

## **Central South Consortium**

### **Curriculum Report for Merthyr Tydfil LA Scrutiny Committee December 2022**

#### **Introduction**

The following report provides Merthyr Tydfil Local Authority Scrutiny Members with an overview of the current situation (as of December 2022) in relation to the development and implementation of Curriculum for Wales in the authority's schools.

Central South Consortium (CSC) provides Professional Learning (PL) and support for all schools in the region on the implementation of Curriculum for Wales. At the start of this report there is a summary of the professional learning and support which has been provided for Merthyr Tydfil schools by CSC.

Improvement Partners working in Merthyr Tydfil schools have identified examples of successes in terms of emerging practice which are detailed below. Along with these examples are some barriers which have been identified by schools and Improvement Partners which are, in some instances, hindering the development of the curriculum. The final section of the report sets out the next steps for various Merthyr Tydfil schools in their implementation of the curriculum as identified by schools in partnership with their Improvement Partners.

The [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Act 2021](#) became law after receiving Royal Assent in April 2021. The Act states the new curriculum and assessment requirements for all learners aged 3 to 16 in maintained or funded non-maintained nursery education in Wales. It replaces the current basic curriculum.

The [Curriculum for Wales \(CfW\) Framework](#) is determined nationally and includes legislative requirements and supporting guidance. It is a clear statement of what is important in a broad and balanced education for learners in Wales. It places duties on school governing bodies and headteachers, local authorities, non-maintained setting providers and Welsh Ministers.

At its heart is the aspiration for every child and young person in Wales, as defined by the four purposes of CfW. The [four purposes](#) are the shared vision, starting point and aspiration for every child and young person in Wales. To realise this vision, schools must design, adopt and implement a curriculum. Enabling learners to progress in relation to these purposes is intended to inform all decisions in relation to curriculum and assessment design and implementation.

In the report, where appropriate, reference is made to a number of the eight contributory factors (see Appendix A) noted in the Welsh Government's "School Improvement Guidance; a framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability" which will support the successful realisation of the Curriculum for Wales.

Schools should design their curriculum, choosing specific knowledge, skills and experiences, and topics, activities and contexts to meet the needs of their learners, ensuring high expectations and enabling all learners to achieve their potential.

For all primary schools (all year groups), and special schools, the implementation of CfW commenced in September 2022. Mandatory roll-out for secondary schools commences with Year 7 and Year 8 in September 2023. However, secondary schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) were given the option of rolling out to Year 7 in September 2022. Merthyr Tydfil secondary schools and PRUs rolling out September 2022 as stated in the Commencement Order June 2022:

- Afon Taf High School
- Bishop Hedley Catholic High School
- Cyfarthfa High School

Overall, there is a positive picture in terms of schools' approaches and attitudes towards Curriculum for Wales. Improvement Partners report that within Merthyr Tydfil schools there is a sense of excitement and enthusiasm with leaders and staff keen to create a bespoke curriculum which meets the needs of their learners. It is also clear that in the main, Merthyr Tydfil schools have been effective in the way in which they have involved their school and local community in developing a vision as the starting point for designing a curriculum in order to meet the needs of their learners. The process of involving the school community links with the seventh contributory factor to support the successful realisation of the curriculum, "(Schools) being at the heart of their communities – building better relationships between schools and families, communities and employers, to support and promote educational achievement..."

However, in a few schools, curriculum development is still at an early stage. This is due to a number of reasons including, weak school leadership, poor quality teaching and learning and ineffective leadership of teaching, learning and curriculum. Two of these schools are now in Estyn statutory categories and are continuing to receive additional support to support them to make the necessary improvements.

### **Professional learning and support**

Support for schools in all aspects of Curriculum for Wales (CfW) is embedded in CSC's Professional Learning (PL) and support, with the exception of those related to current qualifications and post-16 education. This includes PL and support for all areas of the curriculum and also the wider educational reforms in Wales.

