

# **Value for Money (VFM) Review and Report for 2019/20 for the South East Wales Education Achievement Service**

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## Executive Summary

Value for Money (VfM), or cost effectiveness, is a measure of how well resources are being used to achieve intended outcomes. Good value for money is the optimal use of resources to achieve intended outcomes. VfM is usually measured by considering:

- **Economy:** minimising the cost of resources used while having regard to quality (inputs) – spending less;
- **Efficiency:** the relationship between outputs and the resources used to produce them – spending well; and
- **Effectiveness:** the extent to which objectives are achieved (outcomes) – spending wisely.

While the above represent the traditional method of measuring VfM it is also possible to include two further dimensions:

- **Equity:** the extent to which services are available to and reach all people that they are intended to – spending fairly.
- **Sustainability:** an increasingly standard consideration within the context of the Well Being of Future Generations Act (WBFG) – spending for the long term.

In a VfM review it is also important to consider the specific context of the organisation being reviewed. Consequently, it is important to consider the specific aims and objectives of the organisation under review. To add value to an organisation a VfM review has to:

- be an evaluation of how well an organisation is performing in achieving its stated aims and objectives; and
- provide a platform to improve its performance.

For the purposes of this review the overall aim of EAS can be interpreted as its mission statement of ‘*Working with partners we will aim to transform the educational outcomes and life chances for all learners across South East Wales*’. This overall aim can be seen to be underpinned by the following objectives of:

- ensuring successful learning experiences and high levels of wellbeing particularly for those facing the greatest challenges;
- building effective networks of professionals, across the five Local Authorities and beyond and working together to improve leadership, teaching and learning; and
- attracting and retaining a team of outstanding people who embed our core values in their work and share a passion for excellence.

It must be recognised from the outset that the mission statement and its underpinning objectives have been developed based on almost ten years of experience of delivering a school improvement service across South East Wales. They represent what the organisation has determined to be the key components of an effective service and as such it is reasonable to assume that their use, as a methodological framework for gathering evidence, enabled valid conclusions to be drawn on the extent to which VfM is being achieved.

The value from a VfM review lies in part in the assurance that it can provide to both providers and recipients of services. However, it can be argued that a greater added value comes from the extent to which it acts as a catalyst for improvement, based on an evaluation of a body of evidence that demonstrates what is working well and what is working less well. This in turn can lead to well informed judgements about what needs to change.

If one accepts the approach and underlying assumptions outlined above, then the next consideration was how to gather the necessary evidence to make a valid evaluation of VfM. However, it must be recognised that evidence gathering and analysis for this report took place in the wholly exceptional circumstances of the lockdown imposed to combat the Coronavirus pandemic. Consequently, it was an exercise undertaken entirely remotely. While this caused some inevitable logistical challenges and delays in reporting, it did not affect the quality of evidence gathered or impair the validity of subsequent findings and conclusions.

This VfM review drew upon information and data supplied by EAS in response to requests, evidence from external experts who have undertaken work for EAS during the year 2019-20 and information and data that is in the public domain. Consideration of this body of evidence enabled a judgement to be made regarding VfM and the judgement is that:

**EAS continues to provide good VfM in terms of the services it provides to schools across the region as evidenced by improved outcomes for some learners and the achievement of the other objectives that it has set for itself**

This conclusion was arrived at because:

- **Economy – spending less.** EAS continues to deliver a comprehensive range of services to schools across the region from dwindling financial resources; whilst maintaining one of the highest delegation rates to schools of any consortium in Wales
- **Effectiveness – spending wisely.** School performance and pupil outcomes are improving although significant problems, that are being addressed through a comprehensive programme of support, persist in the secondary sector.
- **Equity – spending fairly.** EAS has made improving pupil wellbeing, particularly for those facing the greatest challenges a priority; and its approach is enabling significant progress to be made.
- **Efficiency – spending well.** The quality of the workforce is being enhanced through the delivery of extensive programmes to develop teaching and leadership skills across the region, with demonstrable positive benefits for the quality of teaching and learning.
- **Sustainability – spending for the long term.** An extensive programme of Human Resource support allied to a comprehensive programme of development support is in place to ensure the attraction and retention of high calibre professionals across the region.

The main body of this report will detail the evidence that underpins the above conclusions.

#### **Recommendations:**

- EAS needs to build upon its evolving approach to considering VfM through:
  - on-going refinement of its internal reporting mechanisms;
  - further developing its mid-year review of VfM; and
  - extending engagement with recipients of its services to triangulate evidence and further validate findings and conclusions.

**Economy – spending less. EAS continues to deliver a comprehensive range of services to schools across the region from dwindling financial resources; whilst maintaining one of the highest delegation rates to schools of any consortium in Wales**

One part of arriving at an overall judgement is to look at the organisation holistically in terms of the overall resources -essentially people and money - at its disposal.

The picture is one of ever diminishing resources both in terms of income and staff numbers. The extent of the reduction in core funding, grant funding and trading income is shown below. There has been an agreed 9.6% reduction in Local Authority (LA) funding over the past 5 years which, along with the elimination of trading income, has resulted in a reduction in total core funding of some £1.26m or 28.6% in absolute terms between 2015-16 and 2019-20: although in real terms, when inflation and pay awards are taken into account, the reduction has been in excess of 30%. Over the same time-period the reduction in the amount of grant money received from the Welsh Government

has resulted in EAS having £3.7m or 7% less in grant money available in absolute terms. When reductions in LA funding, elimination of trading income and reductions in grant money received are added together the reduction in total funding is £4.94m which represents an 8.7% reduction in absolute terms ; although in real terms, when inflation and pay awards are taken into account, the reduction has been in the region of 10%.

