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Process Evaluation of Community Focused Schools Funding

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Process evaluation of community focused schools funding

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

ALN

Additional Learning Needs

CAVC

Cardiff and Vale College

CAMHS

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CFS

Community Focused Schools

CFSM

Community Focused School Manager

EOI

Expression of Interest

FACE

Family and Community Engagement

FEO

Family Engagement Officer

FEW

Family Engagement Worker

MEGRT

Minority Ethnic, Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller

NEET

Not in education, employment, or training

Parent(s)/carer(s)

Refers to parents, guardians, and foster/kinship carers

PLC

Pembrokeshire Learning Centre

PDG

Pupil Development Grant

PRU

Pupil Referral Unit

RAG

Red Amber Green

ToC

Theory of Change

WIMD

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

1. Introduction and background

1.1. Policy context

The Community Focused Schools (CFS) strategy aims to combine family, community, and multi-agency engagement to benefit learners and their families ([Welsh Government, 2022a](#)). This involves schools building a strong partnership with families, responding to the needs of the community, and collaborating effectively with other services. The strategy aligns closely with the central ambition of the [Curriculum for Wales](#), which is to equip all children and young people with the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need to thrive in their future lives. The model was developed as a response to research that found that strong relationships between schools and the community, as well as comprehensive multi-agency engagement, are fundamental drivers of educational success, particularly for pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds ([Henig et al., 2016](#); [Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2016](#); [Moran & Duffy, 2016](#)).

Child poverty is a major issue across Wales. Almost all respondents of the 7th Annual Child and Family Poverty Survey highlighted that poverty amongst the children and families they work with in Wales has worsened in the last year, the highest recorded figure to date ([MacFarlane, 2023](#)). In 2023, the Children’s Commissioner for Wales emphasised this challenge, stating that child poverty is “the biggest issue affecting children in Wales” ([Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2023](#)). Although this has been a major issue for some time, evidence suggests the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated rates of poverty as well as negatively impacted young people’s education, health, and wellbeing ([IFS & Nuffield Foundation, 2021](#); [House of Lords, 2021](#)).

Research has consistently highlighted that poverty is closely linked to lower educational outcomes ([Thompson & Invinson, 2020](#)), as well as reduced employment opportunities and a higher likelihood of ill-health and lower life satisfaction ([Blanden et al., 2010](#)). The lasting impact of socioeconomic factors from a young age highlights the need for early interventions to best support children and young people living in poverty.

1.1.1. Introduction of CFS in Wales

In response to this, the Welsh Government has instigated various policies to ensure all children and young people are able to reach their potential, regardless of their socioeconomic background. A core element of their approach is the CFS strategy, with the concept of community focused schools having informed Welsh education policy since the early years of devolution ([National Academy for Educational Leadership, 2023](#)). This approach emphasises that to better support learners, schools should develop closer connections to the community they serve.

1.1.2. Early utilisation of the CFS approach

A more formalised introduction of CFS policy occurred in 2003 by the then National Assembly for Wales, which provided grant funding to help schools provide a range of services and activities to help meet the needs of pupils, their families, and the wider community. These included activities and services relating to childcare, lifelong learning, language provision, health and social services, cultural and sporting activities, play service, out-of-hours learning, work experience, services for the community, and access to IT resources ([ibid](#)). Further iterations of the strategy continued to reflect the need for schools to be more rooted in the wider community, and to focus on the educational attainment of children from disadvantaged communities ([ibid](#)). The impact of CFS was formally recognised by the education and training inspectorate for Wales, Estyn, in a report published in 2020 ([Estyn, 2020](#)). This report also outlined 8 defining characteristics of a CFS, including engagement with families, a focus on learners' social, emotional, and health needs, and multi-disciplinary training and staff development ([ibid](#)).

1.1.3. Current policy and investment in CFS

The Programme for Government 2021-2026 update re-established the Welsh Government's commitment to "invest in the learning environment of Community Focused Schools, co-locating key services, and securing stronger engagement with parents and carers outside traditional hours" ([Welsh Government, 2021](#)). The commitment is part of the Welsh Government's plans for a long-term programme of educational reform to ensure the reduction of educational inequalities in line with rising standards for students in Wales ([ibid, 2023a](#)).

As part of this commitment, the Welsh Government provided a £25 million investment targeted at tackling the impact of poverty within Welsh communities to support learners who experience barriers to education ([Welsh Government, 2022b](#)). The funding aims to enable more schools to be able to operate under the CFS model, allowing them to engage families and the wider community to support learners. The investments were followed by official guidance documents and summaries by the Welsh Government ([Welsh Government, 2022a](#)). Around 1/5 of the investment is being allocated to expand the number of Family Engagement Officers (FEOs) employed by schools to tackle disadvantage and learner attendance issues ([Welsh Government, 2023b](#)). Funding is also being used to fund a trial of CFS Managers (CFSMs) based in schools to collaborate with other agencies to support pupils and the wider community ([Welsh Government, 2023c](#)). Through the strategic deployment of FEOs and CFSMs, schools are expected to develop and implement learner-centred practices that support family involvement, improve attendance, and facilitate holistic, tailored support for students' learning and wellbeing.