Improvement Partners (IPs) support all schools in school improvement related to the curriculum and wider educational reforms in Wales. IPs work in partnership with schools in their self-evaluation of the implementation of CfW, in line with national and regional guidance. This evaluation information is used to signpost relevant PL opportunities and broker bespoke support to meet an individual school's improvement needs. It is used to inform the development of CSC PL and resources available to support schools. It is also used to inform regular reporting to the Merthyr Tydfil CBC Director of Education and the Minister for Education and Welsh on schools' implementation of Curriculum for Wales.

There are a wide variety of CSC PL events, programmes, assignments and networks related to all areas of the curriculum, learning and teaching. During 2021-22, 9136 delegates from 99% (383) schools in the region engaged in regional professional learning events, programmes, networks and conferences focused on curriculum, teaching and learning. This includes 698 delegates from 100% of schools in Merthyr Tydfil.

A comprehensive national PL programme to support schools in Curriculum for Wales and the wider educational reforms was developed and delivered by the four regional consortia. The following synchronous and asynchronous modules were developed for senior leaders, middle leaders and school governors:

- Leading change
- Establishing a shared vision
- Making time and space for professional learning
- Engaging with the Curriculum for Wales framework
- Curriculum Design and Development
- Engagement with the wider reform elements
- Engaging with Areas of Learning
- Thinking about AoLE vision
- Leading Pedagogy

Between its launch in November 2020 and August 2022, 2379 practitioners and school leaders, including Governors, from 87% (335) of schools in the region have engaged in the national professional learning programme for Curriculum for Wales and the wider reforms. 197 of these were from 89% (25) of schools in Merthyr Tydfil. The national Curriculum for Wales PL programme has been refined and relaunched in September 2022 with CSC as key partner in its design, delivery and evaluation. This is a stronger focus on schools sharing their emerging practice, and new modules including a module on progression and assessment in CfW. *N.B. Due to this programme being delivered nationally rather than regionally as previous, engagement data for each local authority is no longer available.*

In June 2022, CSC hosted a virtual Curriculum for Wales conference with record numbers of engagement. The day included keynote speakers, a live roundtable discussion and an exhibition area including 'by schools for schools' where schools shared their emerging practice. One school from Merthyr Tydfil shared its practice as part of the conference. All materials from the conference have been made available for all schools to access on the CSC website. 612 unique users from 75% of schools in the CSC region accessed the platform during the live and on demand period. At least one practitioner/school leader from many (82%) Merthyr Tydfil schools engaged with the conference. Evaluation data received by delegates from the conference shows that many (72%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the conference met its purpose of supporting schools in further understanding curriculum design. This is further demonstrated by the feedback that whilst only a few (24%) respondents felt either confident or very confident about curriculum design before accessing the conference, a majority (69%) felt either confident or very confident about curriculum design after accessing the conference. In addition, many (84%) respondents felt that the materials shared at this conference would positively impact on their practice.

**Literacy / LLC English** – The [professional learning offer](#) for Languages, Literacy and Communication (LLC) is very strong with multiple pathways for schools to engage in PL that meets their needs. This includes programmes related to oracy, reading and writing and LLC network meetings. During 2021-22, 1441 delegates from 81% (312) schools in the region engaged in literacy/LLC English PL programmes, events, conferences, assignments and networks. This included 96 delegates from 85% (26) of Merthyr Tydfil schools. Bespoke versions of the programmes were delivered in Merthyr as part of the local authority's Raising Aspirations Raising Standards (RARS) Strategy.

**Mathematics and Numeracy** – CSC offer a [wide range of PL](#) for mathematics & numeracy for schools to engage to meet their improvement needs in this area. During 2021-22, 883 delegates from 55% (211) schools in the region engaged in PL programmes, events, conferences, assignments and networks. This included 64 delegates from 64% (18) of Merthyr Tydfil schools. Bespoke PL for mathematics and numeracy was made available to all Merthyr Tydfil primary schools as part of the RARS Strategy.

**Digital Learning** – As part of the RARS Strategy, the CSC digital learning team worked with all clusters in developing bespoke PL to meet their needs in developing pupils' knowledge and skills aligned to the Digital Competence Framework (DCF). In addition, PL was provided to support practitioners across the region in the DCF and to develop the [effective use of technology](#) to enhance learning and teaching. 525 delegates from 46% (176) schools in the region engaged in digital learning PL programmes, events, conferences, assignments and networks. This included 81 delegates from 50% (14) of Merthyr Tydfil schools.