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
LA Funding	£3,481,085	£3,376,653	£3,275,353	£3,209,847	£3,145,651
Trading Income	£924,853	£601,974	£447,460	£0	£0
Total Core Funding	£4,405,938	£3,978,627	£3,722,813	£3,209,847	£3,145,651
Grants	£52,703,146	£56,082,261	£52,033,572	£51,991,066	£49,022,408
<b>Total</b>	<b>£57,109,084</b>	<b>£60,060,888</b>	<b>£55,756,385</b>	<b>£55,200,913</b>	<b>£52,168,054</b>
Delegated to Schools	£47,413,811	£50,384,126	£46,481,315	£48,886,304	£46,142,076
Delegation Percentage	90%	90%	89%	94%	94%
Residual Income <sup>1</sup>	£7,687,144	£7,668,633	£7,278,655	£6,314,609	£6,025,978

However, if increases in the rate of delegation to schools are taken into account then residual income spent on running the organisation, including staffing costs, fell by some £1.66m or 21.6% from 2015-16 to 2019-20

Reduced spending has inevitably resulted in a considerable reduction in staffing numbers, with the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff reducing from 107 in 2015-16 to 71 in 2019-20, taking the total reduction in FTE staff reduction to 36 over the period 2015-16 to 2019-20, representing a reduction of approximately one third in staffing levels.

The evidence clearly demonstrates that EAS is spending less than in previous years and that the rate of reduction is accelerating, while the overall number of schools being supported has remained largely static.

However, spending less is not in itself proof of providing VfM. Delivering VfM also requires that the reduced spending is used in a way that enables the organisation to meet its objectives and intended outcomes. The remainder of the report will look at the evidence around how well resources have been deployed.

**Effectiveness – spending wisely. School performance and pupil outcomes are improving although significant problems, that are being addressed through a comprehensive programme of support, persist in the secondary sector.**

As stated earlier the overriding purpose of EAS, as set out in its mission statement, is to *‘transform the educational outcomes and life chances for all learners across South East Wales’* and in order to achieve this it has identified the necessity to ensure successful learning experiences for pupils across the region. This section of the report will now analyse what is being done to achieve this, how well it is being done and how successful it has been.

<sup>1</sup> Residual Income represents the cost of delivering the Business Plan for each year after distribution of Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant (MEAG) and Gypsy Traveller Children Grant (GTCG).

One approach to an assessment of how successful it has been is to look at educational outcomes as measured by:

- categorisation outcomes;
- Estyn inspection outcomes; and
- pupil outcomes.

However, it must be recognised from the outset that these outcomes cannot be achieved by any one organisation or programme of support. They require collaboration and a collective effort for which there is a collective responsibility and accountability. In relation to this report this collective responsibility and accountability extends to Welsh Government, EAS, Local Authorities and schools.

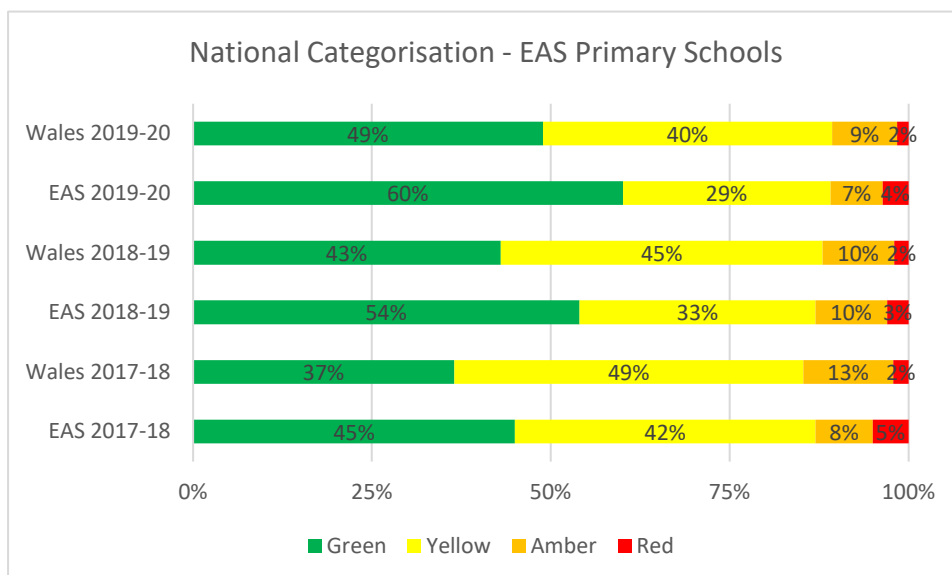
In looking at educational outcomes there is also a need to recognise the changes being introduced by Welsh Government, to evaluation and improvement (accountability) in Wales, to support the realisation of the new curriculum. These changes will result in a shift to individual school self-evaluation. This is seen as signalling a move away from a perceived disproportionate emphasis on narrow performance measures, to a wider range of indicators which better capture the whole learning experience, learner progress and Welsh Government ambitions for the new curriculum.

*School performance - Categorisation:*

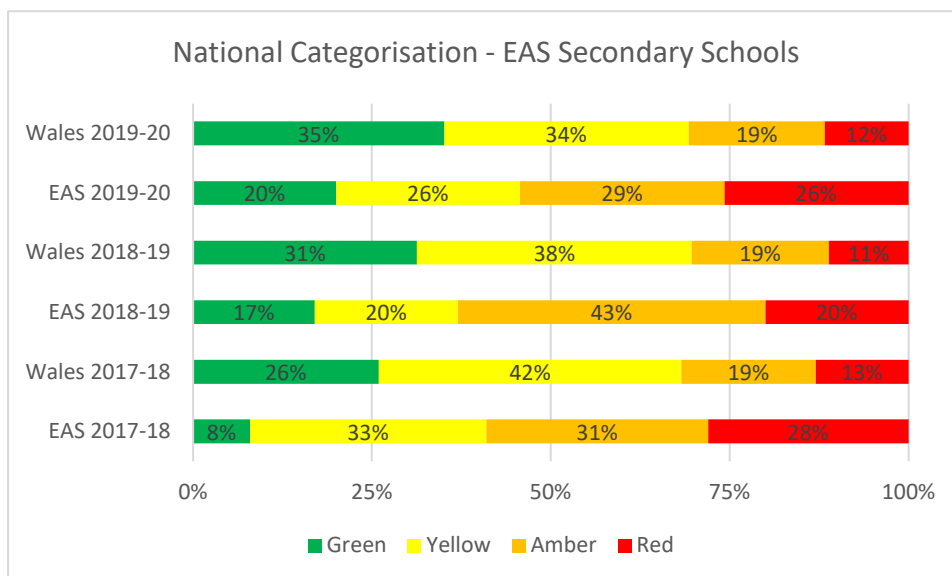
The National School Categorisation System was introduced in September 2014. The system places schools into four categories green, yellow, amber and red in descending order of the amount of support they are judged to require. Thus, green schools are judged to require the least support and red schools the most support. The system is not purely data driven, it also considers the quality of leadership and teaching and learning in schools. The model was jointly constructed between Welsh Government and the four regional consortia.