This funding is being allocated to local authorities on a formula based on pupil and school numbers across Wales, supporting schools that are local authority-maintained

(primary, secondary, all-age, early years settings, Pupil Referral Units, and special). In March 2023, an additional £40 million in capital funding was announced for the expansion of infrastructure, including facilities (outdoor spaces, sports facilities, etc.), along with an additional £6.5 million to fund the Education Welfare Service and further FEO roles. This capital funding allows for schools to offer co-located services, specifically community hubs, which can provide medical, housing, and other key services. A further £20 million in capital funding was made available for the financial year 2024-25, specifically to support the development of a multi-agency space, in line with guidance published on developing multi-agency engagement.

1.1.4. Current implementation and impact of CFS

Early research on 2 CFSs in Wales highlighted how location and wider social contexts informed how the schools interpreted and enacted policy agendas ([Evans et al., 2024](#)). This ties to a fundamental principle of CFS in that it should be informed and co-constructed by the communities it serves ([Sarjeant & Egan, 2023](#)). Case studies of the implementation of CFS in Wales also reflected various methods of implementation, as well as highlighting the widespread positive impacts of the scheme ([Welsh Government, 2023d](#)). Schools introduced a range of activities and initiatives, such as baby and toddler groups, home visits, activities over the summer holidays, a food bank, and coffee mornings. Multiple schools were able to use funding to utilise a building on the grounds of the school for these activities, operating as a hub within the local community.

There have been widespread positive impacts indicated from the initiative, including higher learner attendance and lower exclusion rates, better learning engagement and skill development, increased parental engagement and communication between parents and school staff, less anti-social behaviour in the wider community, and a greater overall sense of inclusion and respect for all ([ibid](#)).

Although the importance of this approach is widely acknowledged, an inquiry undertaken by the Associates of the National Academy for Educational Leadership ([2023](#)) highlighted practical challenges of implementation, stating that there needs to be further collaborative leadership across sectors, as heads of schools cannot operate in isolation. Concerns were also raised regarding the capacity of educational leaders to enact key elements of CFS, highlighting the need for substantial support structures to allow for both professional development as well as mitigating substantive workloads.

1.2. Evaluation aims and objectives

To ensure the programme best supports the needs of children, it is important that the CFS strategy is evaluated to capture a comprehensive picture of the strategy's implementation and emergent outcomes to provide evidence-based insights. The Welsh Government, therefore, commissioned Alma Economics in partnership with

IAITH to evaluate the early implementation of the CFS strategy. The evaluation's objectives were to:

- understand how CFS funding is allocated and delivered, and what difference it is making in schools
- examine how CFS funding helps tackle disadvantage and other barriers to learning and participation
- explore wider impacts on learner wellbeing, school capacity, and communities
- identify what is working well, what is challenging, and where improvements are needed
- develop clear, practical recommendations to support the further development of the CFS strategy

The evaluation focused on family and community engagement, the operational dynamics of FEO and CFSM roles, and the overarching contribution of the initiative to learner wellbeing, educational equity, and community engagement and cohesion in Wales to ensure the aims of the investment are being met.

The evaluation aims to further support the Welsh Government's understanding of how CFS funding is being deployed at the local level, the challenges and successes encountered in its implementation, and the potential for replicating effective practices across the Welsh educational system and informing broader policy objectives.

1.3. Structure of the report

This report contains the following sections:

- Chapter 2 covers the methodological approach, including sample sizes for each phase of stakeholder engagement and limitations of the study
- Chapter 3 sets out the findings from this research on the early implementation of the CFS strategy from a survey with schools, local authority representatives, CFSMs and FEOs, follow-up interviews with CFSMs and FEOs, and 5 case studies outlining an educational setting or local authority's approach to CFS
- Chapter 4 summarises the main conclusions from the findings on the implementation of the CFS strategy
- Chapter 5 outlines a series of recommendations informed by the findings to guide future iterations and evolution of CFS

In addition, the report contains the following Annexes:

- Annex A outlines the Theory of Change developed for this research (a tool used in evaluations to map out key inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes to support the evaluation of policies)

- Annex B provides more detail on the breakdown of participants for the case studies
- Annex C presents the scripts for all surveys administered as part of this research

2. Methodology

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data from stakeholder engagement with surveys. The work was divided into 2 main phases, outlined below.

