

Rural education action plan



Audience

The school workforce, and those in other settings delivering the Foundation Phase; parents and carers; government and national partners, including regional consortia, local authorities, governing bodies, workforce unions and diocesan authorities.

Overview

This plan sets out the actions we are taking to support the delivery of education in rural Wales as part of our national mission. Our approach will be supported by evidence based policies that will be developed in partnership with stakeholders. This plan is to be read in conjunction with *Education in Wales: Our national mission, Action plan 2017–21* which can be accessed on the Welsh Government's website at beta.gov.wales/education-our-national-mission

Action required

None – for information only.

Further information

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Additional copies

This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at gov.wales

Related documents

Prosperity for All: the national strategy (2017); *Prosperity for All: economic action plan* (2017); *Education in Wales: Our national mission, Action plan 2017–21* (2017); *Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales* (2015); *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers: Options for the future of initial teacher education in Wales* (2015); *School Organisation Code* (2013)

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

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Ministerial foreword



“As an Assembly Member who represents the largest rural constituency in Wales, it will come as no surprise that supporting rural schools has been a long-held passion of mine.

If we ensure that learners and schools in rural Wales have the right support to succeed, then we can ensure that our rural communities and economy will go from strength to strength.

There has never been a more exciting time to be involved in rural education in Wales. Over the last two years, we have taken a number of actions to help give children in rural and remote areas the best start to their educational journey.

We have introduced a new Small and Rural Schools Grant to encourage innovation, raise standards and support collaborative working.

We are strengthening the School Organisation Code in respect of a presumption against the closure of rural schools and, for the first time ever, we will have a designation and list of rural schools within the School Organisation Code for this specific purpose.

This Government’s commitment to raising education standards in rural areas remains unwavering. Every learner in Wales, wherever they live, has the right to benefit from high-quality education and the opportunity to reach their full potential.

This document brings together initiatives for small and rural schools from across our national mission into one coherent action plan. We are determined to keep on raising standards, reducing the attainment gap, and delivering an education system that is a source of national pride and public confidence. ”

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Kirsty Williams'.

Kirsty Williams AM
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Context

This is the first ever rural education action plan for Wales. It delivers on a commitment to develop a national approach to small and rural schools within the self-improving system as part of our national mission.

As a government we know that places matter, and we recognise and support the distinctive regional strengths and priorities across our economy. High-performing schools are crucial to the success and sustainability of rural Wales.

As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has said recently:

“Providing access to quality education in rural areas is crucial to meet the needs of rural youth and also to attract young families to settle in these regions.”

Our action plan draws on international evidence and best practice. Evidence tells us that rural schools are well-placed for strong co-operation and collaboration and facilitate a strong sense of belonging and community.

For our education system to reach the very highest standards for all, we need to draw on these rural advantages, as well as the distinct strengths of urban and valleys schools.



Our action plan is set out across three themes, which represent the main challenges and opportunities.

Theme 1: Strengthened organisation and support for rural schools

- How we are reforming and refreshing process and structures so that rural schools are better supported to thrive and innovate.

Theme 2: Supporting equity and excellence in rural schools

- How we are providing targeted support for rural schools and learners, and prioritising leadership and professional learning opportunities for teachers.

Theme 3: Supporting rural schools as community and educational spaces

- How we are delivering the best digital education resources and ensuring rural schools are modern educational and community hubs.



Theme 1: Strengthened organisation and support for rural schools

Schools and communities in different parts of Wales face different challenges as we move forward with our reforms to raise education standards and reduce the attainment gap.

There are significant benefits – academic, cultural and social – to learners and communities through the delivery of high-quality education in small and rural schools¹. This can be critical in engaging learners and families from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in rural areas and raising learner aspirations, as well as making a significant contribution to the long-term sustainability of the local community.

Therefore we are introducing reforms to strengthen the processes to support rural schools, accelerate school-to-school relationships, and prioritise educational leadership.

We have:

- consulted on the School Organisation Code and laid the draft Code before the National Assembly for Wales²
- established an independent board to advise on changes to Welsh in Education planning processes
- invested in School Business Manager Pilots to free up headteachers' time to focus on leadership and school standards
- commissioned research into definitions of schools based on their provision of Welsh
- invested in a Community Focussed School Business Manager initiative, to strengthen school engagement with health and well-being services, and to increase the use of school premises and wider community engagement.