Under the proposed changes to evaluation, improvement and accountability outlined above it is recognised that categorisation will need to evolve into a more sophisticated process that looks at a broader range of indicators, such as learner well-being. It is expected that this will evolve into an ongoing process of authentication of a school’s self-evaluation and priorities for development.

The categorisation outcomes go through a rigorous moderation process that allows valid comparison to be made within the region over time and between regional and national outcomes. The picture for schools in the region is illustrated below:



The above table illustrates that the combined percentage of primary schools in the green and yellow categories has remained consistent over the last three years and is broadly in line with the Wales average. However, within this picture of consistent performance it is worth noting that the percentage of primary schools in the green category has risen by 15 percentage points over the last three years resulting in the extent to which the percentage of green schools in the region exceeds the Wales average increasing from 8 percentage points to 11 percentage points.



The above table illustrates that the percentage of secondary schools in the green and yellow categories has risen from 41% in 2017-18 to 46% in 2019-20. In particular there has been an increase from 8% to 20% for schools in the green category; an improvement that has narrowed the gap between schools in that category across the region and those across Wales. This improvement has resulted in the gap between secondary schools in the green and yellow categories across the region and schools across Wales narrowing over the three-year period.

*School based performance -inspection outcomes:*

Another measure of school improvement is Estyn inspection outcomes across the region. In September 2017 Estyn introduced a new framework for judging school performance based upon assessments across the following five categories:

- Leadership and management
- Care, support and guidance
- Teaching and learning experiences
- Well-being and attitudes to learning
- Standards of achievement

For each category school performance is judged to be either excellent, good, adequate or unsatisfactory. As part of the new framework no overall judgement is arrived at and no assessment is made of prospects for future improvement. This marked divergence from the previous approach, coupled with the relatively small percentage of schools inspected, particularly in the secondary sector, limits the extent to which valid assessments of trend based upon comparisons with past judgements can be made. However, it is possible to make comparisons between the judgements arrived at across the region compared with those across Wales; and between primary schools and secondary schools.

In terms of these comparisons the following picture emerges for the period 2017-19:

- Inspection outcomes for primary and secondary schools combined were broadly in line with the all-Wales average across all five categories;
- Inspection outcomes for secondary schools resulting in judgements of unsatisfactory were above the all-Wales average for leadership and management, teaching and learning experiences and standards of achievement;
- Inspection outcomes for secondary schools for well-being and attitudes to learning have improved to be above the all-Wales average and those for care, support and guidance are broadly in line with the average;
- With the exception of care, support and guidance no secondary school was judged to be excellent in any category;
- Inspection outcomes for primary schools were broadly in line with the all-Wales average with judgements for well-being and attitudes to learning improving to be above the all-Wales average;
- Some judgements of excellent were made across all five categories for different primary schools.

Another method for evaluating school performance based on inspection judgements is to look at what category schools are placed in following their Estyn inspection. Post inspection all schools are placed in one of the following four categories:

- No follow-up required
- Estyn review
- Significant improvement
- Special measures

Based on inspection outcomes from 73 inspections carried out and reported on between 2017 and 2020 the position with regard to follow-up categorisation can be summarised as:

- 48/60 (80%) of primary schools - no follow-up required
- 9/60 (15%) of primary schools - Estyn review
- 2/59 (3.3%) of primary schools - significant improvement
- no primary schools in special measures
- 1/9 (11%) of secondary schools – no follow-up required
- 6/9 (67%) of secondary schools – Estyn review
- 2/9 (22%) of secondary schools – special measures
- 1/2 pupil referral units – Estyn review
- 1/2 pupil referral units – Special measures

While this picture of inspection outcomes is a snapshot based upon a relatively small sample, particularly in the case of secondary schools, it does serve to further highlight the differentiation in performance between primary schools and secondary schools across the region. There are some significant challenges in many secondary schools, where progress is not good enough and this is a key issue for the EAS and for local authorities to continue to address.

#### *Pupil outcomes – Teacher Assessment:*

As stated earlier, in addition to looking at school-based measures, one fundamental indicator of effectiveness is pupil outcomes. In the past this has involved looking at end of key stage results and



analysing them both in terms of historical trend and comparative performance. However, this is no longer possible following the amendments that were made in 2018 to the use of Teacher Assessment information in Wales. These amendments were seen as necessary to support the key objectives of the Welsh Government document: 'Our National Mission,' in delivering robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements to support a self-improving system.

The amendments reflect a belief that Aggregated Teacher Assessment outcomes have been used for accountability purposes for too long; leading to unintended consequences that can negatively impact upon raising school standards. The Welsh Government changes are intended to ensure that there is a more coherent system where the focus is on using teacher assessment to inform better teaching and learning.

Consequently, teacher assessment data and National Reading and Numeracy Test data at a school, local authority and consortia level will no longer be published. This applies to the Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 in all maintained primary and secondary schools. The decision not to publish comparative information about teacher assessments and tests, in relation to other schools within a local authority or 'family of schools' is predicated on the belief that *'Evaluating the performance of individual schools rather than generating aggregated data at local authority level will be more helpful to supporting and challenging individual schools with their improvement.'*<sup>2</sup>

#### *Pupil Outcomes - Key Stage 4:*

In 2019, the Minister for Education announced the introduction of a suite of interim Key Stage 4 performance measures that were developed through collaboration with head teachers and key stakeholders. The new measures, based on points scores, were designed to remove the historic emphasis on the Level 2 threshold measure and the narrow focus on borderline C/D grade learners that past use of threshold measures has cultivated. Instead, they reflect a school average of all individual learners' points' scores, rather than a percentage attaining a minimum threshold level.

