

a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

The Skills Framework at key stage 2

An evaluation of the impact of the non-statutory Skills framework for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales at key stage 2

July 2011







The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities (local authorities);
- primary schools;
- secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ★ independent schools;
- ▲ further education:
- ▲ adult community learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ local authorities;
- ★ teacher education and training;
- work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies; and
- offender learning.

Estyn also:

- provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section Estyn Anchor Court Keen Road Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to <u>publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk</u>

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright 2011: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document/publication specified.

Contents	Page
Summary	1
Main findings	2
Recommendations	4
Context	5
1 Curriculum planning	7
Understanding and applying Skills framework Support and training Financial implications Working within clusters	7 8 10 10
2 Assessment and tracking	11
3 Teaching and learning	12
Involvement of pupils in planning their own learning	12
4 Evaluating the impact on pupils' outcomes	14
Appendix 1 – Evidence base	
Appendix 2 – Case studies	
Glossary	
The remit author and survey team	

Summary

- The non-statutory Skills framework for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales provides guidance on developing pupils' skills in thinking, communication, ICT¹ and number. The Skills framework is designed to underpin the National Curriculum Subject Orders and teaching and learning in all subject areas.
- The Skills framework is not used well for planning progression in pupils' skills. Few schools use the Skills framework as a starting point for planning their work. Most schools use the National Curriculum Subject Orders to plan schemes of work first and then identify opportunities for developing pupils' skills afterwards. As a result, few schools are planning a 'skills-based' curriculum consisting of progressively more complex activities designed to develop pupils' thinking, communication, ICT and number skills.
- Although the Skills framework has increased teachers' awareness of the importance of improving pupils' skills, too often teachers plan the curriculum as separate subjects, without giving enough attention to how subjects, such as history or geography, provide a context for the development of literacy, numeracy and other skills. These skills do not form the core organising elements or backbone of teachers' schemes of work. Consequently, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to use and develop their number, reading and extended writing skills across all of the curriculum.
- 4 Assessing or tracking pupils' progress in skills is one of the weakest aspects of the schools visited. Teachers are not aware of pupils' prior achievement in skills and, as a result, many pupils are not making enough progress.

¹ Information and communication technology

Main findings

- The Skills framework is non-statutory and was developed after the initial introduction of the National Curriculum Subject Orders. In general, schools do not see skills as the starting point for designing the curriculum, but rather as a bolt-on to existing schemes of work. Only in a few schools, or departments within schools, have teachers re-constructed their schemes of work to focus on how pupils acquire skills.
- Schools use the National Curriculum Subject Orders to plan schemes of work first and then identify opportunities for developing pupils' skills afterwards. This is because teachers lack a clear understanding of the non-statutory Skills framework as a basis for planning a curriculum that meets all the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum Subject Orders. As a result, few schools are planning a 'skills-based' curriculum that consists of activities that become progressively more complex and are designed to develop pupils' thinking, communication, ICT and number skills.
- Although the Skills framework has increased teachers' awareness of the importance of improving pupils' skills, too often teachers continue to plan the curriculum as separate subjects without giving enough attention to how subjects, such as history or geography, can support and provide a context for the development of literacy, numeracy and other skills. They do not recognise fully that skills such as literacy and numeracy should form the core organising elements and backbone for their schemes of work. As a result, they do not plan to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum provide appropriate and sufficiently challenging opportunities for pupils to consolidate, apply and extend their communication and number skills.
- In around half of schools visited as part of this survey there are not enough opportunities for pupils to use and develop their number, reading or extended writing skills across all of the curriculum. In particular, too few schools teach high-level reading skills at key stage 2.
- Assessing or tracking pupils' progress in skills is one of the weakest aspects in the schools visited. There is usually no whole-school system to track individual pupils' skill development. Teachers are not aware of pupils' prior achievement in skills and so do not plan appropriately challenging activities to extend their learning. As a result, many pupils are not making enough progress in using and applying their thinking, communication, ICT and number skills.
- In the few schools where there is an effective skills-based curriculum, senior leaders have a clear strategic vision and a good understanding of how to use the Skills framework. Many of these schools are now in the process of increasing staff confidence and ability in using the Skills framework to underpin planning, teaching and learning.
- DCELLS² and local authorities have provided training on using thinking skills in schools. Many schools are now placing a greater emphasis on developing pupils'

-

² The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

thinking skills than on developing communication, ICT and number skills. Even so, in around half of schools visited, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to use and develop thinking skills, such as making inferences, considering evidence, information and ideas or evaluating their own learning and thinking.