2.1. Phase 1: Scoping and baseline assessment

2.1.1. Desk-based review and stakeholder mapping

Phase 1 involved an exploratory review of academic and grey literature, policy, and legislation, to enhance understanding of the issues, ground development of research materials, and identify gaps to address through this research. The review included Senedd committee reports, Estyn publications and local authority-level grant monitoring data to assess implementation progress, emergent outcomes, and data quality. Some important sources within the Welsh context included Estyn's publication 'Community schools: families and communities at the heart of school life' ([2020](#)), Welsh Government guidance on 'Community Focused Schools' ([2022](#)), and Evans and colleagues' article 'An ethic of care in two community focused schools in Wales' ([2023](#)). While conducting the desk-based review, a stakeholder mapping exercise was conducted in parallel, where key stakeholders were identified to engage within the project.

2.1.2. Scoping interviews

To provide further context on CFS and to help refine the research approach, 8 scoping interviews were conducted with policy officials in the Welsh Government, a local authority representative, a CFMS, an FEO, a leading academic, and a third-sector organisation, working closely with families. These interviews provided important contextual information on how CFS is being implemented across Wales, and enabled adjustments to the methodological approach.

2.1.3. Theory of Change and Fidelity Framework

Based on the desk-based review and scoping interviews, a Theory of Change (ToC) was developed to help define and illustrate the intended outcomes of CFS and the pathways through which they are expected to be achieved. The ToC is a tool used in evaluations to map out key inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes to support the evaluation of policies and programmes. The ToC can be found in the Annex of this report.

Once the ToC was approved, a Fidelity Framework was developed, intending to assess how closely CFS was implemented in individual settings compared to its original design and intent. It followed Carroll and colleagues' ([2007](#)) suggested domains of adherence, dosage, quality, and participant responsiveness. The

Framework focused on short-term outcomes consistent with the implementation stage (aligned with the ToC). This Framework guided the development of research materials, ensuring the evaluation aligned with established implementation research.

2.1.4. Research ethics

In parallel to the other scoping activities, an internal Research Ethics Committee was convened. This was made up of senior Alma Economics researchers who were not involved in the project to provide ethical advice. They approved the research design and appropriate materials in January 2025, prior to any fieldwork commencing.

2.2. Phase 2: Fieldwork and analysis

2.2.1. Surveys with schools, local authorities, CFSMs, and FEOs

Following the completion of the scoping phase, online surveys were distributed to schools, local authority representatives, CFSMs, and FEOs. These surveys aimed to assess how CFS is understood and implemented across Wales (see Annex B for survey scripts). Recognising the challenges of engaging time-pressured schools and aiming to maximise participation across educational settings, 2 separate surveys were developed for schools:

- a brief version (about 5 minutes) to capture important information on whether schools were aware of, and/or engaging with, the CFS strategy or not
- a more detailed version (about 15 minutes) for schools with more advanced engagement and the capacity to provide additional insights

The detailed survey explored areas such as CFS-related activities, barriers and enablers to implementation, funding received, and initial outcomes. For CFSMs and FEOs, the survey focused on perceptions of their role, experiences of training, guidance and professional development, daily responsibilities, and early outcomes of the initiative. Local authority representatives were asked about CFS implementation in their area, including any barriers or enablers encountered, funding, partnerships, and collaborations developed, and their approaches to monitoring, evaluation, and measuring outcomes.

Survey distribution was timed carefully to avoid school holidays, which could have limited engagement. To ensure widespread engagement, the following methods were mobilised to share the surveys:

- Hwb newsletter (for schools)
- IAITH's network of Welsh-medium and bilingual schools (for schools)

- Welsh Government email networks (for CFSPMs, FEOs, and local authority representatives)

Surveys were sent to the full population for each target group (e.g., all CFSPMs), and respondents self-selected to complete the survey. The surveys were open between May and June 2025. To sign up for the follow-up engagement, at the end of the survey, CFSPMs and FEOs could choose to complete a separate Expression of Interest (EOI) form to provide their name and contact details, which meant that the survey responses remained anonymous. For schools and local authorities, the EOI form also included the opportunity to nominate a school setting or local authority to participate in a case study (further information provided below).

When analysing survey data, descriptive statistics and tabulations were generated, including means and frequencies and group-based analyses when relevant. While most questions were closed, qualitative content analysis was used to analyse open-text responses using a thematic framework.

2.2.2. Follow-up interviews with CFSPMs and FEOs

Following the survey's closing, follow-up interviews were conducted with CFSPMs and FEOs to gain further depth on their experiences of implementing the CFS strategy within their specific context. Participants were mostly recruited through the survey, with a small amount of supplementary recruitment conducted through direct contacts provided by the Welsh Government. Recruitment was targeted to ensure coverage across Wales. Key topic areas included the day-to-day responsibilities and role development, priorities within the role and alignment with CFS strategy, partnerships and collaborations, and perceived impacts of their role. Follow-up interviews were conducted online over Microsoft Teams and lasted around 45 minutes.

