

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

SCHOOL OF THE FUTURE

DRAFT INTERIM REPORT

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for education and lifelong learning to the year 2010 was set out in *The Learning Country*, published in summer 2001. The Committee carried out this policy review in order to look further ahead to the middle of the next decade.

Our purpose was to produce a vision of the school of the future or, more accurately, schooling of the future. We wished to inspire policy makers to concentrate on those areas we consider to be of particular importance in moving from current practice to that of the future.

Our method was to invite stakeholders - including learners, teachers and governors - to indulge in 'blue skies' thinking unhindered by current physical or financial constraints.

The Terms of Reference for the review are set out in Annex 1.

The Committee is grateful to members of the external reference group, who provided advice and guidance during the course of the review. A schedule of members of the group is at Annex 2. It is hoped that the reference group will continue to offer advice to the new education committee, following the forthcoming National Assembly election.

The Committee started hearing evidence in October 2002 and finished in February 2003. A written consultation exercise was carried out during summer 2002. We have consulted widely in the field of education in Wales and the Committee is grateful to all those who have contributed to this review by sharing their ideas with us. A schedule of consultees and responses can be found on the Committee's website at www.wales.gov.uk

A schedule of papers presented to the Committee is at Annex 3.

The Committee was particularly keen to hear the views of learners. We are grateful to those schools and their pupils who have discussed this topic at their school councils and who have shared their ideas with us. We are particularly grateful to three schools who presented evidence directly to the Committee: Caerphilly Comprehensive School, Ysgol Bro Taf from the Vale of Glamorgan and Ysgol y Wern from Cardiff.

This is an interim report. We hope that it will act as a catalyst for further work by the new education committee. We do not feel that there is a need for dramatic upheaval but rather that there should be a progressive evolution of education and training along the road to the future. It promises to be an interesting journey.

CHAPTER 2 – OUR VISION

Having assessed all the evidence and ideas presented to us, the Committee considers that schooling in the future should:

- Raise standards in education and training by listening to and acting upon the views of learners;
- Provide excellent teaching and learning that balances the teaching of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes;
- Provide a focus for the local community and engage with parents, other local residents, businesses, police, social workers, environmental groups and a range of voluntary and other organisations;
- Provide comfortable, energy-efficient buildings open throughout the year to accommodate the learning needs of the whole community;
- Provide a broad, balanced and flexible curriculum, including 'out of school hours' activities - taking account of local needs and existing facilities;
- Contribute to the development of a bilingual Wales, taking account of local demand for learning through the medium of Welsh;
- Imbed sustainable development, equality of opportunity and social inclusion in all activities of the school, including energy conservation and procurement policies;
- Recognise achievement and give parity of esteem to academic and vocational qualifications;
- Be provided with sufficient resources over a rolling three year period in order to facilitate strategic planning;
- Make effective use of information and communication technology not only in learning but also in management and administration, to further reduce bureaucratic burdens on teachers;
- Hone teaching skills through continuing professional development and provide appropriate training and support for teachers in their role as leaders, managers and carers;
- Review teaching methods, assessment data and targets regularly to conserve the momentum of learning in a smooth and progressive transition from nursery through primary and secondary school and beyond; and
- Provide a safe and nurturing environment for learning, playing and simply growing up.

CHAPTER 3 - THE PRESENT

Facts and Figures

These are set out in *Schools in Wales: General Statistics 2002*. Unless otherwise stated, figures given for pupils and teachers are full-time equivalents in Wales.

At January 2002 there were some 27,500 teachers teaching just over 500,000 pupils in just under 2,000 schools. The number of pupils is projected to fall to some 458,000 by 2015, levelling out at around 473,000 from 2026.

There were 40 nursery schools. All 4-year-olds had access to a full-time place in a maintained school and some 75% of 3-year-olds were in school part-time. There were 735 full-time and 1,489 part-time pupils.

There were 1,624 primary schools. Welsh was the sole or main medium of instruction in 442 of these schools. The average class size was 24.4 and the pupil to teacher ratio was 21.0. There were 271,364 pupils and 12,904 teachers.

There were 227 secondary schools. Welsh was the sole or main medium of instruction in 53 of these schools. The average class size was 21.2 and the pupil to teacher ratio was 16.4. There were 212,024 pupils and 12,955 teachers.