- Local authorities have given their schools effective support and guidance on how to implement the 2008 revised National Curriculum Subject Orders. However, support for schools in using the Skills framework to underpin planning the National Curriculum has not been as effective. Not all local authority advisers understand how the Skills framework can be used as a planning tool to develop, monitor and assess skills across the curriculum.
- Many schools work in isolation when trying to improve systems to develop an effective skills-based curriculum and to assess pupils' skills acquisition. Local authorities do not do enough to co-ordinate arrangements between clusters of schools to share practice and maximise their collective expertise.
- A minority of schools have bought published schemes of work for delivering a skills-based curriculum. These provide useful starting points when planning a new curriculum, but there is little evidence that these resources help to improve teaching and learning beyond what can be achieved by simply using the Skills framework.

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 place developing pupils' skills, particularly literacy and numeracy, at the heart of the curriculum and make it the starting point for planning a skills-based curriculum;
- R2 provide better and more effective opportunities for all pupils to practise, apply and build their thinking, communication, ICT and number skills at an appropriate pace and level;
- R3 teach reading more explicitly and progressively as a skill at key stage 2;
- R4 align all subject schemes of work with the principles of a skills-based curriculum; and
- R5 adopt a whole-school approach to assessing and tracking progress in pupils' skills.

Local authorities should:

R6 improve the support given to schools:

- to plan a skills-based curriculum, that takes planning for progression in literacy and numeracy as its starting point; and
- to assess and track pupils' skill development across the curriculum.

The Welsh Government should:

R7 revise the Skills framework so that it provides a more effective starting point for developing a skills-based curriculum and a whole-school approach to assessing and tracking pupils' skill development.

Context

- This report is written in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit to Estyn for 2010-2011. The report evaluates how well primary schools in Wales are using the Skills framework at key stage 2 to plan and deliver improvements in pupils' skill development.
- 16 The report:
 - evaluates the effectiveness of whole-school approaches to developing coherence, continuity and progression of provision in the full range of skills set out in the Skills framework at key stage 2:
 - evaluates how the introduction of the Skills framework has impacted on teaching and learning and assessment at key stage 2;
 - identifies case studies of good practice; and
 - makes recommendations for future developments.
- 17 The report is intended for the Welsh Government, senior managers and staff in key stage 2, local education authority officers and advisers. The report may also be of interest to institutions that train teachers and to church diocesan authorities.
- The 'Future Skills Wales 2003 Generic Skills Survey' reported that employers in Wales were concerned about employee skills gaps. Lack of information and communication technology skills was the most common problem identified, followed by communication skills and employee's ability to show initiative, problem solve and work independently using transferable skills.
- In the 'Review of the School Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements 5-16' (ACCAC, 2004), the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales advised that there should be a radically revised curriculum that was learner centred and skills focused to equip learners with transferable skills.
- The Estyn document, 'Transforming Schools: a discussion paper' (Estyn, 2007), also called for a review of the rigid subject-focused curriculum structure and recommended to schools that they:
 - develop pupils' thinking and learning skills and make them central to all lesson planning; and
 - introduce a focus on skills as part of a whole-school approach to curriculum planning.
- In 2008, the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) published the Skills framework. The Skills framework is not intended to be a curriculum framework, but is intended to underpin the planning for the Foundation Phase, all National Curriculum 2008 Subject Orders, and the frameworks for personal and social education, careers and the world of work, and religious education.