Professional learning continues to be available from CSC to support all schools in all other areas of the curriculum, including:

- Expressive arts
- Humanities
- Health and well-being
- Science and technology
- Relationships and sexuality education
- Religion, values and ethics
- Careers and work-related experiences

**Bespoke support** – Bespoke support is available to all schools in the region to support school improvement priorities that are not fully met by the published regional PL opportunities or through the work of the Improvement Partner. Bespoke support is provided for individual schools, clusters, School Improvement Groups (SIGS) and groups of schools working together on shared improvement priorities.

Since September 2021, 15 individual schools, all clusters and four other groups of schools in Merthyr Tydfil have received bespoke support from the CSC curriculum and professional learning team related to CfW. This has ranged from the facilitation of INSET days/sessions in all clusters, to more intense targeted support in identified schools in a particular area, e.g. literacy, Welsh, etc.

In January 2021, CSC established a regional Curriculum for Wales online community available to all practitioners and school leaders, including Governors in the region. It provides an interactive platform for practitioners to access resources, materials, PL and guidance related to Curriculum for Wales. Members can also participate in discussions with other members to share ideas and receive peer support. There are over 1700 members at present including practitioners, school leaders and Governors from schools in Merthyr Tydfil.

To support practitioners in curriculum design, CSC developed a specific [website](#) launched in October 2021. The focus of the website uses the design thinking model aligned to the phases of Welsh Government's 'Curriculum for Wales: the journey to curriculum roll-out' guidance to support schools in the process of curriculum design. All regional Curriculum for Wales PL, resources, materials and guidance are also available through this website. Engagement in and feedback related to this website and the design thinking model has been very positive.

Between December 2021 and February 2022, 72 practitioners from 55 schools across the CSC region participated in a cross-regional curriculum design PL programme. This included four practitioners from three Merthyr Tydfil schools. All PL resources, materials and guidance developed during the programme are available to all schools in Wales to support the design and development of their curriculum.

Since June 2022, CSC have provided further opportunities for schools to discuss their current CfW implementation questions, queries and concerns in 'CfW drop-in sessions'. five full day sessions are held each half term in venues in each local authority in the CSC region. Seven schools from Merthyr Tydfil have attended these sessions to date.

There are a wide variety of PL [resources](#), including guidance documents, toolkits, poster packs, videos, blogs, vlogs, podcasts to support schools in curriculum, learning and teaching. These resources include the CSC Curriculum for Wales [newsletter](#), published monthly containing the latest regional and national information on CfW with over 7000 views to date.

### **Successes (Emerging practice)**

One of the main examples of emerging practice across Merthyr Tydfil schools has been the opportunity for staff and pupils to design an exciting and interesting curriculum, making it relevant and purposeful to the lives of their pupils. Teachers and pupils have been able to step back and think about the vision, values and aims of the curriculum while considering what, why and how to teach. The training, sharing of practice and opportunity to “take control” has encouraged and stimulated professional discourse on curriculum design and pedagogy. Across many schools, a clear success has been the level of engagement with curriculum design and pedagogy and how to develop practice in order that learners make the most progress. This aligns with the second of the eight contributory factors to support successful realisation of the curriculum; “Co-constructing a curriculum, in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework which promotes a broad range of knowledge, skills and experiences... with a clear understanding of why these matter”. Curriculum design overall is now much more relevant to the lives of pupils.

Many Merthyr Tydfil schools are planning in a wide range of rich, authentic learning experiences as part of their curriculum offer for learners. In one primary school, staff have set a challenge for the learners to carry out 100 authentic and purposeful activities during their time at the school such as, walking in sand and visiting a museum, all linked to the Statements of What Matters; this is complemented by the school’s “Junior Duke” programme. This programme ensures experiences are varied and authentic by linking them together, similar to the Duke of Edinburgh award. In another school, informed by pupil and parent voice, a list of “hopes” as part of the curriculum has been developed for the learners to experience, such as toasting marshmallows, singing in the community and building a den. These experiences are all weaved carefully into that school’s curriculum, aligned to a wide range of skills and knowledge.