¹ https://research.bangor.ac.uk/portal/files/21807216/ap_Gruffudd_G.S._et_al._2017_REAP_Rethinking_Educational_Attainment_and_Poverty_in_Rural_Wales_Final_Report.pdf

² www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/sub-ld11730/sub-ld11730-e.pdf

We are:

- strengthening the School Organisation Code in respect of a presumption against the closure of rural schools
- improving the statutory process for planning Welsh-medium education by local authorities, following the recommendations of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) Advisory Board; in particular this will improve longer term planning and include early years provision
- providing match funding for 11 School Business Manager Pilots for 2017–19, including Powys, Anglesey, Conwy and Carmarthenshire; the pilot is already supporting 100 schools across the country, freeing up headteachers' time by working on areas such as procurement and finance
- investing in the Pembrokeshire pilot as part of our Community Focussed School Business Manager initiative
- developing an overarching Workforce Development Plan to include a focus on small and rural schools, developing Welsh language skills and improving the quality of the supply workforce.



Theme 2:

Supporting equity and excellence in rural schools

We know that learners, teachers and schools in rural communities can benefit from targeted support and investment which addresses specific challenges, and helps to set high expectations for all.

Small and rural schools play an important role in raising standards and extending opportunities for all, and they must be supported to innovate, embed professional learning for staff, and recruit and retain motivated and excellent teachers.

Therefore, we are providing targeted investment, prioritising leadership and development opportunities, and reforming initial teacher education.

We have:

- allocated £2.5 million per year (in 2017–18 and 2018–19) through the Small and Rural Schools Grant, with over 300 schools already benefitting from this investment
- allocated infant class size reduction grants across Wales, with over 80 additional new teachers already employed in classrooms (17 of which are in rural schools)
- consulted with other countries and governments, such as Scotland, Ireland and Ontario, on best practice for supporting rural education
- published an evaluation of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG)
- launched the National Academy for Educational Leadership³ which will support our current and future school leaders
- commenced the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) In-reach pilot programme delivering a targeted emotional and mental health support initiative across Wales, which includes a particular focus on rural communities.

³ learning.gov.wales/resources/collections/national-academy-for-educational-leadership?lang=en

We are:

- making available £10 million through the Small and Rural Schools Grant to encourage innovation, support greater school-to-school working and raise standards
- continuing to reduce class sizes across Wales, making £36 million available over this National Assembly for Wales term
- innovating through the new e-sgol project which will trial school-based bilingual online distance learning, ensuring access to a wide curriculum through, for example, live video streaming
- supporting our current and future school leaders, through the National Academy for Educational Leadership, with new programmes to increase capacity and expertise, including a focus on the skills for leading rural schools and federations
- introducing a new school-based, university-partnered, part-time Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), which includes a number of employment-based places and will deliver the qualification to students via a high-quality, blended learning model, ensuring a student's locality is not an issue; the employment-based route will mean that a student teacher can be employed in school from the outset, enabling regional consortia and local authorities to address proven shortages such as those in rural communities
- extending the Early Years Pupil Development Grant (EYPDG)⁴ so that early years children benefit from an increased grant, and expanding the definition so that schools have the flexibility to support learners who have been eligible for free school meals (e-FSM) in the previous two years (this can be a particular issue in rural and coastal communities with seasonal employment)
- making available £1.4 million to deliver the CAMHS In-reach pilot projects.

⁴ gov.wales/newsroom/educationandskills/2018/schools-to-share-in-over-90m-to-help-disadvantaged-learners/?skip=1&lang=en



Theme 3: Supporting rural schools as community and educational spaces

As a government, we believe in the principle that places matter and we are ambitious in delivering better jobs closer to home, within prosperous, healthier and secure communities.

Just as we are committed to working with businesses, we will continue to work with schools, parents/carers and local authorities to give them the tools to shape successful and sustainable futures.

Therefore we are delivering the largest investment in our schools and colleges since the 1960s, rolling out superfast broadband and supporting rural schools to be at the heart of their communities.

We have:

- delivered digital tools and content to education stakeholders via Hwb
- delivered the 'Food and Fun'/'Bwyd a Hwyl' Programme in our most deprived communities, including in rural areas such as Powys, Denbighshire, Conwy and the Vale of Glamorgan
- intensified our work with BT to target a small number of 'difficult to reach' schools to improve connectivity.