2.2.3. Case studies

To demonstrate how CFS is being implemented in practice across contexts in Wales, 5 case studies were conducted. From a long list of nominated school settings and local authorities, 5 case studies were chosen to provide a mix of school characteristics (e.g., language medium, primary or secondary level), varying levels of socio-economic disadvantage (e.g., percentage of eFSM learners), and a range of implementation progress and approaches. While it may have been of interest to include settings with limited or particularly difficult implementation, it was recognised that engagement in these settings would likely have been extremely challenging. Therefore, case studies focused on examples of success and good practice, although they still captured a range of limitations and barriers.

Case study coordination was facilitated by a key contact in each setting. Each case study involved an in-person site visit by 2 researchers, supplemented by online

interviews with key personnel prior to/following the site visit. Additionally, a short survey was shared with parents/carers.

Fieldwork approaches were tailored to each local context, comprising a mixture of interviews, focus groups, and informal engagement with stakeholders, including CFSMs, local authority representatives, school leaders, school governors, FEOs, teachers and other staff, parents/carers, and community partners. Where possible, fieldwork aligned with local activities, such as celebration events, parent engagement afternoons, and coffee mornings. This aimed to reduce local burden, since stakeholders would be gathered anyway, and allowed the evaluation team to observe CFS activities in action.

Initial plans for the case studies included greater engagement through surveys with school leadership, staff, local authority representatives, community partners, and families; however, due to stakeholders in the scoping phase noting the common challenges of low survey engagement, the approach was shifted toward more qualitative engagement. There was also an original intention to conduct more formal engagements with parents/carers. However, informal engagements, such as unrecorded discussions during CFS activities, were ultimately deemed most appropriate for parents/carers, given challenges with engagement. Practical and ethical complexities also limited the evaluation’s capacity to engage with learners.

To analyse qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and informal engagements in site visits, 4 iterative steps of thematic analysis were conducted: familiarisation, coding, theme development, and reporting. This was carried out within an analytical framework to identify areas of stakeholder agreement and points of divergence on key themes.

2.2.4. Sample sizes achieved for stakeholder engagement

The sample size achieved for the surveys is as follows (full population sizes and percentage of reach are not included, as this is not clear for all groups):

Table 1: Survey sample size

Participant group	Number of responses
CFSMs	18 (15 local authorities)
FEOs	37 (15 local authorities)
Local authority representatives	12 (12 local authorities)
Schools (short survey)	91 (18 local authorities)
Schools (longer survey)	22 (7 local authorities)
Case study schools: parents/carers	114 (5 local authorities)

The sample size for the follow-up engagement, including case studies, is as follows:

Table 2: Follow-up sample size

Participant group	Number of participants in follow-up interviews	Number of participants engaged in case studies
CFSMs	6 (across 6 local authorities)	4
FEOs	5 (across 4 local authorities)	11
Local authority representatives	n/a	5
School leadership team	n/a	14
School governors/Management Committees	n/a	10
Teachers and other school staff	n/a	8
Community partners	n/a	18
Parents/carers	n/a	26
Total	11	96

For a further breakdown of stakeholder groups in each case study, see Annex B.

2.3. Limitations

While many diverse groups engaged in this research, there were several challenges in recruitment and engagement. It had initially been anticipated that parents/carers and learners in each case study would engage through formal interviews or small focus groups. Ultimately, this kind of engagement was not feasible in many case study contexts.

In some cases, limited engagement with learners was due to much of the CFS work occurring on the strategic level and local contacts feeling learners would be unable to comment at this early stage, as well as sensitivities with engaging learners in certain settings (for example, learners with complex needs in the Pembrokeshire case study).

With parents/carers, the methodology shifted to prioritise engagement with a larger number through informal participation (e.g., discussions during ongoing activities) and a short survey. While this increased the breadth of parental/carer input and avoided participant burden, the evaluation was unable to capture their in-depth perspectives

on issues such as challenges of and motivations for school engagement. Any future evaluation of CFS or similar initiatives should prioritise an exploration of both learner and parent/carer perspectives in greater depth.

There was also more limited engagement with non-leadership school staff than anticipated, largely due to ongoing capacity pressures and competing demands on their time. However, teachers and wider school staff were meaningfully involved in several of the case studies, which provided valuable insights into their experiences of CFS within the school.

As with any project of this scale, the sample size and approach did not allow full demographic representation of settings across Wales. Participation was self-selecting, relying on individuals and institutions having the time, interest, and capacity to participate. This inevitably shaped the composition of those involved. It should be noted that those who volunteer to take part in an evaluation of any initiative may be more positive and enthusiastic about it than those who do not. These limitations have been taken into account in the analysis and reporting. Nonetheless, the research captured a broad and diverse range of perspectives. The insights have contributed to a rich and nuanced understanding of how CFS has been implemented and understood, as outlined in the findings below.

3. Findings

This section outlines findings for each element of the evaluation, beginning with national-level findings, followed by case studies.