- The Skills framework provides guidance on planning for continuity and progression across the four main strands of thinking, communication, ICT, and number. It emphasises that skills development is cyclical rather than linear and that development in skills is achieved by progressively increasing the complexity of activities and the challenge within tasks.
- 'Making the most of learning Implementing the revised curriculum' (DCELLS 2008) provides schools with further support and guidance on how to implement the Skills framework alongside the new National Curriculum Subject Orders. The document reiterates that the aims of the new curriculum are to:
 - focus on the learner;
 - ensure appropriate skills development is woven through the curriculum;
 - focus on continuity and progression for 3 to 19-year-olds; and
 - offer reduced subject content with an increased focus on skills.
- 'Making the most of learning' gives examples of the various ways schools may choose to plan for the new curriculum. The Skills framework stresses that it is for schools to decide how they approach implementation of the revised curriculum. It is hoped, however, that the Skills framework will be used alongside the National Curriculum Subject Orders and other frameworks to help the planning process and it is suggested that the Skills framework "could, indeed be most effective if used as the first point of reference when planning".
- 'Making the most of learning' also identifies that a whole-school approach to the planning and provision of a skills-based curriculum is pivotal to its success. It suggests that one senior leader within a school should have responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the revised skills based curriculum.

1 Curriculum planning

Understanding and applying the Skills framework

- Most schools are at an early stage of planning for progression in pupils' skill development as set out in the Skills framework. Most school leaders do not understand why the Skills framework was developed or how it can be used to underpin curriculum planning. Consequently, there is a lot of uncertainty about the most effective way of integrating skills into planning to ensure progression in pupils' learning and of the advantages of doing so.
- 27 Most schools use the 2008 Subject Orders as a starting point for curriculum planning. The majority then refer to the Skills framework for additional guidance on tracking skills coverage. It is a considerable challenge for schools to understand that skills should be the starting point for designing the curriculum rather than as being a bolt-on to existing schemes of work.
- Only a very few schools have used the Skills framework as the first point of reference when planning a whole-school approach to schemes of work and to delivering progressive skills development. Too often, teachers continue to plan the curriculum as separate subjects without giving enough attention to how subjects, such as history or geography, can support and provide a context for the development of skills such as literacy and numeracy. They do not recognise fully that skills such as literacy and numeracy should form the core organising elements and backbone for their schemes of work. Although this is in part due to the lack of clarity surrounding the non-statutory status of the framework, it is mainly due to leaders' uncertainty about how to align the National Curriculum Subject Orders and the Skills framework.
- Although the Skills framework has increased teachers' awareness of the importance of improving pupils' skills, it does not provide enough clear and detailed guidance on how teachers should plan and deliver a skill-based curriculum. Most teachers are uncertain about how to combine the National Curriculum Subject Orders with the Skills framework. As a result, teachers do not plan to ensure that appropriate and sufficiently challenging opportunities for pupils to consolidate, apply and extend their communication and number skills are provided across the curriculum. One teacher said:
 - "I feel as if I'm planning backwards. I do my planning then go the Skills framework and see where it fits in so that I can add the symbols. The Skills framework does not affect my teaching. I just need to prove I've covered it."
- In another school, teachers use a wide range of published and in-house resources, as well as the Welsh Assembly Government's guidance, to aid their planning. However, teachers are unclear how these documents combine to produce a cohesive, consistent approach to planning pupils' skill development.
- 31 Most schools have a designated co-ordinator to oversee the implementation of a skills-based curriculum. DCELLS guidance on how to implement the Skills framework alongside National Curriculum Subject Orders recommends that a senior

leader should be responsible for its implementation. However, only a minority of schools have assigned this responsibility to a senior leader.