We are:

- delivering our major, long-term and strategic capital investment programme (21st Century Schools and Education Capital Programme) creating modern and sustainable education communities right across rural Wales
- delivering an enhanced Learning in Digital Wales (LiDW) Programme, including Hwb and Google for Education, ensuring equity across the country in accessing the best in digital education resources
- introducing a new model of community learning centres so that schools can be supported as community hubs, offering not just education but a much wider array of community activities; the hubs will reflect the needs of the local area, particularly in rural communities as we work with partners to provide extended services such as childcare
- increasing community use of school buildings through our Small and Rural Schools Grant
- awarding funding under the Rural Development Programme 2019–20 to develop community transport networks, including school transport
- continuing to support the 'Food and Fun'/'Bwyd a Hwyl' Programme which provides meals and educational activities over the summer holidays in our most deprived communities; the scheme runs across Wales, including in rural areas such as Powys, Denbighshire, Conwy and the Vale of Glamorgan.

Timeline

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School Organisation Code is expected to come into force on 1 November (subject to approval by the National Assembly for Wales). • Launch the e-sgol pilot project in Ceredigion and Powys. • First programmes endorsed by the National Academy for Educational Leadership become available. 	<p>Autumn 2018</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult on the revised Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs) regulations. • Further allocation of the annual Small and Rural Schools Grant (and for each spring onwards). • Development of Education Digital Standards to aid schools with infrastructure, taking into account specific needs of rural schools. • Commence community learning centre/community hubs pilot projects. • Updated guidance and website to support community learning centres/community hubs. 	<p>Spring 2019</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete research into definitions of schools based on their provision of Welsh language. • Lay revised WESP regulations. • Carry out an initial review of the e-sgol pilot project to consider future national rollout. 	<p>Autumn 2019</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish the final report of the WESP Advisory Group. • Publish revised WESP guidance. 	<p>Summer 2020</p>

Case studies

Pembrokeshire College has been supporting learning in rural areas by offering two forms of 'online' learning – asynchronous learning where learners follow a programme at their own time and pace, and synchronous learning where learners follow timetabled sessions. Learners additionally receive support and tutorials with college staff.

Pembrokeshire College has also been offering A levels and IGCSEs online asynchronously for six years. A levels are delivered centring on learner focus rather than institutional focus, including maximising course offer while minimising duplication, establishing guidance for financial viability, and minimising learner transport requirements during the core day.

More information is available through LiveSchool at <https://liveschool.co.uk>

Ysgol Bro Teifi is a new 3 to 19 school in Ceredigion which utilises its school buildings for community needs. The school's excellent sports resources help support various clubs, with cycling, running and football clubs in the local area using these facilities and making the school a vibrant community hub during the evenings.

Likewise, **Ysgol Dyffryn Cledlyn** provides the base for the weekly meetings of the local Young Farmers Club, with many concerts and drama practices held in the well-equipped hall.

Ysgol Mynach, Ysgol Syr John Rhys and **Ysgol Gynradd Gymunedol Pontrhydfendigaid** benefit from the Small and Rural Schools Grant and work closely in partnership to plan provision and share expertise within fields such as leadership in literacy, numeracy and additional learning needs (ALN).

Ysgol Penllwyn and **Ysgol Penrhyn-coch** have benefited from a strong informal collaboration and are now in consultation to extend this partnership to a formal federation.

Ffederasiwn Carno, Glantwymyn and **Llanbrynmair** was established in 2014 and has ensured continued provision of Welsh-medium education in these three rural, traditionally Welsh-speaking areas. Permanent leadership arrangements have been in place since the Federation was established, and all three schools have had successful Estyn inspections. Work has now commenced on a new building for Ysgol Carno which will further safeguard and strengthen the provision of education in the village.

Llangedwyn CW School and **Llanfechain Church in Wales Primary School** are two small schools located in North Powys. The schools have a shared headteacher, and received funding from the Small and Rural Schools Grant during 2017–18 to support collaboration between them. Having recognised the potential to further benefit the opportunities available for learners by strengthening the links between the two schools, the governing bodies decided to proceed with the federation process.