A recent musical production in a Merthyr Tydfil school effectively demonstrated how the leaders and staff have worked effectively to ensure their curriculum is inclusive and engaging and meets the varied needs of their learners. A version of Oliver Twist set in Merthyr Tydfil, ‘Merthyr Twist!’ was an excellent example of their approach to developing an innovative curriculum that is motivating and engaging for learners, many of whom have a wide range of additional learning needs.

In another Merthyr Tydfil school, there is an agreed and well- developed curriculum in place, named ‘Llwybr Llwyddo’ (Pathway to Success) with robust planning which includes all the knowledge and skills of the Areas of Learning and Experience. The Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) leads, through training sessions and beneficial joint planning, have ensured sound knowledge and understanding of all staff. Planning includes ensuring a clear focus on specific AoLE’s each term within the themes with ‘Famous’ and ‘Most Famous’ lines of enquiry for each half term. Leaders track all the skills and the ‘non negotiables’ within each area and theme termly in order to ensure continuity and balance over a two-year cycle. As a result, the school has a solid overview of the skills covered and also recognises any gaps in the planning. Planning is broad and balanced, providing rich learning experiences within the themes, ensuring that pupils achieve within their ability and make progress. It also ensures clear and strong links with the parents and the community, with the local area as a starting point for each theme.

In one Merthyr Tydfil cluster, some schools are developing a concepts-based curriculum; there is clear development in the increasing use and emerging understanding of a concepts-based curriculum linked to the idea of golden threads, amongst these schools. In a concepts-based curriculum tasks are developed in line with the concepts detailed across all the Statements of What Matters. The cluster is collaborating effectively in this work.

Use of real-life contexts to engage learners is a strong feature in many Merthyr Tydfil schools' curriculum offer; in one school learners have sold products to raise funds for the PTA linked to developing core skills of literacy and numeracy. It is also evident that many Merthyr Tydfil schools are appropriately ensuring a strong focus on their locality within their curriculum offers. In the best examples of curriculum implementation, the concept of Cynefin, (the place where we belong) permeates the learning, aiming to strengthen the feeling of belonging amongst learners and enabling schools to make full use of the features of their locality to enhance learning. For example, in one Merthyr Tydfil school, Cynefin underpins part of the humanities curriculum with an element on natural disasters and changes and the impact that these have on communities-pupils will be focusing on the Aberfan disaster and the impact of this on the local community.

In most instances, schools have used the What Matters Statements and the Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) as set out in the Welsh Government Curriculum materials, effectively, to plan and design their own curriculum for their learners, all underpinned by the four purposes. Schools are making use of the opportunity to trial and adjust their curriculum in line with the iterative process. Use of the AoLEs and What Matters Statements have supported the connection of knowledge and skills in order to create a coherent curriculum. In a number of schools the "Why" has been very well developed and provides a good level of guidance for teachers without being over prescriptive. There is also evidence of more natural cross-curricular links being made as schools have designed their curriculum. A strong focus on ensuring high quality teaching and learning of key skills, such as literacy and numeracy, are also important features of successful curriculum implementation.

As part of the curriculum design process, in the best examples, schools have, appropriately taken the opportunity to reflect on and review their whole school strategies for teaching and learning. Many have provided meaningful professional learning opportunities through INSET days, staff meetings and twilight sessions for staff to focus on the twelve pedagogical principles. This has enabled these leaders and staff to develop a curriculum which is underpinned by a strategy and an aspiration for high quality teaching and learning. In one particular Merthyr Tydfil school, the Headteacher established a series of staff meetings to allow staff to explore, define and develop their understanding of each pedagogical principle following their initial rag rating as to where they felt they were in terms of their understanding of the principles. Their work in developing their understanding was enhanced through partnership working with a neighbouring school and staff's own research. Following this work, staff were asked to re-rag rate the principles which demonstrated impact in terms of increased staff understanding. This work aligns with the fifth contributory factor to support the realisation of the curriculum, "Enabling ambitious professional learning for all practitioners in a school dedicated to being a learning organisation." The Headteacher ensures that pedagogy remains front and centre with staff through regular professional learning meetings, individual research and reading days. By focusing on high quality teaching and learning in relation to the curriculum, the school is ensuring the learners receive the best possible provision to help them achieve their full potential.