- In the few schools where there is an effective skills-based curriculum, senior leaders have a clear strategic vision and a good understanding of the purpose and principles of the Skills framework. Many of these schools are now in the process of building staff confidence and ability in using the Skills framework to underpin planning, teaching and learning.
- Where leaders do not have a secure understanding of what they are trying to achieve, staff are often uncertain about why they need to change their approach to planning. This results in teachers mapping coverage of skills rather than creating opportunities to teach skills that can be applied in different contexts. Planning the coverage of skills in this way means that many pupils do not acquire skills at the appropriate level before they need to apply these skills. For example, in one science lesson observed, pupils in a Year 6 class needed to create tables and graphs to show the number of smokers in Wales over the past ten years. The pupils, although capable of understanding the information, had not previously been taught the mathematical skills needed to construct the graphs and were unable to complete the task.
- In the few cases where schools plan a skills-based curriculum effectively, teachers work together to plan across all year groups and target development of specific skills taught through subjects or themes. In these schools, teachers are aware of pupils' prior skill development and the new skills they need to be taught to make progress. For example, they ensure that pupils are taught the necessary skills before asking them to apply them to a range of contexts and subjects, or they create opportunities for pupils to acquire the skills from a low starting point in context. In these schools, teachers and pupils often have established a common approach and a consistent language to discuss thinking and learning. They use a range of relevant terminologies to discuss the skills needed during an activity and how they will use these skills to the best effect. Schools involved in the DCELLS training make good use of accompanying resources. Resources such as posters on display within classrooms are used as a point of reference when teachers introduce tasks and when pupils reflect on their learning and the learning process.

Support and training

- Local authorities have given their schools effective support and guidance on how to implement the 2008 revised Subject Orders for the National Curriculum. However, support for schools in using the Skills framework to underpin their planning for the National Curriculum has not been as effective.
- The quality of the support for schools on how to use the Skills framework has been too variable. Not all local authority advisers understand how the Skills framework can be used to develop, monitor and assess skills across the curriculum. This has resulted in inconsistent views about the underlying principles of a skills-based curriculum between local authorities and also across schools within the same authority.

- Overall, local authorities are not effective enough in providing training and guidance for delivering and assessing pupils' progress through a skills-based framework. The training provided is often too generic and does not take into account enough the different stages of development that schools are in regarding implementing the skills-based curriculum. As a result, many schools feel that they are working in isolation when developing a skills-based curriculum and systems to assess learners' skills. This lack of co-ordination and partnership working by local authorities and their consortiums results in unnecessary duplication of activity and effort by individual schools.
- Around half of the schools visited have a member of staff who has accessed local authority or DCELLS training on how to implement thinking and assessment for learning in the classroom. In nearly all schools, the teacher who attended the course disseminated the information to all teaching staff and held in-house workshops on how to develop thinking skills. In the best practice, this has helped to embed a more consistent approach to teaching and developing pupils' thinking skills and given staff a useful tool-kit of activities. However, a minority of schools see thinking activities as one-off activities at the start or end of a topic rather than an integral part of routine teaching and learning. Not enough schools link pupils' thinking activities to the thinking strand of the Skills framework. As a result, there are missed opportunities to extend pupils' thinking skills by increasing the complexity of the activities and the challenge within tasks. For example, few pupils are asked to make inferences, analyse and assimilate information, think logically and seek patterns, make links or think laterally.
- Many local authorities have formed working parties with selected groups of teachers and local authority officers to produce subject-specific 'skills ladders'. A few local authorities have bought for schools commercially-produced skills ladders, based on the National Curriculum Subject Orders. These commercial skills ladders are often weighty, complex packages that teachers find difficult to adapt for medium-term and daily planning.
- 40 ESIS (a school improvement consortium in south-east Wales) has produced a comprehensive document that enables schools to evaluate their current curriculum and plan for a skills-based curriculum, based on the principles of the Skills framework. Schools using this document have very effective guidance and support in planning a skills-based curriculum.
- 41 Nearly all schools have used training days and after-school sessions to raise staff awareness of the skills-based curriculum. After the initial training sessions, staff have worked together to revise schemes of work and other planning documentation. However, because teachers lack a clear understanding of the nature of a skills-based curriculum they spend too much time matching symbols or key words from the Skills framework to existing curriculum plans.
- 42 Schools visited in this survey that have been developing a skills-based curriculum prior to the September 2008 curriculum revisions have invested heavily in developing the understanding of all staff on how adults as well as children think and learn. Many

9

³ A 'skills ladder' sets out what progress in a skill looks like in practice, step by step.

have brought in outside providers to train staff on key learning and thinking theories as part of the school's programme for continuous professional development. Members of staff are then encouraged to set up a professional learning community to share good practice with other staff within the school or across schools. In these learning communities, staff work well together to research and plan activities that help pupils to apply and extend their knowledge, understanding and skills across all areas of the curriculum.