These interim measures known as Capped Points 9 performance show that in 2019 performance across the region was 345.2, compared to 353.8 across Wales. This performance measure has changed since last year, as the core prescribed element is now 3 qualifications, rather than 5 previously, hence direct comparison is not possible. However, trends can be considered and in 2018 performance in this measure was 333.2 points, compared to the Wales average 349.5 points, so the gap between the region and Wales has narrowed from 16.3 points to 8.6 points.

National benchmarking data was previously provided to allow a comparison with other schools in similar socio-economic circumstances to encourage collaboration. However, it is now felt that the way in which benchmarking has been used has instead driven competition between schools and local authorities rather than collaboration. It will, therefore, no longer be provided.

While there are now significant restrictions on the publication of data that does not mean that the data is not collected, analysed and used. EAS still have access to all the data that they have had in the past and this forms part of a broad range of un-aggregated data and information that is used to evaluate and report on school performance. This is consistent with the previously stated view that *'Evaluating the performance of individual schools rather than generating aggregated data at local*

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<sup>2</sup> Joint letter from Welsh Government, Estyn and WLG July 2019

*authority level will be more helpful to supporting and challenging individual schools with their improvement.<sup>3</sup>*

EAS support and challenge to individual schools to promote improvement is based upon a strategic approach of moving increasingly towards a self-improving system, with more and more of the support, challenge and development work carried out by schools themselves: underpinned by a programme of regional investment in building the capacity of schools and educational settings to enable and facilitate more collaborative ways of working. This approach is enabling teachers and leaders to learn from each other, to try out new approaches and to engage with educational research as the backdrop for improvement. Across the region there are now a variety of ways in which EAS supports and challenges school improvement. The impact and effectiveness of the strategies are reviewed regularly through both internal and external processes.

These supporting and challenging strategies can be summarised as:

- the role of the challenge adviser in supporting, brokering and challenging the pace of progress schools make in addressing their identified school priorities;
- the role of EAS officers (including subject specific support, support for governors, wellbeing and equity) in supporting, brokering and challenging the pace of progress schools make in addressing their identified school priorities;
- access to funded school networks that support all aspects of professional development and school improvement focused on improving the quality of leadership and teaching and learning;
- access to a wide range of professional learning, some with accreditation options, for teaching assistants, teachers, school leaders and governors;
- peer working and peer reviews;
- the use of trained and accredited coaches and mentors for teachers and leaders, sourced from within and beyond; and
- access to eLearning materials and high-quality resources.

Evaluating the performance of individual schools also involves addressing the problem of underperforming schools across the region through the Schools Causing Concern (SCC) process. While both primary and secondary schools can be a cause for concern, it has to be recognised that on all outcome measures; categorisation, inspection judgements and key stage results, the performance of secondary schools across the region is significantly below that of primaries.

SCC are placed on a register based on a range of criteria, and their inclusion is agreed by local authority Directors of Education and the EAS Managing Director. The Headteacher and Governing Body are notified in writing if their school is placed on the Schools Causing Concern Register.

The register is reviewed on a half termly basis by senior officers within the local authorities and EAS, to ensure that levels of support and challenge are consistent. Progress of schools is also discussed at the meetings with all Cabinet Members for Education on a termly basis. Following these meetings schools will be notified if there are any changes to their inclusion on the register or any updates regarding support.

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<sup>3</sup> Joint letter from Welsh Government, Estyn and WLGA July 2019

The composition of the register as of autumn 2019 can be summarised as:

- In total there are now 37 schools on the register. Of these 20 are secondary schools. This reflects both outcomes in the sector and the greater risk associated with underperformance in secondary schools.
- Of these 37 schools, 13 have been added, during the academic year.
- 5 schools have been removed from the register this academic year as they have made sufficient progress for their inclusion to be no longer warranted.

For 2019-20 the number of schools being removed has been less than the number being added, and there are concerns over secondary school performance across the region. Secondary schools account for 32 (13.5%) of the 238 schools across the region but 20 (62.5%) of schools on the SCC register. This means that over half (54%) of secondary schools are on the SCC register.

All identified schools have fully engaged with the SCC process in 2019-20 and in many instances, schools had made progress across the year. It was also evident that nearly all Headteachers and governors had responded positively to advice provided by EAS and LA officers.

In looking to further refine its approach EAS is planning to:

- pilot an approach to 'Team Around the School' that incorporates the SCC process;
- ensure all meetings reach a collective judgement based on the protocol's judgement criteria; and
- work with LAs to ensure schools are not producing excessive and additional paperwork in relation to these meetings

However, as the figures above relating to the composition of the register demonstrate, risks remain around the pace of tackling underperformance in leadership particularly at secondary school level. This remains an issue for governing bodies, local authorities and the EAS. as the following extract demonstrates '*.....there are some significant challenges in many secondary schools, where progress is not good enough. This is a key issue for EAS and its overwhelming priority*'<sup>4</sup>.

**Equity – spending fairly. EAS has made improving pupil wellbeing, particularly for those facing the greatest challenges a priority; and its approach is enabling significant progress to be made.**

It is worth re-iterating here that the EAS objective refers to '*ensuring ..... high levels of wellbeing particularly for those facing the greatest challenges*' and the next part of this report will focus on the work being done to meet that objective.

The following extract highlights the central role that this work now occupies within EAS. '*EAS is now, rightly, focusing on **well-being and equity** as part of its core remit. This sends an important signal to schools that they need to be about both excellence and equity and that EAS and the Welsh Government are as concerned about the progress of vulnerable groups and the well-being of children as they are about academic excellence. This is not a compartmentalised silo approach in EAS but a genuinely joined-up approach which links to the business planning process, the School Development Planning process, local target-setting and the schools causing concern protocol. Good relationships have been established with the key people in each local authority and EAS has, rightly, been very clear about what its role is and what its role is not as far as the broad welfare, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and safeguarding issues are concerned. Good*

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<sup>4</sup> EAS Review October 2019: Steve Munby

*work has been done to ensure that the use of the PDG funding is evidence-based – including the use of Professional Panels*<sup>5</sup>.