3.1. Survey analysis

3.1.1. Local authority survey

Key findings:

- CFS falls within a range of departments, but all are felt to be suitable.
- Considerable evidence of increased collaboration resulting from CFS, especially with other local authority departments and local schools; limited evidence of entirely new collaborations.
- Challenges include demonstrating the relevance of CFS to schools and funding limitations.
- Half of the responding local authorities do not collect any monitoring and evaluation data on CFS.

We received 12 responses from stakeholders who work in a local authority in Wales and have a key role in CFS implementation. Participating local authorities are not listed here to protect anonymity. In terms of how CFS grant funding is allocated, 5 local authorities reported that they keep funding centrally, 3 distribute funding to schools directly, and 4 use a combination of both strategies.

Respondents from most local authorities reported that the departments responsible for implementing CFS were related to education (e.g., Education Services, Education Welfare Service, Education and Children's Services, or Education, Early Years, and Young People) or departments like Attendance and Wellbeing Services or Equity and Wellbeing. All respondents felt their department was well-placed to oversee CFS implementation, noting that CFS aligns closely with education priorities and reflects a broader ethos of supporting attendance and wellbeing.

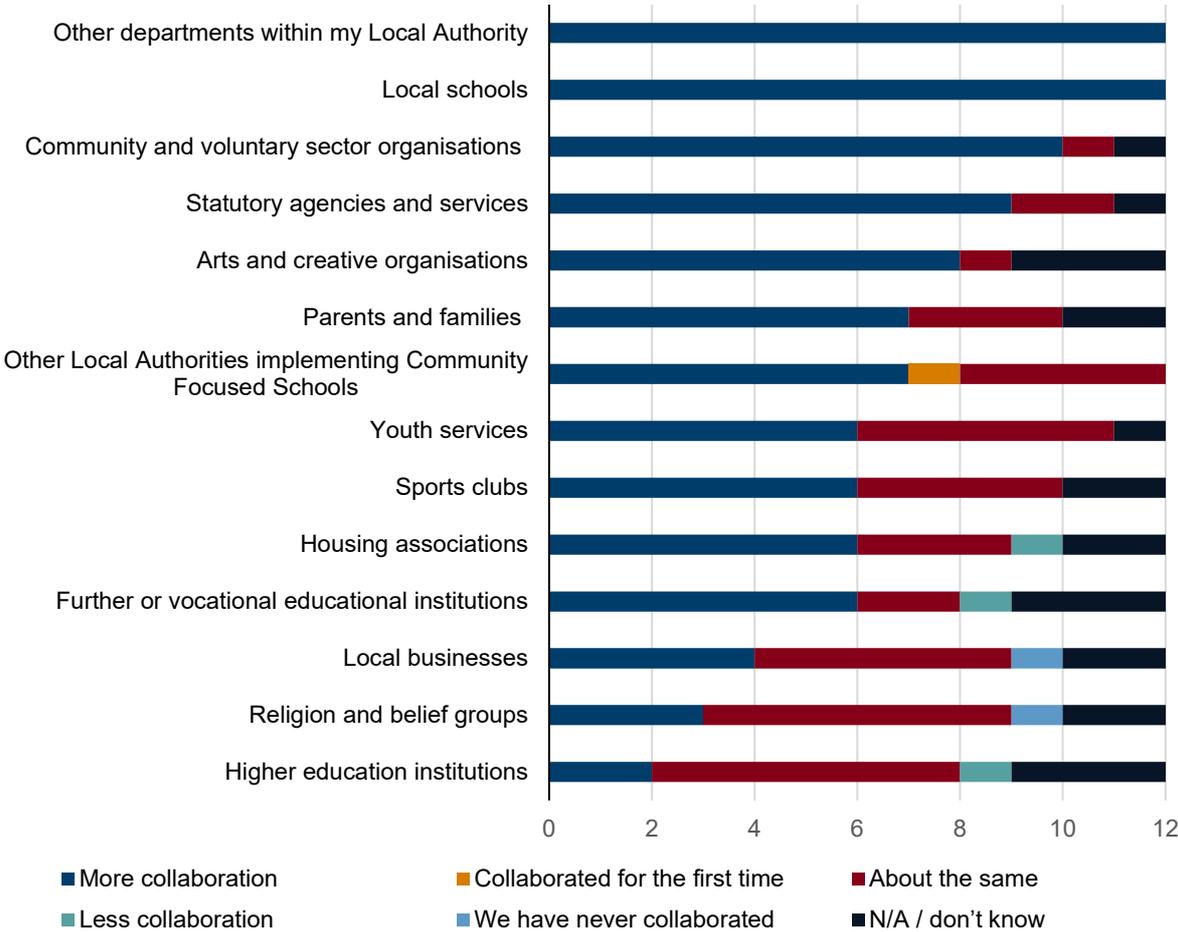
Interestingly, in one case, it was noted that responsibility for CFS had previously been placed within the community development team but had recently moved to the education department. This transition was seen as positive, helping to refocus the work on impact and need, while retaining the valuable knowledge and relationships built through the community development team.