Financial implications

- Around half the schools in the survey reported that they had used their school budget extensively to finance the introduction of a skills-based curriculum. The majority of the spending was to release teachers for planning and to fund the purchase of additional ICT resources. A few headteachers stated that there had been insufficient financing for schools to introduce a new curriculum at key stage 2. However, in schools where leaders have a clear strategic vision for the development of a skills-based curriculum, a lack of funding was not a significant barrier to implementation. These schools use their own in-house expertise to train staff and use existing resources effectively.
- All of the schools surveyed used a large proportion of their Better Schools Funding to support the introduction of the 2008 revised Subject Orders by releasing staff for planning and training. However, very few schools used this money to plan for, or implement, the Skills framework.
- A minority of schools have spent considerable sums on purchasing published schemes of work and other resources. However, there is little evidence that these packages help to generate higher standards of work or improve the quality of teaching. Use of teachers' existing and collective expertise and skills within local authority schools and consortia can often be more effective. For example, teachers focus more on developing the specific skills in the Skills framework, whereas the published resources are more generic in their approach, in order to appeal to a wider market.

Working within clusters

Most schools work well with other schools in their cluster to develop a more skills-based curriculum. This includes joint production of skills ladders and assessment portfolios, the sharing of planning and joint attendance at training events. Although most of this joint working has focused on skills within subjects rather than the development of communication, ICT or number skills, there has been useful work on developing consistent approaches to thinking across clusters. In the best practice, there is an agreement on the common approaches to ensure continuity and progression in pupils' skills development from key stage 2 to key stage 3. Through its 'Thinking Skills Pedagogy Course', Cynnal has supported schools in Anglesey, Gwynedd and Conwy to develop their approaches to thinking and assessment for learning. A pedagogy adviser supports subject advisers when they are planning courses and highlights appropriate opportunities to develop skills across the curriculum. Schools, in these local authorities, have access to a good range of web-based resources.

2 Assessment and tracking

- 47 Tracking pupils' skills is one of the weakest areas of provision in the schools visited for this survey. Teachers do not know how well pupils are able to use and apply their skills across the curriculum and therefore do not plan appropriately challenging work for them. Consequently, many pupils are not making sufficient progress in using and applying their thinking, communication, ICT or number skills.
- None of the schools surveyed have developed a whole-school system to track individual pupil outcomes in the non-statutory skills against the Skills framework. One school is currently trialling a system in a single year group to report against each pupil's level of attainment in every strand of the Skills framework, although it is unclear how this information will be used to improve pupil outcomes.
- A minority of schools use a traffic light system to track achievement of a cohort of pupils against strands within the Skills framework. For example, one school uses the following indicators: red not implemented; amber partially implemented, but not fully applied or used independently by the majority of pupils; and green fully implemented with many of the children applying the skill independently. In this school, this information is used to inform the next stage of whole-class planning, but is not used to plan differentiated or personalised skill-focused activities for individual learners.
- A few schools are considering using a published package to track pupil achievement in subject-specific skills and in the wider skills. However, these schools do not intend to track individual pupils' attainment against the Skills framework.
- Many headteachers believe that pupils' progress in communication, ICT and number is tracked sufficiently through the school's existing tracking systems in English, Welsh, mathematics and ICT. They do not understand the importance of applying skills such as literacy and numeracy in subjects such as history or geography.

3 Teaching and learning

- In around half of schools visited as part of this survey there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to use and develop their number, reading and extended writing skills across all areas of the curriculum. In particular, too few schools teach reading as a high-level skill at key stage 2.
- In the few examples of good practice observed, teachers consistently focused on developing pupils' skills in subjects across the curriculum. Lessons focused specifically on teaching new skills and their relevance to current and future work was made clear to pupils. Teachers shared learning intentions and success criteria with pupils and gave pupils the opportunity to discuss how best to use the skills they have already acquired. At regular intervals, pupils evaluated their progress and reflected on areas to improve.
- Although symbols or icons for communication, thinking, ICT or number feature in teacher's planning in around half of the lessons observed, the skills are not developed in the lessons and opportunities are missed to develop pupils' skills to a level higher than they already possess.
- In most schools visited, collaboration and group work is now good, due to a much stronger focus on these aspects in lessons. Pupils listen attentively to the views of others, respond appropriately and take on a variety of roles. However, group work is less successful when teachers do not, in the first instance, designate specified roles and responsibilities or teach the rules of group working.
- Teachers in most schools state that they provide open-ended skill-based activities to enable pupils to respond at a level appropriate to their ability and they extend the more able learners by asking them more challenging questions during the lesson. However, in around half of the sessions observed for this survey, teachers' questioning was spontaneous and general in nature rather than carefully planned to extend pupils' skill development, and in too many cases the more able pupils had tasks that were too easy for them.