As part of its role in supporting those facing the greatest challenges EAS works in partnership with the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Support Hub to train its schools in an awareness of ACE and the impact they have on learning and mental health. Vulnerable learners – many of whom have experienced ACE – include grant-funded children entitled to free school meals and those in the looked-after system

More specifically, in partnership with the ACE Support Hub, EAS has rolled out a *train-the-trainer* programme to train up an ACE ambassador, known as a wellbeing lead, within each school. In turn, these wellbeing leads have been charged with implementing ACE-awareness in their individual schools. Over five school terms from 2018 to 2019, the programme delivered initial training to all the schools in the consortium. By July 2020, the goal was to have trained most of the schools in a second ACE module that encourages them to think about emotional coaching and providing safe spaces for their vulnerable pupils. There is also a third tier of staff training for schools that want to go into greater depth. This includes five hours of staff-development workshops covering the impact of attachment on brain development, building pupil resilience and focusing on the wellbeing of the educators themselves. The programme has inevitably been curtailed as a result of school closures in response to the Coronavirus pandemic but to date:

- over half of the schools across the region have received unit two training; and
- 80 schools have attended third tier of training.

EAS maintains a register of the schools that have been trained and where they are on their ACE journey so that none fall through the gaps and runs “mop-up sessions” for schools that lose their wellbeing lead for whatever reason and need further training.

The feedback from schools in the consortium has been largely positive both in relation to the way staff have engaged with the training, and how, within the consortium, schools have shared good practice in order to improve support for their vulnerable learners. Sharing within clusters – groups of primary schools that feed a particular secondary school – has helped vulnerable pupils making the transition from primary to secondary. Some secondary schools are now gathering information from the primary schools to support their most vulnerable learners, setting up separate transition plans for the most challenging children.

Many of the secondary schools in the EAS consortium have set up their own wellbeing hubs to provide a safe environment for their vulnerable learners and to help them engage in school life. Those secondary schools that are developing these hubs are seeing a decrease in exclusion rates and an increase in attendance rates. The hubs play a particularly important role in reassuring children transitioning from primary school, where they have often benefitted from intensive nurture and support programmes

In 2019 Public Health Wales commissioned research into the effectiveness of the roll out of ACE Awareness across the EAS. The report states:

- The feedback received by a total of 88 schools and 1,707 individuals indicates that recipients of ACE Ambassadors’ training perceived it to be of use to their work and thought favourably of the Train the Trainer (TtT) programme. Yet, although reflections upon the content and delivery of the training delivered by ACE Ambassadors were mostly positive, it did appear as though some recipients believed that the training should have been more interactive.
- Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the TtT programme had been effective in developing professional learning about ACE throughout schools within the EAS region.

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<sup>5</sup> EAS Review October 2019: Steve Munby

The leading role that EAS plays in supporting the wellbeing agenda is reflected in the fact key learning points from schools in the EAS consortium are being used to evaluate the train-the-trainer approach to inform its roll out across other school consortia in Wales.

The intention of EAS' approach is to improve the progress and provision for all vulnerable learners and its effectiveness will be monitored, and challenged as required, through the work of challenge advisers, education improvement boards and intervention meetings. Effectiveness will be measured qualitatively through:

- improved curriculum offers;
- improved engagement of carers at parental consultations, option evenings; and
- appropriate challenge and provision for all groups of learners.

and quantitatively through:

- improved attendance;
- reduced exclusions (internal and formal fixed term); and
- improved attainment of vulnerable learners.

Data on attendance, exclusions and attainment for vulnerable learners is not currently collected and EAS will have to find a way to collect this specific data if it is to realise its intention to use quantifiable measures of effectiveness.

**Efficiency – spending well. The quality of the workforce is being enhanced through the delivery of extensive programmes to develop teaching and leadership skills across the region, with demonstrable positive benefits for the quality of teaching and learning.**

The vital role that the quality of teaching and leadership plays in ensuring successful learning experiences is self-explanatory, widely accepted and exemplified by the following quote:

*“These days, of course, it is widely accepted that second to the quality of teaching itself, the single thing that makes the biggest difference to outcomes for pupils is leadership”* (Mead 2018)

EAS provides a range of services designed to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in schools across the region. This support covers the various tiers of professionals – leaders, teachers and learning support staff – who collectively are charged with *‘ensuring successful learning experiences’*.

In this report - for the purposes of presentation - support provided to the various tiers are covered as discrete elements of the overall support package. However, for example, as illustrated below improvements in leadership can have a very positive impact on the quality of teaching within a school and the various support packages are complementary rather than discrete.

It would not be appropriate, within a VfM report, to provide a detailed description of the entire range of support provided. Some examples will be described here to provide an insight into the way support needs are determined and services delivered to meet those needs.

#### *Leadership Support:*

The pressing need to improve leadership in schools across the region is evident when considering inspection reports' findings on leadership for the region compared to the national picture outlined in the Estyn annual report of 2018/19. The national report states that:

- Leadership is good or excellent in around three-quarters of primary schools and in around half of secondary schools.
- In weaker secondary schools, the role of middle leaders is often underdeveloped. Middle leaders do not have enough opportunities to lead initiatives, to evaluate outcomes or to identify areas for development and plan for improvement.

Whereas:

- Across the EAS, 22% of Estyn recommendations between 2016-2020 were related to the development of aspects of leadership. However, in secondary schools 32 % of all recommendations related to aspects of leadership compared with only 18% of primary schools

In response to the pressing need referred to above, EAS has developed and refined an extensive programme of leadership professional support, based on use of the Professional standards for Leadership, across several tiers including:

- experienced headteachers;
- new and acting headteachers;
- deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers;
- aspiring headteachers; and
- middle leaders;

For *Experienced Headteachers* EAS is delivering a National Academy for Education Leadership (NAEL) endorsed Programmes of Professional Learning designed to identify and develop a growing regional cohort of aspirational leaders, current serving headteachers and experienced headteachers to expand system wide leadership opportunities.

