

ASCL Cymru response to Children, Young People and Education Committee

1. The work of the Pioneer schools network in designing and developing the new curriculum

Schools are putting significant time and resource into their efforts as pioneer Schools. There are many examples of really exciting and innovative approaches being developed. We applaud the moral purposes contained in Successful Futures and feel these should be guiding principles.

We have some concerns that there does not appear to be a coherent strategy to ensure a co-ordination of the work of all the Pioneer Schools. This would appear to be due in part to the differing approaches of the regional Consortia that are directing the work. This becomes particularly apparent when some schools are being encouraged to develop curriculum content before there is a clear direction established in terms of pedagogy.

There does not appear to be an explicit requirement for schools to adopt a research based approach to their work, meaning that there is significant danger of schools expending time, energy and resources in “re-inventing the wheel”.

There is, however, a danger that constraints imposed by the qualifications framework, hard line accountability models, including the narrow Estyn judgements, are stifling this agenda of innovation.

2. The interface with effective professional learning for the education workforce and initial teacher education and training

We are concerned that there appears to be a limited amount a “sharing of best practice” between Pioneer Schools and those schools that are not part of the programme. There is a real danger that non-Pioneers will feel disenfranchised, and uncertain about what is going on. This is leading to a feeling of “being done to”, and will mean that many schools will be placed in a position of having to “catch up” in one of the periods of most significant changes in education of recent times.

At present we are not seeing a great deal of evidence to suggest that ITE providers are contributing to this; however, there is yet time, and the emphasis to date has very much been on the work of the Pioneer Schools. We would support any initiative to ensure that new entrants to the profession are properly prepared for implementing the new curriculum.

3. Governance arrangements for implementation and the role of the Independent Advisory Board, Change Board and Strategic Stakeholder Group

These appear to be well established, and operating well. We are concerned that a range of academics are only involved at a strategic level and would have important contributions to make if encouraged to work with Pioneer Schools to support a research-based approach.

4. Other issues of concern and/or importance regarding the development of the new Curriculum for Wales.

We feel that there is not yet a clear enough grasp on the overall direction of all those involved in the work of Pioneer Schools. Some schools report that whilst being encouraged to develop new ideas they also feel the need to know what else is happening across the project. We would recommend even more effort needs to be put into clear co-ordination and also in communication not only between Pioneer Schools but also to all other schools in Wales. With a project of such significance for all schools in Wales, it is essential that everyone understands what is going on and their place in helping to develop the new curriculum.

There are some concerns regarding assessment, and how Welsh Government proposes to track pupil progress nationally. Schools are uncertain whether they are just going to rely on the national literacy and numeracy tests and what would be the implications for GCSE.

In 2015 we published our Blueprint for a Self-Improving System in Wales that deals with many of the issues mentioned above. It challenges us all, government, school leaders, governors and professional associations to have a clear vision for where education should be by 2020. We would see this concept as critical to the success of the new curriculum.