Involvement of pupils in planning their own learning

- Many schools involve pupils in planning their class topic or theme. Pupils are encouraged to share their existing knowledge and views of the proposed theme, including what they would like to find out, and decide how to go about gathering information. In a majority of schools, learners are encouraged to work collaboratively, taking on different roles within a group, and are free to choose how they present their work.
- Where pupils are involved in making decisions about their learning, their levels of interest, participation and gains in knowledge, skills and understanding improve. For example, pupils in one school were asked to recount lessons where they had learnt more than usual. Their replies included reference to a residential trip where they had to decide what they wanted to study. This included pupils carrying out the initial research, costing the trip, contacting organisations, booking the event, writing to

The Skills framework at key stage 2: An evaluation of the non-statutory Skills framework for 3 to 19-year-olds at key stage 2 - July 2011

parents and handling all the money. They had to put themselves into groups and delegate responsibilities and decide how best to present the information to the rest of the class. All pupils agreed that their learning was most effective when they were actively involved in deciding what and how they learnt. As one pupil said:

"If you want me to learn, give me hands-on lessons, where I get to choose and do things. Then it will stick in my mind".

4 Evaluating the impact of the skills-based curriculum

- Misunderstandings about the purpose of the Skills framework and how it should be used to plan pupils' skill progression mean that the Skills framework has had limited impact. A significant minority of schools surveyed had taken little account of the Skills framework prior to the notification of the visit from Estyn.
- In most schools, the introduction of the revised Subject Orders and a more skills-based curriculum has been a major focus for improvement plans. Schools have referred to the Skills framework to a lesser extent because of the non-statutory nature of the Skills framework and the lack of clear guidance on how to use it effectively as the first point of reference when planning.
- Nearly all schools that took part in this remit had the development of thinking skills as part of their school improvement plan. While important, this focus is sometimes at the expense of the other skills identified in the Skills framework, such as communication and number.
- To some extent, all schools have evaluated the impact of their planned actions and fed these evaluations into the next round of school development planning. The quality of these evaluations is too variable. In a few schools, senior leaders have a good understanding of the principles of the Skills framework and are now planning to increase teacher confidence in using it as the first point of reference when revising their planning.
- Around half of the 73 respondents to the questionnaire indicate that the Skills framework has had the greatest impact in the core subjects of English, Welsh, mathematics and science and in the foundation subjects of history and geography. Schools regard these subjects as ones lending themselves more readily to a skills-based approach to learning. The other half stated that the Skills framework is having an equal impact on all subjects. Many of these schools attribute this to their whole-school approach to covering the requirements of the Skills framework with thinking, communication, ICT and number skills permeating all areas of the curriculum. Evidence from the survey shows that thinking skills and the subject specific skills in oracy and ICT are used well in most curriculum areas. However, there are only limited planned opportunities for pupils to progress in their number, reading and writing skills across the curriculum.

Appendix 1

Evidence base

This report draws on:

- visits by inspectors to a representative sample of 21 primary or junior schools across Wales inspected by Estyn in 2008-2009. Inspectors interviewed senior leaders and teachers, observed two lessons in each school, scrutinised documentation and planning, spoke to a group of learners and in most instances spoke to a local authority adviser;
- questionnaires completed by 73 primary or junior schools inspected during the same period; and
- questionnaires returned by officers in 11 out of the 22 local authorities.