The demographic profile of headteachers across the region reinforces the need for such a programme. In 2018, across the EAS, 20.3% of headteachers were aged 55 or over and could therefore be eligible for early retirement at any point. Consequently, the development of experienced head teachers across the EAS region, to support a self-improving system in the future, is important in developing a sustainable leadership development pathway.

*New and Acting Headteachers* are leaders who require support and coaching in their early Headship experiences. To meet this need EAS has, in partnership with other regions, developed a NAEL endorsed New and Acting Headteacher development programme, which is part of a national cross regional leadership development professional learning offer.

The development programme has been developed in response to the need to ensure recruitment demands are met by leaders who are qualified and prepared to become Headteachers across the EAS Region and Wales. Therefore, it is important to recruit and retain high quality inspirational leaders across the EAS; who feel supported and developed through the professional learning experiences they engage with.

EAS provides Professional Learning (PL) networks and opportunities, for current serving *deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers* (primary and secondary), special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRU), on a regular basis to ensure they are well informed regarding regional and national priorities, support, and best practice. The intention is to identify aspiring leaders across the region, provide bespoke PL and provide opportunities for them to experience leadership within different settings.

In particular, across the region, EAS acknowledges the need to understand the aspirations of leaders at all levels; the need to identify those aspirational leaders across the system and track the support and professional learning opportunities provided to them. There is recognition of the need to develop these leaders to provide strong leadership and improve teaching and learning in schools across the region, particularly those in the secondary sector.

EAS has prepared and delivered, in collaboration with other regions, a high-quality NAEL endorsed PL opportunity for *Aspiring Headteachers* to support them in attaining the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) qualification

In 2020, of the 30 EAS candidates, 24 gained the NPQH. This is a success rate of 80% compared to 74% in 2018/19, 70% in 2017/18 and 82% in 2016/17. The overall national rate was 83%. The

total of 24 successful candidates was 5 less than the previous highest figure of 29 attained in 2018/19.

For *Middle Leaders* EAS has been engaged in the review and delivery of an NAEL endorsed Middle Leader Development Programme (MLDP). This programme provides an extensive portfolio of leadership development opportunities (endorsed, as appropriate, by NAEL) that meet the needs of all sectors. The programme is delivered in partnership with higher education institutions, regional consortia and other middle tier organisations.

In summary it is expected that, in relation to leadership across the region, this ongoing investment and development will ultimately provide schools with a sustainable supply of high-quality middle, senior leaders and Headteachers for the future.

#### *Teaching and Learning Support:*

One example of the support being provided is the design and implementation of a programme to improve the *quality and consistency of teaching, particularly within the secondary phase*.

The programme is aimed at addressing shortcomings as evidenced from inspection data. This data show that inspection outcomes between 2017-19 for secondary schools across the region resulting in judgements of unsatisfactory, were above the all-Wales average for leadership and management, teaching and learning experiences and standards of achievement. Across the region 7 out of nine secondary schools are in an Estyn statutory category, and all of these schools have a recommendation to develop their approach to teaching and learning.

Historically, EAS has provided support for teaching and learning either through Challenge Adviser co-ordination and brokerage, or through subject adviser support. Whilst this has provided some impact in some areas, there has been less impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

The approach now being adopted builds upon other existing school improvement strategies that EAS is engaging with, to support improvements in teaching and learning:

- the Peer working programmes, being led by Prof Mick Waters (referred to later in this report)
- the leading collaborative learning project with Dr Lyn Sharratt.
- The RADY (Raising Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters) project and evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

The programme is seen as long-term engagement strategy, working over the course of at least two business planning years that has been designed with the aim of ensuring that it:

- provides coherence with existing successful school improvement strategies;
- supports Senior Leadership Teams to engage with all key stakeholders in understanding their current baseline and desired outcome;
- reflects the current education reform agenda;
- Impacts upon the consistency and quality of teaching and learning, reducing within school variation and thus improving outcomes for all learners;
- draws upon learning from the wider educational system within and beyond Wales; and
- builds capacity to support the development of common approaches to pedagogy and a common language of learning.

Since January 2019 the EAS has been exploring different Peer Working Models with Professor Mick Waters through a programme entitled: '*A collaborative leadership approach to school improvement - Action research into effective models for peer working and review.*'

The programme is consistent with the intention across Wales to develop all schools as learning organisations in support of the ongoing curriculum reform. This peer working format is built on the philosophy of school to school collaboration explored through the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) model and recognises in particular that, as identified within the 2018 report by the OECD on Developing Schools as Learning Organisations, secondary schools in particular are finding it more challenging to develop as learning organisations.

The programme involves EAS in identifying, supporting and evaluating a range of peer working models for developing effective school leadership and pedagogy to include:

- primary/secondary interface; and
- core and non-core departments within the secondary phase.

These models were chosen to accelerate the culture of collaboration and joint working, with schools working with other schools to secure improvement.

Implementation of the project enabled leaders and practitioners to be able to share and develop practice to improve leadership, teaching and learning within their own contexts, particularly within the secondary phase. This was part of a planned 2-year programme with interim evaluations. The programme was implemented across the region throughout the Spring and early Summer terms 2019.

In June 2019, Professor Waters met with nearly all participant Headteachers to review the programme, and completed an evaluation of impact based on their responses. The overall view of those schools who had participated in the programme was that it had been worthwhile and successful for the majority of schools. The evaluation recommended that '*...more differentiation of approach for each model would see more effectiveness*', as well as a '*...smaller cohort with a more limited range of models over a longer term.*'

Within this context, the models of the first year were refined and revised for 2019-2020. The programme reached a point of delivery in March 2020 where many school visits had been completed, but many were also planned for March-May, in preparation for the completion of the evaluation for Professor Waters' review day on June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2020. At this point, there was a national school closure, and the programme was placed on hold.

