

Education delivery risk

As a result of: fundamental changes to the curriculum; tensions over teachers' pay and workload pressures; long-term impacts on children's mental health arising from the pandemic; and behavioural problems and absenteeism, there is a risk that WG will not deliver the education reform and improvement commitments within the ONM High Standards and Aspirations for All Roadmap, particularly curriculum implementation and evaluation, ALN reform, equity and reducing the impact of poverty on attainment. Which could result in: learners not fulfilling their potential, having equal opportunities and gaining the skills and knowledge to play an active role in contributing to resilient communities and a prosperous economy; insufficient focus on the improvement of Pisa results, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy, and an adverse impact on learner outcomes and Wales' Well-being goals.

Mitigation

Note the controls need to be revisited as some are future actions. Implement the new curriculum for Wales to transform the way children learn, providing greater direction and support for the profession particularly with a focus on higher standards and numeracy. Continue to build a high-quality education profession equipped to deliver the new curriculum; Improve leadership and standards in schools, supported through strengthening collaboration, professional learning, and improved school improvement processes. Develop strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity, attendance and well-being, and additional learning needs support, so learners are equipped to learn in a safe and supportive environment. Link to HSSG to maintain our whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing, enabling schools to work with families and wider communities and support their learners to attend, engage and thrive. Link to early years and post 16 / apprenticeships /HE policy to bring together the lifelong learning experience Progress the Partner review process to ensure a clearer focus on educational standards, workload reduction and VfM of funding through clearer roles and responsibilities, and a more robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements that support a self-improving system; Support preparation for PISA through the dedicated Consortia Group and continue to use the Headteachers working group to improve perceptions of PISA with schools.

Workforce risk

Workforce and workload pressures continue to be challenging. For teachers, the recorded number of hours worked weekly (as reported by EWC) often exceeds 55. This is higher than averages in UK and Europe. The range of expectations of headteachers is considered to be excessive. Head teachers report they have a wide range of responsibilities beyond those covered in their contracts. These include attending out of hours emergencies such as burglaries, water leaks, fires as a consequence of denuded services at LA level. Alongside the outcome of the next pay review, there is a risk that these pressures could lead to industrial action.

Mitigation

We have created a number of working groups to address workload and wellbeing including:

- Finance and grants
- Reporting and engagement
- Impact of policy on teachers' and headteachers' workload

Through these groups, we have made changes to workload, for example:

- We have simplified our grants systems/funding
- The middle tier review has resulted in us beginning the process of streamlining reporting and engagement
- We have introduced a policy workload impact assessment in government and have made some changes based on the takeaways from these assessments.

There is ongoing dialogue between Welsh Government and local authorities regarding the shortfall in local authority resourcing of critical roles due to budgetary constraints, which is resulting in headteachers absorbing these additional responsibilities.

We continue the work of the working groups, and report to the Schools Social Partnership Forum (SSPF). Anna Brychan has been appointed to chair the Coordination group. The current position is that unions are being consulted on the recommendations of the IWPRB for the coming pay round and appear not to be considering any form of industrial action, be it strike or action short of strike.

As part of the development of the strategic education workforce plan, we will be working through the SSPF and four sub-groups on Pay, workload, ALN coordinators and TAs to agree medium to long term actions to address concerns. Wellbeing will be a cross-cutting theme across all of the work. Alongside this we will be developing our vision for supporting the workforce throughout their careers and identifying key data that is currently not available to inform developments. We will also be considering the role of the teacher for the future and will use the OECD Teacher Professional Identity report and other evidence to inform our thinking.

Workforce issue

There is a wide and increasing range of school workforce issues being highlighted and impacting on the system, which are compounding the ability of local authorities to create a capable and resilient workforce to effectively deliver the reforms and ambitions of the curriculum for Wales. The issues include continuing concerns around workload, learning support workers, pay and conditions, recruitment and retention (including WM), professional learning and ITE, wellbeing, and so on. The CYPE Committee report published on 29 January 2026 provides further evidence of and commentary on the challenges being faced. There is a degree of consensus emerging around the Strategic Education Workforce Plan for Schools, but it will take time for the plan to be implemented, and frustrations in the sector are likely to remain.

Actions

The Strategic Education Workforce Plan for Schools is due to be published on 18 March 2026; it is being taken to Cabinet on 9 February. This will help tackle the issues over the short, medium, and long terms, though material change could take some time owing to the complexity and different interests within the system.

Financial pressures issue

The longer-term financial recovery of the UK in respect of Covid-19, the cost-of-living crisis and inflation increases has placed education funding, including frontline budgets, under significant and sustained pressure. Education settings are unable to maintain their current staffing levels, against a backdrop of industrial relations challenges and capacity issues, at a local and national level. This is impacting our ability to deliver in a sustainable way.

Local Authorities and schools are responsible for ensuring that sufficient, suitable staff are employed or engaged to work at the school, to provide education appropriate for the ages, aptitudes, abilities

and needs of the pupils. The funding crisis in Welsh schools has put significant pressure on budgets and schools are having to make difficult decisions including teacher and other school staff redundancies because of local authority budgetary pressures.

NAHT Cymru (National Association for Head Teachers) published their annual report on 20 September 2025 'Falling Short: The Deepening School Funding Crisis in Wales'. On 1 December 2025, following the publication of the 2026-27 Draft Budget, they also launched a national campaign '#FairFundingNow' calling Senedd members to rethink the education allocations considering the education consequential funding from UK Government.

School reserves have been high over recent years due to additional funding provided during and post pandemic. These reserves have been reducing significantly, and we are seeing many schools going into deficit positions. As of March 2025, school reserves had dropped to £66m and 393 schools were in deficit which equates to 27% of schools in Wales. We are almost one year on from the latest recorded position, and we are being told by the sector that the position has continued to worsen. We have recently seen a local authority issue warning notices to schools, and this has caused unease amongst stakeholders including unions.

Schools will shortly be in the process of setting their budgets for 2026-27 and we anticipate that more schools will be operating with deficit budgets. This will cause further pressure on local authorities to take action. The WLGA have reported that on top of in-year school budget pressures of £71m, they are anticipating future pressures in the region of £137m in 2026-27, £115m in 2027-28 and £122m in 2028-29. Pay inflation and demand for ALN provision were noted as the largest pressures on school budgets.

Although increases to the Local Government Settlement and the additional grant funding are welcomed by the sector, we are continuously being told by our stakeholders that the existing and ongoing financial and workforce pressures are not sustainable, especially with school reserves being exhausted.

Actions

WG prioritised funding for public services (including schools) through maintained year on year rise in Local Government settlement (LAs determine level of allocation of their funding to education and set budgets for their schools). Additional grant funding to schools also prioritised in recent budgets, alongside continued education-specific grant amalgamation activity. However, the vast majority of funding for education (including schools) in Wales is set by local authorities who determine the level of investment in education, balanced against other services they fund. Education grant funding from WG supplements this somewhat, however ultimately local authorities determine the level of investment in education in Wales.

Education has been identified as a key priority through the WG spending review work.

SIPP has enabled the reallocation of funding back to LAs and to support a more streamlined and nationally consistent approach to PL, curriculum, and locally-bespoke and responsive improvement.

Cabinet Secretary priority to update the school funding and budget regulations, which aim to provide greater transparency, comparability and consistency in the school funding system.

The 4% increase to teacher's pay which is to be fully funded by WG has been agreed which is effective from September 2025 as part of the Welsh Government's commitment to support education funding.