The schools visited as part of this remit were:

Barry Island Primary, Vale of Glamorgan

Ysgol Caer Derwyn, Denbighshire

Coed-Y-Garn Primary, Blaenau Gwent

Crynallt Junior School, Neath Port Talbot

Ysgol Dyffryn Ardudwy, Gwynedd

Ysgol Eglwys Bach, Conwy

Glais Primary School, Swansea

Griffithstown Primary, Torfaen

Holt Community Primary, Wrexham

Kymin View Primary, Monmouthshire

Llanidloes Community Primary School, Powys

Neyland Junior School, Pembrokeshire

Ysgol Penlon, Ceredigion

Ysgol Rhys Pritchard, Carmarthenshire

Rogerstone Primary, Newport

Penygawsi Primary, Rhondda Cynon Taff

Saltney Ferry Primary, Flintshire

St Marys and St Patrick Catholic Primary School, Bridgend

Thornhill Primary School, Cardiff

Ystrad Mynach Primary, Caerphilly

Ysgol Y Parch Thomas Ellis, Ynys Môn

Appendix 2

Case study 1

Barry Island Primary, Vale of Glamorgan

Context

Barry Island Primary School serves the community of Barry Island in the Vale of Glamorgan. There are currently 220 pupils on roll and 20.5% of these pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is above the national average.

Strategy

Barry Island Primary has a skills policy agreed by all staff. Senior leaders within the school monitor the application of the policy and ensure consistency in teachers' approach to delivering the Skills framework.

Action

The school has amended its timetable to concentrate teaching of core subjects in substantial blocks of time. This ensures that all pupils have at least two days a week to immerse themselves in topics and apply the skills they have acquired.

The school has been part of a professional learning community since 2005 and along with its partners has invested heavily in the purchase of ICT equipment. The school has set up an electronic or virtual learning community and regularly teaches pupils new ICT skills. All pupils use technology as part of their daily learning activities.

The leadership within the school are proactive in establishing a learning environment where pupils' views are actively sought and acted upon.

Outcomes

As a result of focusing on a skills-based curriculum, pupils:

- demonstrate high levels of independent and interdependent learning skills;
- achieve excellent standards of ICT skills across the school; and
- are confident learners, able to plan their own learning activities and assess how well they have used their skills.

Case study 2

Glais Primary School, Swansea

Context

Glais Primary School is situated in the village of Glais at the southern end of the Swansea Valley. There are currently 105 pupils on roll and 1% of these pupils are entitled to free school meals.

Strategy

All staff in Glais Primary School have a shared understanding of the philosophy and principles that underpin the Skills framework.

Action

Whole-staff development over the past eight years has focused on developing a whole-school approach to the teaching of thinking and learning.

There is a consistent approach across the school to planning and teaching subject-specific and transferable skills. The headteacher and subject leaders are all part of the school's monitoring procedures. Outcomes from monitoring are shared with all staff.

All new teachers have timetabled opportunities to observe established staff teaching and are coached in the school's approach to pedagogy.

Outcomes

As a result of focusing on a skills-based curriculum, pupils:

- are more confident, effective communicators;
- share ideas, undertake their own research, and learn from each other well;
- are fully involved and engaged in their learning;
- understand their own strengths and weaknesses; and
- apply a range of appropriate skills to different contexts.

Case study 3

Ystrad Mynach Primary School, Caerphilly

Context

Ystrad Mynach Primary School opened in September 2006, as the result of the amalgamation of Ystrad Mynach Infant School and Ystrad Mynach Junior School. The school is situated on the outskirts of Ystrad Mynach, a small town to the north of Caerphilly. There are currently 409 pupils on roll and 11.8% of these pupils are entitled to free school meals.

Strategy

A new headteacher introduced the skills-based curriculum on appointment in April 2010 in order particularly to improve the attainment of boys who were not paying attention in lessons and were not interested in learning.

Action

Staff had varying degrees of understanding about learning intentions, success criteria, how to involve pupils in their own learning, and how to challenge more able pupils. In the period since her appointment, the headteacher has focused on developing staff's knowledge and understanding of the Skills framework and assessment for learning strategies.

Outcomes

As a result of the introduction of a skills-based curriculum:

- pupils are increasingly aware of the skills they need to learn and nearly all pupils are engaged in lessons;
- teachers share learning intentions and provide opportunities for pupils to be actively involved in research and group activities; and
- boys are becoming enthusiastic learners and talk animatedly about their work.