EAS is committed to supporting the national development and regional delivery of pathways for *Learning Support Workers*.

Investing in the teaching assistant population is seen as a priority for the region as this represents 48% of the total EAS school workforce population. The National Mission outlines the need for the entire workforce to have the entitlement for individual development in whatever role they undertake to support school improvement, ultimately improving outcomes for all learners.

The Education Endowment Foundation research 2018 "Making the best use of teaching assistant a report summary" states teaching assistants can be used effectively in 3 main areas including:

- the effective use of teaching assistants in everyday classroom conditions;
- the effective use of teaching assistants in delivering structured interventions; and



- integrated learning work led by teachers and teaching assistants.

The professional learning approach adopted by EAS, designed to make learning support staff more effective in their roles, was determined in partnership with the Cross Regional Teaching Assistant Learning Pathway (TALP) group and supported by Welsh Government. The professional learning programmes are based on experience of design and facilitation of previous Professional Learning opportunities, the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) and learning gained from previous TALP regional delivery which includes views from current regional TALP co-ordinators and current practitioners.

Facilitation of TALP programmes is organised through EAS school to school models in most programmes, using the lead professional learning schools to lead on aspects of professional learning as per the agreed regional professional learning strategy.

A total of 296 participants have provided feedback on the practicing Teaching Assistant programme:

- 41% of participants stated they felt that the training would have a very high impact on their daily practice back in school;
- a further 45% stated that they felt the programme would have a high impact on their daily practice as a teaching assistant;
- 88% agreed or strongly agreed that the content of the training was relevant to them in their role in school.
- 81% agreed or strongly agreed that they have a better understanding of their role as a result of the training.

The evidence-based rationale, for investing heavily in providing an extensive suite of programmes to improve leadership and the quality of teaching and learning, is a clear demonstration of *'doing the right things'*. However, there is also a need to look at the impact that the programmes are having.

In looking at the overall effectiveness of the programmes being delivered it is reasonable to adopt the following success measures:

- In the long term, schools engaged in the programmes would expect to see an improvement in Estyn judgements for the quality of teaching and leadership and a reduction in the number of recommendations relating to leadership and teaching (18 months to 2 years).
- In the longer-term sustained (and sustainable) improvements in teaching and learning should impact on improved outcomes for learners (2/3 years).
- Support levels (categorisation) would reduce over time
- Estyn inspections / visits to schools in statutory categories would highlight improvements in teaching and learning
- Less schools in a statutory category

If one accepts the above success criteria then analysis of the extent to which they are being achieved is a valid indicator of the effectiveness of the programmes. The evidence to date shows that:

- school performance and pupil outcomes are improving although significant problems persist in the secondary sector;

- over the last three years Estyn judgements for the quality of teaching and leadership have shown a significant improvement across the region. The extent of this improvement is illustrated below:

2017

- 50% teaching, 50% leadership good or excellent
- 2% Excellent teaching, 8% Excellent Leadership

2018

- 74% teaching, 66% leadership good or excellent
- 10% Excellent teaching, 10% Excellent Leadership

2019

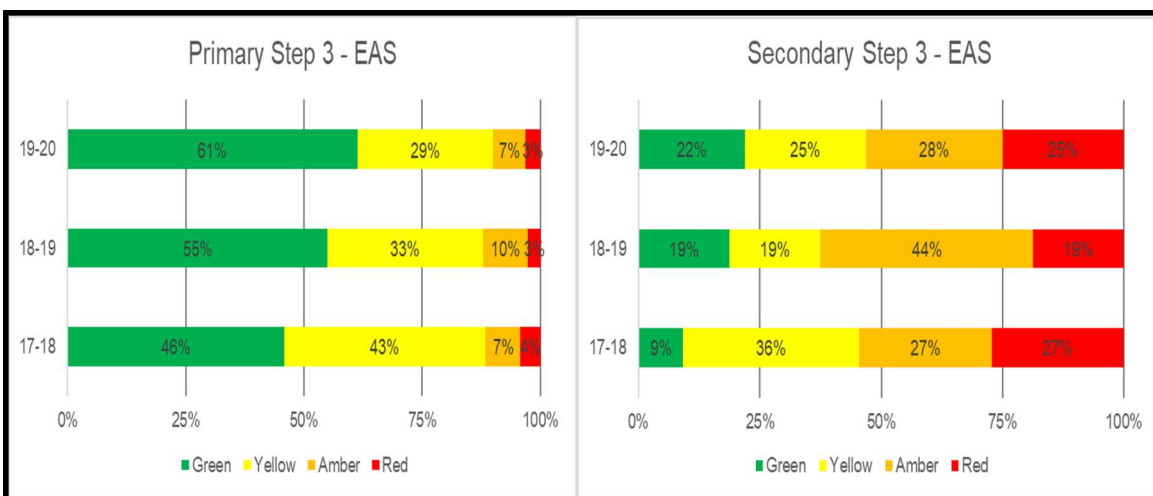
- 78% teaching, 75% leadership good or excellent
- 22% Excellent teaching, 28% Excellent Leadership

2020

- NB only 4 inspections taken place this year due to COVID-19

The aim now is to continue to improve Estyn inspection outcomes over the next three year by increasing the numbers of good and excellent leadership and teaching judgements and reducing the number of recommendations linked to leadership and teaching. For the period 2016 -2020 leadership related recommendations accounted for 22% of all recommendations. However, once again there was a significant difference between the primary and secondary sectors with the figure being 18% for primary schools and 32% for secondary schools; emphasising the problems associated with leadership in secondary schools across the region.

- Categorisation outcome data over the last three years (see graphs below) provides evidence of improved teaching and leadership in schools across the region, including a significant increase in excellent practice. However, once again primary schools show a stronger improvement picture than secondary schools.



**Sustainability – spending for the long term. An extensive programme of Human Resource support allied to a comprehensive programme of development support is in place to ensure the attraction and retention of high calibre professionals across the region.**

Attracting and retaining high performing professionals both within schools and EAS itself is central to ensuring sustainability both in relation to the quality of service provision and the ability to make best use of that provision to ensure continuous improvement in outcomes.