The number of schools reported to be implementing CFS within local authorities varied. Some gave specific numbers, while others reflected that this was difficult to answer, as schools may embrace the ethos of CFS without receiving specific funding.

All local authorities reported increased collaboration with other departments within their own organisations and with local schools since the implementation of CFS. The majority also indicated greater collaboration with a range of external partners, including community and voluntary sector organisations, statutory agencies and services, arts, and creative organisations, other local authorities implementing CFS, parents/carers and families, youth services, sports clubs, housing organisations, and further or vocational education institutions.

By contrast, between 5 and 6 local authorities stated that their level of collaboration has remained the same with higher education institutions, religion and belief groups, and local businesses. Interestingly, a small number of local authorities (one for each category) reported reduced collaboration since the implementation of CFS, particularly with housing associations, further or vocational education institutions, and higher education institutions. There was limited evidence of new collaborations established.

Figure 1: Implementing the CFS: Partnerships and collaborations. Since implementing the CFS strategy, how have partnerships and collaborations between your Local Authority and the following changed?



Source: Local Authorities survey, n=12

Other partnerships reported included health services, the police, community groups like family centres, and outdoor education centres and regional organisations, such as regional education consortia (regional education consortia in Wales were phased out by late 2024, as the [Welsh Government](#) moved to a more localised school improvement model). It was reported that these collaborations have contributed to the success of CFS in important ways. They have enabled the provision of holistic support for children and families, addressing not only educational needs but also issues such as attendance, mental health, housing, and overall family wellbeing. This collaborative work has also helped identify areas of need and best practice and has facilitated the sharing of resources and ideas. However, it was noted that developing this type of collaborative working can take time.

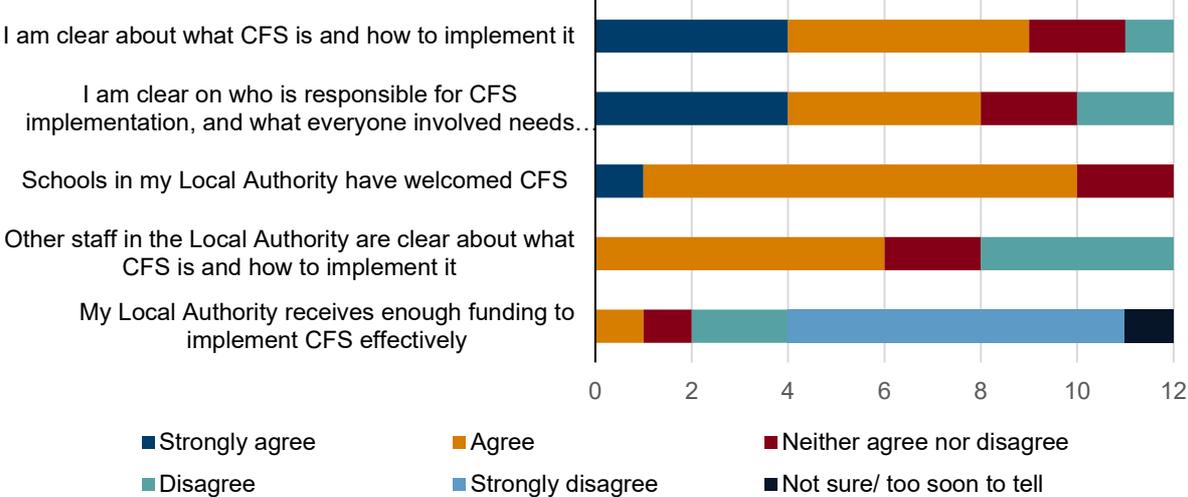
Some local authorities reported challenges in engaging with certain schools. For example, it was noted that some schools with low levels of free school meal eligibility (eFSM) may consider the policy as not relevant to them. Other barriers to engagement included limited staff availability, the size or geographical location of the school, lack of physical space for FEOs to work, and differing school priorities. Funding was also highlighted as an important factor that can limit schools' ability to engage effectively, often in relation to the FEO funding from the Welsh Government.

Almost half of the respondents (5 local authorities) reported that they did not collect any monitoring and evaluation data on the implementation and/or effectiveness of CFS. Respondents emphasised the need for clearer and more consistent approaches to monitoring and evaluating CFS activities. Several noted that outcomes related to community engagement and family support are hard to quantify, making evaluation challenging. They suggested that having clearer guidance and key indicators of success could be beneficial, as well as a standardised data collection form to be completed, to record challenges and examples of good practice.