Case study 4

Wrexham local authority – Cross-phase effective learning course

Context

Wrexham is situated in north-east Wales and is bordered by Flintshire to the north-west, Denbighshire to the west, Powys to the south and England to the east. The total population is 133,207. The percentage of Wrexham pupils of compulsory school age eligible for free school meals is 19%, similar to that nationally.

Strategy

The local authority wanted to promote joint-working and better understanding of skills-based learning.

Action

The local authority provides training for two teachers from each school, one of which should have a leadership responsibility and be responsible for developing teaching and learning across the school. Teachers attend the course with both primary and secondary colleagues from their cluster, supporting them in the development of professional learning communities to share good practice and agree a common skills-based approach with their feeder secondary school.

The course aims to:

- raise standards of pupil achievement and promote high-quality learning and teaching in schools:
- ensure that the teaching that learners receive and the learning they experience
 has a positive and sustained impact on the outcomes they achieve and on their
 wellbeing;
- support the building of a shared vision of successful teaching and effective learning, and a shared skills-based pedagogy;
- enable learners to become more engaged, effective and motivated and so achieve better quality outcomes;
- encourage teachers to talk about what makes good pedagogical practice, the elements that need to be present for effective teaching and successful learning to take place, and how these elements interact; and
- develop a common vocabulary to enable practitioners to converse across all sectors, settings and phases.

Teachers are asked to implement the strategies and research their effectiveness on raising pupil attainment. The outcome of their research is fed back to colleagues both at school and at the subsequent course. The headteacher of each school is given a copy of each teacher's personal learning target agreed with the course leader. The headteacher is expected to monitor the action taken by the member of staff and ensure that the strategies learned on the course are embedded in classroom practice. Attendance on this course is a requirement for all newly qualified teachers appointed to Wrexham schools.

Outcomes

As a result of the training, improvements include:

- a common approach to skills-based teaching and learning in all schools in the cluster;
- better continuity and progression in pupils' thinking skills, especially in transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3;
- · improved pupil achievement; and
- the development of schools as professional learning communities.

Case study 5

Holt Community Primary, Wrexham

Context

Holt Community Primary School is located in the Welsh border village of Holt, near Wrexham. There are currently 83 pupils on roll and 14.8% of these pupils are entitled to free school meals.

Strategy

Through a 'Small schools' joint working project set up in 2006, this school along with its partners has developed a curriculum that links the wider skills to subject skills.

Action

Subject skills ladders, showing progression from 'working towards' (W) to level 5 are linked to the wider skills. These are now being updated.

An example to illustrate the application of pupils' wider skills at level 4 of the National Curriculum for design and technology is included below:

Thinking	Communication	Number	ICT
I take time to find out if my designs meet the needs of users as they progress	I communicate my ideas and alternative ideas which show I am aware of the constraints of my ideas	I use accurate measurements and my knowledge of ratio to construct scale drawings of my design	I create multimedia presentations to demonstrate my designs or products
I constantly evaluate my product or design to see what could be improved	I use text, labelled diagrams and annotations to describe my ideas	I use my knowledge of proportion to mix ingredients, e.g. a cake	I research products and users by using the Internet

I refine the quality	I can present a	I use my	I use ICT to
of finish of my	persuasive text on	knowledge of	produce schedules
products	the benefits of my	measurement,	of work
	product	including area and	
		volume, to	
		calculate the	
		materials needed	
		for a project	

Outcomes

As a result:

- the school has a clear understanding of how the key skills underpin all learning and the links between higher-order skills and subject skills; and
- there is clear guidance for whole-school planning, as well as teachers' individual planning, forming a good basis for developing pupils' cross-curricular skills.

Glossary

Developing Thinking and Assessment for Learning (DCELLS)

The programme focuses on the development, implementation and dissemination of good practice in the teaching of developing thinking and assessment for learning strategies.

The remit author and survey team

Liz Miles HMI	Lead Inspector
Ann Jones HMI	Team Inspector
Lynda Newton AI (Secondment)	Team Inspector