Most people would argue that attraction and retention, to promote sustainability, is heavily reliant upon:

- effective recruitment;
- providing development support;
- providing development opportunities; and
- facilitating progression;

EAS has done much over the last few years to facilitate this process, both through the comprehensive programme of development support referred to earlier and through the provision of extensive Human Resource (HR) support. As noted in previous reports the development of the Specialist HR service enables economies of scale to be achieved across the region and encourages a common approach, where possible, to the implementation of key policies and practices. The development of a range of common regional policies and guidance documents means that all school's within the region are being recommended the same processes, reducing variability across the region in the way leadership recruitment, capability processes and performance management processes are undertaken and teacher's pay is implemented.

The regional professional learning programmes, delivered by the Specialist HR Service, enable school leadership to access sessions that support the development of people management skills, while delivering a common message on these processes across the region.

The existence of the Specialist HR Service has encouraged greater collaborative working between Local Authority HR teams on the production of key policies and approaches. Opportunities for sharing best practice are provided regularly through half termly meetings and an increase in communication and collaborative approaches to matters has been seen over the past 12 months.

Having the Specialist HR service in a central role in the EAS has proved effective in providing clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the EAS and the Local Authorities in many processes. This has included the Headteacher recruitment process and more recently, the process for convening statutory committees for HR processes. The Specialist HR service provides a direct link for discussion between EAS teams and Local Authority HR teams, enabling messages of concern to be relayed and options to address issues to be discussed more easily.

The work undertaken by the Specialist HR service to support the ongoing development of a high-quality education profession can be summarised as:

- providing specific, high level HR support for EAS staff dealing with HR issues that arise out of the "support and challenge" role to schools being undertaken by Challenge Advisers;
- developing guidance and professional learning around people management for both school leaders and governing bodies, in collaboration with Local Authority HR, that supports both the recruitment and development of effective leaders in schools across the region;

- providing this guidance and professional learning to school leaders to enable them to effectively support and challenge their staff, build the capacity of the school-based workforce, to contribute to raising standards; and
- working collaboratively with South East Wales Consortium HR to enable a consistent approach to people management matters that impact upon school improvement.

While, for the purposes of structuring this report, the programmes of professional development and HR support are treated separately, the delivery reality is one of complementarity as the following examples demonstrate.

*Effective Recruitment:*

Leadership development programmes, however well designed and delivered, need to be complemented by effective recruitment if the potential benefits are to be fully realised. To facilitate effective recruitment EAS entered into a consultative process to develop new exemplar job descriptions that incorporate the requirements of the new Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership introduced in Sept 2018. Views on the content of the job descriptions were also sought from Dr Andrew James Davies of Aberystwyth University, who has published research papers on the recruitment and retention of Headteachers.

Following the development of the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher job descriptions it became apparent through discussions with stakeholders, that there was demand from schools to expand the bank of standard recommended job descriptions and EAS developed these for both Assistant Headteacher and Classroom Teacher roles. These were agreed by all Local Authority Education Directors and are now widely used across the region.

In addition to the development of exemplar job descriptions EAS works closely with the Local Authorities to provide significant support to school governing bodies in the recruitment process for appointing Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers. This support includes the introduction of new assessments methods, commonly used for leadership recruitment in other industries. These methods allow governing bodies to fully assess the skills, experience, qualities and potential of candidates for Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher positions. Recruiting the right person for the school is crucial so ensuring a governing body has a range of complimentary options for selection, that test all the requirements for the post and also the fit for the school, is essential.

*Providing development support:*

Discussions with school leadership members over a period of time revealed that many felt they were not prepared for the people management element of the role, as the training provided in preparing them for the role of a Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher did not previously include this element. Specialist HR has worked with the Professional Learning team to contribute towards delivery of the milestone programmes by designing and delivering HR related content, primarily focussed on managing change and holding challenging conversations. The aim is to provide school leaders with more confidence in implementing effective performance management measures to address performance issues early to support school improvement. Discussions have also been held around contributing to sessions relating to wellbeing and resilience. To date, delivery has included:

- design and delivery of a general People Management session for the Aspiring Headteacher's programme;
- design and delivery of a Making Challenging Conversations a Success session as part of the Senior Leaders milestone programme;

- design of a Managing People through Change session to be delivered as part of the national New and Acting Headteachers programme; and
- assisting the Professional Learning EAS lead for the national Experienced Headteacher programme to identify suitable external organisations to administer 360 feedback processes and sessions as part of the programme.

## Conclusion:

As stated in the introduction to this report, VfM is a measure of the extent to which an organisation, in this case EAS, is achieving its intended outcomes and objectives from the resources at its disposal. Separate reference to outcomes and objectives should not be interpreted as implying that they are in any sense divorced from one another. On the contrary, intended outcomes will only be achieved if the organisation's objectives represent the necessary and sufficient constituent activity that best facilitates achievement of those outcomes.

For EAS, objectives around attracting, developing and retaining a high-quality workforce, both within the organisation and across the schools in the region, represent a coherent set of enablers to achieve intended outcomes in terms of school performance and pupil attainment. This alignment results in objectives that are mutually reinforcing and facilitate complementary provision in terms of the delivery of support programmes.

The complementary delivery of programmes that underpin objectives aligned to intended outcomes, and are closely aligned to National Objectives to help prepare schools to meet the challenges of curriculum and evaluation reform, provides evidence that EAS is '*doing the right things*'. Survey returns from recipient schools and participating individuals that show a high level of satisfaction with services being delivered provide evidence that EAS is '*doing the right things well*'. Improvements in outcomes provide evidence of '*impact*' and the good use being made of externally commissioned research to evaluate current approaches and improve future provision provide evidence of '*sustainable improvement*'.

In summary EAS is providing a service that is:

- doing the right things;
- doing them well;
- having an impact; and
- sustainable

All of which support the overall conclusion that EAS continues to provide good VfM in terms of the services it provides to schools across the region.