Some respondents mentioned that they are already developing local systems to strengthen monitoring, such as recording weekly activities, producing end-of-term reports, and drafting evaluation reports to ensure continuity. Others highlighted broader structural suggestions, including the organisation of a national annual conference for FEOs, an award scheme, and ensuring the Welsh Government mandates support from statutory service partners like health boards to promote equitable implementation across Wales.

Most local authorities (between 8 and 10) agreed or strongly agreed that they are clear about what CFS is and how to implement the strategy, who is responsible for its implementation, and what is expected of everyone involved. They also reported that schools in their area have welcomed the CFS approach. Despite this, 9 local authorities disagreed or strongly disagreed that they received sufficient funding to implement CFS effectively.

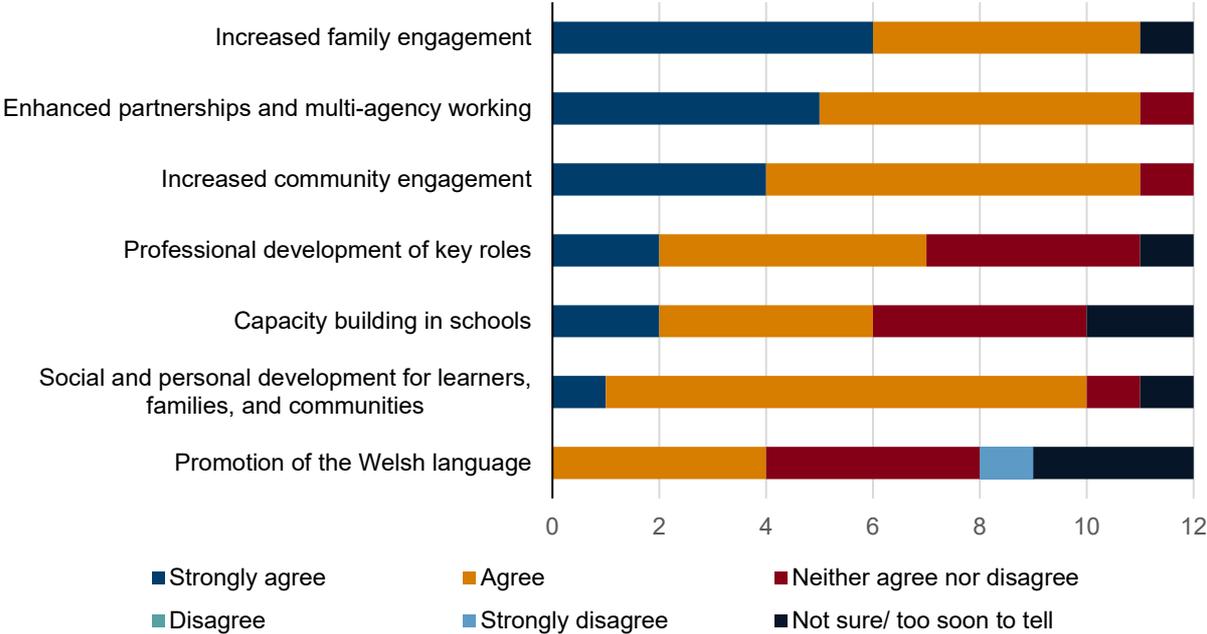
Figure 2: Enablers and barriers to CFS implementation: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement



Source: Local Authorities survey, n=12

In terms of outcomes, the vast majority of local authorities (11) agreed or strongly agreed that CFS was leading to increased family engagement, enhanced partnerships and multiagency working, and increased community engagement. Interestingly, the local authorities did not disagree with any of the suggested outcomes, with one exception. There was strong disagreement from a small number of respondents that the implementation of CFS was contributing to the promotion of the Welsh language.

Figure 3: Outcomes of CFS: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. Implementing CFS has led to:



Source: Local Authorities survey, n=12

3.1.2. FEO survey

Key findings:

- There is wide variation in FEOs' working structures and day-to-day roles.
- Enablers include autonomy and flexibility, professional background and passion, training opportunities, and networking with other FEOs.
- Barriers include high workloads and caseloads, lack of physical space in which to work, and being required to undertake non-FEO work.
- FEOs report a high level of understanding of CFS, but fewer than half feel the schools they work with understand CFS well.

In total, 37 responses from current FEOs in Wales were received. About 1/3 of the responses came from Bridgend (12), with a similar number from Neath Port Talbot (10). Additional responses were received from the following local authorities: Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey, Merthyr Tydfil, Vale of Glamorgan, Newport, Pembrokeshire, Powys, and Rhondda Cynon Taf (one response each).

Twenty-five of the FEOs who answered the survey had been in their position for more than 2 years, 9 between 1 and 2 years, and the remaining respondents for less than one year. On average, these FEOs work with 3.3 schools (range = 1-12). Twenty-two FEOs were employed by the local authority and 15 by a school or schools.