In the few schools where teaching and learning strategies and/or the curriculum development are in early stages, appropriate support is in place. Support is provided through the Improvement Partner and/or the wider CSC curriculum and professional learning team as well as support from System Leaders and Lead Practitioners where appropriate. These schools are carefully and regularly monitored to ensure sufficient progress is being made and that the support is appropriate and sufficient.

Many Merthyr Tydfil schools are launching their topics and projects through “Immersion Days” or “Shine Days” which provide rich and valuable experiences for pupils. These can take the form of a trip or a visitor coming in to talk to learners for example. By providing these experiences at the start of topics they can be effective in engaging learners and igniting their curiosity at an early stage-this then sets the scene positively for the next steps in the learning. Also, for the learners who do not routinely have such opportunities outside of school, they are particularly beneficial. A celebration day is frequently inserted at the end of a topic and often involves the coming together of the school community as a culmination and celebration of all the learning which has taken place.

Improvement Partners are noticing that in many schools, leaders and staff are working in a more agile and effective manner with regards to the new curriculum; for example, short and medium term planning is being adapted more readily and as a matter of course according to what is happening in the classroom so that it meets the needs of learners. With less restraints in the new curriculum, leaders and staff feel more confident in trialling, testing and adapting.

One of the eight contributory factors that Welsh Government see as being key to supporting the realisation of the curriculum is “Listening to children and young people as they engage with their learning and supporting them in achieving their aspirations.” In all Merthyr Tydfil schools it is clear that pupil voice is valued, actively encouraged and in most instances is used to inform provision for the curriculum. In some instances it is evident that teachers have adapted their short term plans as a result of pupil voice and in order to meet learners’ needs more effectively. In some instances pupils are better able to make connections and transfer their learning into new contexts. In the best examples, schools are making effective use of their pupil voice groups to support the review and evaluation of the curriculum so far, finding out from them what has worked well and what would further help them in their learning.

In many instances collaboration within Merthyr Tydfil schools and across schools is a strength in supporting the development of the curriculum. Teacher professional development has benefited from greater emphasis of collaboration and connection within AoLE Teams within schools and within clusters,

In terms of assessment and progression, all schools are developing systems and processes to address this although this is an area which is still at early stages for some schools. Schools are exploring assessment and how to track and whilst this is still for some schools one of the least developed areas, the opportunity to clarify assessment and tracking is impacting beneficially on practice in some instances. All schools are developing and trialing assessment and progress tracking procedures that fit purposefully with their bespoke school level curriculum. In one Merthyr school, leaders are currently trialing new assessment procedures with Years 6 and 3 which use a traffic light system to assess the pupils' progress against the success criteria and record this in a way that highlights the progress. The school develops effective methods of 'Assessment in Learning' which includes beneficial strategies e.g., 'pitstops' and assessment stations where pupils have opportunities to discuss their work, reflect and choose improvement strategies. All the staff use appropriate language and feedback to consolidate e.g., 'Good answer but even better if...' Effective use of the progression steps to inform assessment and tracking processes and to ensure progression for learners is evident in the best examples.

Where leadership and practice is strong in Merthyr Tydfil schools, self-evaluation and school improvement processes incorporate aspects of the curriculum effectively and are built sensibly into the school’s calendar for monitoring and evaluation. In these instances, there is a broad and purposeful programme of self-evaluation activities in place. This ensures that leaders know what the strengths are, identify good practice and understand the next steps for further development.