Conwy County Borough Council, using the Small and Rural Schools Grant, has financed three School Business Managers (SBMs) operating from the secondary school Ysgol Dyffryn Conwy to support 21 primary schools in the Dyffryn Conwy cluster. The aim is to release headteachers from administrative/organisational tasks so they can focus on leading, raising standards and improving learner performance contributing to the sustainability of the small and rural schools, in particular those where the headteacher has a significant teaching commitment. Furthermore, the initiative encourages and supports school-to-school working, enabling headteachers to share good practice and collaborate to maximise capacity and share expertise.

The Small and Rural Schools Grant has enabled **Pembrokeshire County Council** to support a group of four schools to develop leadership and improve provision. The group has been working on provision for additional learning needs (ALN) and, with support from the Inclusion Service, they have appointed an ALN coordinator (ALNCo) to work across the group. The work so far has evidenced the potential of collaboration and has enabled headteachers of the schools, many of who teach the majority of the week, to delegate the day-to-day management of ALN to the ALNCo which has already resulted in reduced costs across the group. This grant is also providing a greater range of support which is being accessed by the schools to support their learners.

Gwynedd Council is supporting its learners by promoting after-school homework clubs in its communities. Twenty-four schools have received funding to purchase equipment to establish clubs in homework and ICT, film, coding and multimedia, physical education, cycling, Welsh language development and community gardening.

The **Ysgol Calon Cymru Cluster** in Powys has used grant funding to appoint a Business Manager to manage the cluster. The school is now looking to establish a cluster-wide behaviour support project. The business manager was funded via the Business Manager Pilot, and the behaviour support project will be supported by the Small and Rural Schools Grant.

Support and guidance

Further information about what we are doing can be found online. We are also in the process of gathering evidence and compiling case studies to report on the progress we are making to support small and rural schools. These will be published on our website.

Taking Wales Forward 2016–21 (2016)

gov.wales/docs/strategies/160920-taking-wales-forward-en.pdf

Prosperity for All: the national strategy (2017)

gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf

Prosperity for All: economic action plan (2017)

gov.wales/topics/businessandconomy/economic-action-plan/?lang=en

Education in Wales: Our national mission, Action plan 2017–21 (2017)

beta.gov.wales/education-our-national-mission

Progressive Agreement

gov.wales/newsroom/firstminister/2016/160623-working-together-to-take-wales-forward/?lang=en

Federation process of maintained schools in Wales: Guidance for governing bodies and local authorities (2014)

<https://beta.gov.wales/federation-process-maintained-schools-guidance-governing-bodies-and-local-authorities>

Education Digital Guidance

<https://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/education-digital-guidance/?skip=1&lang=en>

e-Sgoil, Ynysoedd Allanol Heledd (Saesneg yn unig)

www.e-sgoil.com/e-sgoil-english-home

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh Medium Education (Wales) 2013

www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2013/3048/pdfs/wsi_20133048_mi.pdf

Criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes in Wales: Teaching tomorrow's teachers (2017)

learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/170310-accreditation-criteria-for-initial-teacher-education-en-v4.pdf

Early Years Pupil Development Grant: Guidance

beta.gov.wales/early-years-pupil-development-grant-guidance

Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 and school transport

beta.gov.wales/school-transport

Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers

gov.wales/topics/welshlanguage/welsh-language-strategy-and-policies/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy/?lang=en

Food and Fun''Bwyd a Hwyl' School Holiday Enrichment Programme
www.wlga.gov.uk/food-and-fun-school-holiday-enrichment-programme

Re-thinking Educational Attainment and Poverty (REAP) – in Rural Wales (Bangor University, 2017)
https://research.bangor.ac.uk/portal/files/21807216/ap_Gruffudd_G.S._et_al._2017_REAP_Rethinking_Educational_Attainment_and_Poverty_in_Rural_Wales_Final_Report.pdf

Good Practice Guide to inclusive Pre-School Education in the Czech Republic, England, Slovakia and Wales (Erasmus+, 2016)
www.researchgate.net/publication/304117704_Good_Practice_Guide_to_inclusive_Pre-School_Education_in_the_Czech_Republic_England_Slovakia_and_Wales

Poverty and Ethnicity in Wales (JRF, 2013)
www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/poverty-ethnicity-wales-full.pdf

Specialist emotional and mental health support in Wales' schools from CAMHS
gov.wales/newsroom/health-and-social-services/2017/specialist/?lang=en