning).

8. DARE Strategy:

One of the four purposes of the curriculum for Wales is that all pupils develop as ethical and informed citizens as well as healthy and confident individuals. As a result, our training is targeted at realising this in all NPT schools.

9. Digital Opportunities:

The service uses a number of approaches that take advantage of digital opportunities. Many meetings now take place online. This happens on a daily basis and allows us to collaborate with colleagues across the county borough and Wales. Employees are able to access services from home and this enables a certain amount of agile/hybrid working for nearly all team members who wish to use this approach.

How do we know?

- The modelling of effective self-evaluation processes with middle and senior leaders has strengthened school leadership significantly as evidenced by NPT's Estyn profile. Only a half of schools had been judged by Estyn to have effective leadership for the four years prior to the implementation of this strategy.
- A wide range of impact reports form the basis of team's self-evaluation. These reports identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Continual feedback from headteachers and senior leaders through the strong relationships between LA and school has allowed us to co-construct the approach to reform and support.
- Regular attendance at local authority scrutiny meetings, seminars for members and governors allows both internal and external challenge
- Regular team meetings to discuss what is going well and what needs to be better helps to inform our direction and approach

- Performance Management which has developed through the culture of coaching and mentoring enables a culture of development and consistency. All targets are aligned with the service plan and the directorate plan (all of which align with Welsh government priorities)
- Regular updates of targets on the CPMS system / or its equivalent monitor progress

How and what we can do better?

- Support secondary schools in making the cultural shift away from a system which measured attainment above all other aspects of a child's development towards the realisation of the four purposes. Due to the phased implementation of the new assessment and accountability system influencing change at secondary schools is understandably more challenging. Colleagues in secondary schools are understandably reticent to shift practice too much until they know what they qualifications are going to look like. As a result, it is more challenging (nationally as well as locally), to ask schools to make a leap of faith.
- Access and contribute to cross-regional and national working groups. There are many groups both at Welsh Government and cross regional level that exist. As we are no longer part of a region, access to these groups is occasionally an issue, as is our capacity to have a representative on every group.
- Of the schools inspected this academic year, three primary schools and one secondary school have been placed in a formal category. The primary schools two are in Special Measures, one is need of significant improvement and the secondary school is in need of Significant Improvement. All schools are receiving additional appropriate levels of support. One primary school had significant challenges around staffing in the lead up to the inspection.

Budget, Resource Management and Organisational Development

This means that the School Improvement team receives direct funding of £1,364,941. Total allocation £18,255,700. 7.4% is retained by the LA. 92.6% is allocated directly to schools. Of the 7.4% retained by the LA £207,845 will go to schools. Therefore, of the total allocation of £17,098,604 to schools which equates to 93.6%.

SWOT Analysis	
<p>KEY STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural of being a learning organisation – Strong culture of collaboration and innovation • Stability within the team – Most of the team are full time and permanent • The team is very experienced, and we are able to continually second ‘new blood’ into the team which freshens up our ideas and thinking and also provides them with rich experiences. • Strong relationships exist between all sectors • Strong external links exist between individuals in organisations such as Estyn, Welsh Government, the region etc) 	<p>MAIN WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity – limits our ability to carry out action research (Business development) and be part of national and cross-regional groups • Grant funding leads to annual anxiety and does not promote long term planning culture (also leads to considerable amount of time retaining and recruiting staff – constantly reacting rather than developing) • attendance, alternative curriculum development (particularly at secondary school) reducing exclusions, • Recruitment and retention of senior leaders in schools is becoming an increasing problem with over half of NPT schools having new or acting headteachers
<p>KEY OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The national reform agenda • No longer being part of a regional consortia 	<p>MAIN THREATS (see also risk area below)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The national reform agenda – time to bring about cultural change • Recovery from the cost of living that is impacting across all sectors • Unknown outcomes of Welsh government’s middle tier review (findings due March 2024)

Risk Management				
Risk Title	Date From	Date To	Risk rating	
			Original	Latest

Risk 1: Grant funding withdrawn – This would have a significant impact as many of the key posts are grant funded including the Welsh support team, the professional learning lead post and all the 14-19 work including SEREN. These are all national priorities. However, as they are national priorities the funding is unlikely to cease. Originally the likelihood 3 Impact 5. That has moved to likelihood is 3 and the impact is 3 as many of the projects are now more embedded and understood.			15	9
Risk action 1: Treating – seeking funding from other sources			N/A	N/A
Risk 2: Covid continues to have a negative impact – This has been downgraded over time, however the impact has been significant and remains a factor in terms of staff anxiety and sickness. Originally the likelihood was 3 and the impact is now 3 but as the threat of covid has receded the likelihood has reduced to 2.			12	6
Risk action 1: Treating – practice changed to minimize impact			N/A	N/A
Risk 3:				
Risk action 1:			N/A	N/A
Risk action 2: add more if required			N/A	N/A
<i>Add more risks if required</i>				

Key Actions (<i>refer to Guidance Note 9</i>)		Responsible Officer	Start Date	End Date	Well-Being Objective / Governance & Resource (<i>contributes to</i>)
1	Provide high quality support for teaching that supports the evolution of pedagogy and how to plan for progression in the CfW	MD & TH	01/04/23	31/3/24	WBO 1 & WBO 3
2	To provide high quality responsive support for leadership at all levels including induction, support staff, leadership training etc.	MD & AH	01/04/23	31/3/24	WBO1
3	To engage with a range of partners both within the LA and beyond to ensure progression within our schools e.g. Camau, NPEP, Let's think, Talk pedagogy, NNC etc.	MD & GS	01/04/23	31/3/24	WBO1

4	To ensure that parents are involved in pupils' learning	MD & JR	01/04/23	31/3/24	WBO 1 & WBO 3
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Performance Measures <i>(refer to Guidance Note 10)</i>		Actual 2021/22 (full year)	Actual 2022/23 (full year)	Target 2023/24	Well-Being Objective / Governance & Resource <i>(contributes to)</i>
1	Most schools will have developed a vision for the curriculum for Wales and will be trialling new approaches to teaching	80%	85%	Maintain 100%	WBO 1 & WBO 3
2	Most schools will be part of a professional network of school leaders sharing ideas and resources	80%	85%	Maintain 100%	WBO 1
3	Most schools will provide evidence that pupils are effectively developing the four purposes of the curriculum because teaching will have evolved (more teachers will be following the approach to developing higher order thinking as explained in the training and learning and teaching strategy)	80%	85%	Maintain 100%	WBO 1