## **Barriers**

Schools and Improvement Partners have identified a range of barriers to implementation of the curriculum. These are a sample of the barriers noted and are not common to all schools in Merthyr Tydfil:

- Ensuring that curriculum offers ensure breadth, balance but also depth in order to raise pupils' outcomes/standards
- Matters relating to assessment
- Matters relating to Relationships and Sexuality education (RSE)
- Constraints of budget
- Staff absence issues caused by COVID and long term illness.
- Legacy from pandemic including greater pupil/family need. More time needed to support pupil wellbeing
- Some staff still need support with change of mindset to adjust timetables/flexibility, the shift from old-new curriculum
- Outdoor learning - barrier being lack of green space (adapt school grounds or use other areas)
- Not overloading staff with too many changes
- Courage - Concern of how a school will be judged in taking forward the curriculum - expectations of external agencies who evaluate the practice and provision of schools. Schools are a little wary of expectations. It takes time to review and evaluate as the curriculum is embedded. Estyn have said that they understand that implementation will take time.
- Time to change practice – covering the breadth and depth of the curriculum as well building in learner context and need in a flexible and authentic way
- Assessment approaches and practices at secondary settings – matching assessment and tracking to the expectations of qualification specifications at the end of Key Stage 4.
- Clarity of understanding with the connection between Progression Steps and assessment practices.
- Time to work with parents and the wider community on the vision and aims of the curriculum as well as exploring opportunities and resources with groups such as employers
- Juggling priorities – finding time for all the priorities is a challenge.
- Variability in quality of teaching and learning (for a few schools)

## **Next steps**

The following next steps have been identified by schools and Improvement Partners. Again, these are a sample of next steps identified by Merthyr Tydfil schools and their Improvement Partners and they are not common to all schools.

- On-going professional learning and support to further develop staff expertise in understanding the scope and breadth of the design and ambitions of the curriculum
- Involvement of 3 Merthyr Tydfil schools in the new Welsh Government programme; “Understanding by Design”, starting January 2023
- Understanding the linkage of skills, knowledge and concepts across and between AoLES
- Further development and refinement of assessment and progression strategies and tracking of progress; ensuring strong focus on Assessment for Learning
- Further development of teachers' ability to meet learner need in a flexible and authentic way and to support the changing of mindset where necessary
- Sharing best practice within schools, cluster and wider
- Reviewing content, skills and attitudes to learning to ensure they are built in a sequential way through the curriculum.

- Ensuring that Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) and RSE are planned effectively.
- Evaluate (in the form of looking at progression) improvements made to provision for supporting skills for learners in early stages of development/foundation learning

### **Conclusion**

Overall, across Merthyr Tydfil schools, it is clear that there is a strong sense of enthusiasm and a positive attitude towards the development and implementation of Curriculum for Wales. As noted in the report there are examples of successes across the authority which demonstrate effective implementation of a curriculum which is engaging, coherent and meets the needs of all learners.

However, there are schools where curriculum development is at an early stage for a range of different reasons; these schools are being well supported to enable leaders to accelerate progress. In some schools the barriers are more complex and numerous; as noted above, they range from staff absence to matters relating to assessment. CSC will continue to work in partnership with the local authority to support Merthyr Tydfil schools in helping leaders and staff to overcome these barriers.

Curriculum for Wales has been implemented in schools for four months and is at a very early stage; leaders and staff along with their wider school communities will need to continue to review, evaluate and refine the curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of learners in Merthyr Tydfil so that they can make the best possible progress and achieve positive outcomes.

*Below are the eight contributory factors taken from WG School Improvement Guidance: A Framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability.*

Successful curriculum realisation will be supported by schools:

1. Enabling all learners, and in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds to progress along their own learning pathway and raise their aspirations to achieve their full potential; allied to a range of assessment approaches to understand and support this progress.
2. Co-constructing a curriculum, in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework, which promotes a broad range of knowledge, skills and experiences (including social and interactional experiences) with a clear understanding of why these matter.
3. Ensuring the school environment supports learners' and practitioners' well-being.
4. Supporting practitioners' understanding of what works in curriculum design by investing in the enquiry and pedagogic skills of all staff.
5. Enabling ambitious professional learning for all practitioners in a school dedicated to being a learning organisation.
6. Embedding reflection, self-evaluation and improvement within schools, with good school leadership as a pre-condition for that.
7. Being at the heart of their communities – building better relationships between schools and families, communities and employers, to support and promote educational achievement and excellent employment, next steps education and training.
8. Listening to children and young people as they engage with their learning and supporting them in achieving their aspirations