There were 44 special schools and 56 independent schools. In the special schools there were 3,727 pupils and 555 teachers. In the independent schools there were 9,467 pupils and 976 teachers. The pupil to teacher ratios were 6.7 and 9.7 respectively.

Principles

The Committee carried out a policy review of Early Years Education some two years ago and the key recommendations were accepted and are being implemented by the Welsh Assembly Government. This included setting up an Early Years Advisory Panel to help shape policy in this area. Every local education authority (LEA) has established an Integrated Early Years Centre, with funding from the National Assembly. As part of the childcare strategy, some 9,000 new childcare places have been funded since 1999.

The National Assembly has worked closely in partnership with LEAs to develop effective local, non-selective, comprehensive schools. In general, education and training policies in Wales seek to strike a healthy balance between ensuring that schools have the capacity to make the most of their independence, reputation and identity and avoiding unnecessary competition in favour of mutually beneficial collaboration wherever appropriate.

The Welsh Assembly Government, broadly supported by the Committee, has sought to develop policies to reflect the distinctive needs and circumstances of Wales and not merely to adopt policies applied in England. For example, there are no 'specialist' schools in Wales. Also, literacy and numeracy hours were not imposed on schools in Wales but rather schools were given freedom to develop their own literacy and numeracy strategies, with support from the National Assembly. Last year the statutory requirement to carry out tasks and tests at key stage one was removed and league tables for secondary schools were abolished.

The Education Act 2002 contains a number of clauses that apply only in Wales and will allow distinctive education and training policies to be developed further. These include an opportunity for LEAs in Wales to collaborate in facilitating more effective provision for learners with special educational needs and also an opportunity to develop community schools.

Last year we carried out a policy review of the Welsh language in education and published a report, jointly with the Culture Committee, in summer 2002. The Welsh Assembly Government has recently responded to this report and published an action plan for the Welsh language - '*Iath Pawb*'. This adopts a number of the Committee's recommendations and allocates additional resources to further support and develop Welsh and bilingual learning, particularly in the early years.

There is a national curriculum for Wales, which is reviewed every five years. The current curriculum was introduced in September 2000. It includes certain core subjects but allows schools the flexibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. The National Assembly in consultation with schools and LEAs sets attainment targets for each key stage. Pupils are assessed by written tasks and tests and also by teacher assessment. Standards of teaching and learning are measured and assessed by Estyn (Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales).

Standards

Evidence from Estyn shows that standards are good or very good in half of all lessons in both primary and secondary schools. The overall attainment of pupils in nearly every core subject and every key stage continues to improve year on year. About half of all pupils gain at least five GCSE grades A*-C. Over the past ten years there has been a significant improvement in the quality of education and training provided and the standards achieved by pupils. We congratulate teachers and their pupils on this achievement.

But this is not the complete picture. Over a thousand pupils leave compulsory education at 16 with no recognised qualification. There is a stagnation of performance in the transition between primary and secondary school. There is a large variation in outcomes achieved by schools working in similar socio-economic environments. The performance of boys still lags behind that of girls.

The overall absenteeism rate has stabilised at about 10%. To put this into context, the daily number of pupils choosing to stay away from school in Wales would fill 17 secondary schools. It is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on these 17 empty schools and the opportunities for teaching and learning that are wasted every day. This problem affects the truants, who are very likely to leave school with no qualifications and who are three time more likely to commit crimes than non-truants. But it also affects those who attend regularly. Many teachers have found that irregular attendance by pupils affects the overall progress of a class.

The Future Skills Wales survey found that half of all employers were disappointed at the lack of skills possessed by many school leavers. They particularly lacked communication skills. The Basic Skills Agency considers that almost 800,000 people in Wales have low levels of basic skills.

In summary, much has been achieved in improving standards and there is already a wealth of good practice in schools across Wales. But there is scope for substantial improvement by all those involved in delivering education and training to best meet the needs and expectations of learners in the 21st century.

CHAPTER 4 – THE FUTURE

Work in progress

CHAPTER 5 – RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That our vision set out in Chapter 2 should provide the basis for planning the school of the future;
2. That the changes required should take place over the next 10 to 15 years;
3. That the Assembly Minister should consider the means of managing this process of change effectively – possibly by appointing a programme director, supported by managers for specific projects;
4. That the new education committee, with advice from the reference group, should consider carrying out further assessment of the following issues:
 - Existing community schools;
 - Curriculum and Assessment; and
 - Enriching the learning experience.