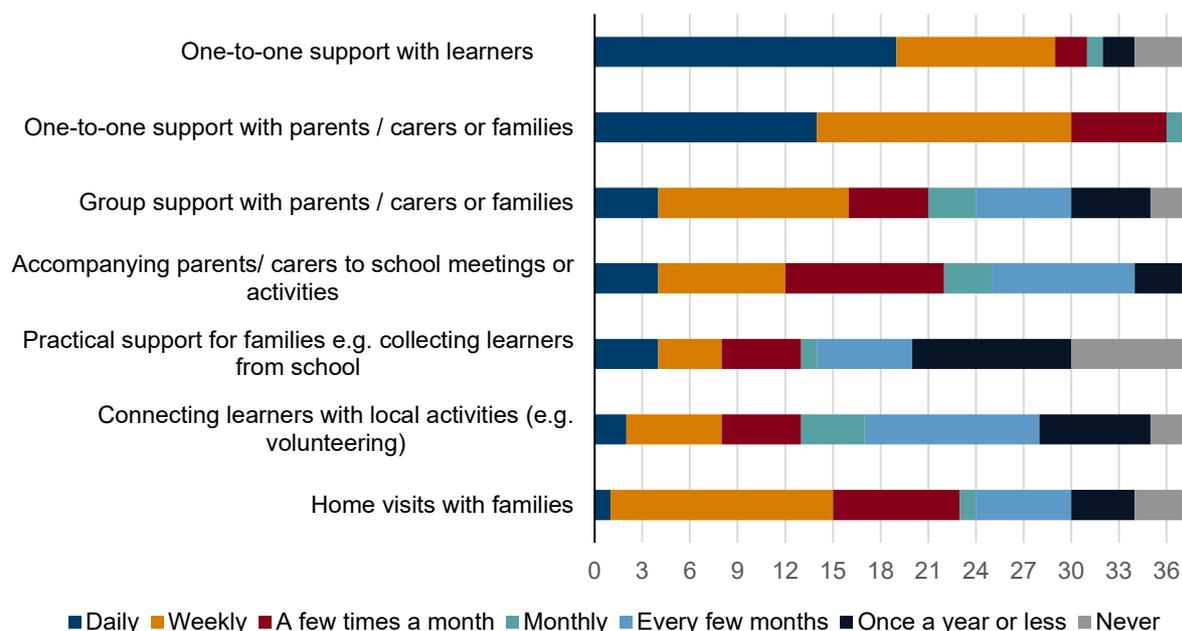
In terms of training, 5 reported receiving training at least once a month, 21 every few months, and 8 a couple of times a year. The remaining respondents reported other training frequencies (once a year, less than once a year, or never). Despite this variation, 28 of the 37 respondents felt that the amount of training, guidance, and professional development they receive is about right.

There is substantial variation in the type and extent of training received by FEOs. When asked about the training, guidance, and professional development they had undertaken to support their role, respondents mentioned a wide range of courses. These included FEO awareness sessions and basic training, safeguarding, [Mental Health First Aid](#), trauma-informed approaches, outdoor wellbeing, and training on dealing with difficult conversations and bereavement. Others referred to more specialised or advanced courses such as the National Occupational Standards in Working with Parents and Carers, [Thrive Practitioner and Family Thrive Course](#), [Leader training](#), Working with Hostile Adults, Anxiety-Based School Avoidance, Community Organising, a Level 4 Diploma in Leadership and Management, and the [Food and Fun](#) Coordinator qualification.

Many FEOs mentioned that they are willing to receive more recognised and formal training opportunities, particularly in areas such as mental health, trauma-informed practice, conflict resolution, mediation, and school attendance. However, other respondents highlighted a lack of clear guidance and formal training when entering the role, and felt this should be tailored as the CFS approach often varies considerably between schools and local authorities. Additionally, almost all (34 FEOs) had attended meetings, events, or conferences to connect with other FEOs. Of those, 32 FEOs found them very useful or somewhat useful.

Survey responses indicate important variation in the range and frequency of FEO activities. FEOs most frequently provide one-to-one support to learners and to parents/carers or families, with 29 to 30 of them reporting that they carry out these activities on a daily or weekly basis. Other commonly reported activities undertaken on a daily or weekly basis include group support sessions with parents/carers or families (16 FEOs) and home visits (15 FEOs). By contrast, a proportion of FEOs (7 of them) reported that they never provide practical support for families, such as collecting learners from school.

Figure 4: Implementing CFS: Partnerships and collaborations. Please indicate how frequently you collaborate with the following individuals and groups, as part of your FEO role



Source: Survey for FEOs, n = 37

FEOs reported that other key elements of their work include delivering trauma-informed sessions with pupils, liaising with external agencies, such as food banks, Citizens Advice, and Family Support Teams, and supporting school-based initiatives like “Pay As You Feel” shops and breakfast clubs. FEOs sometimes also monitor

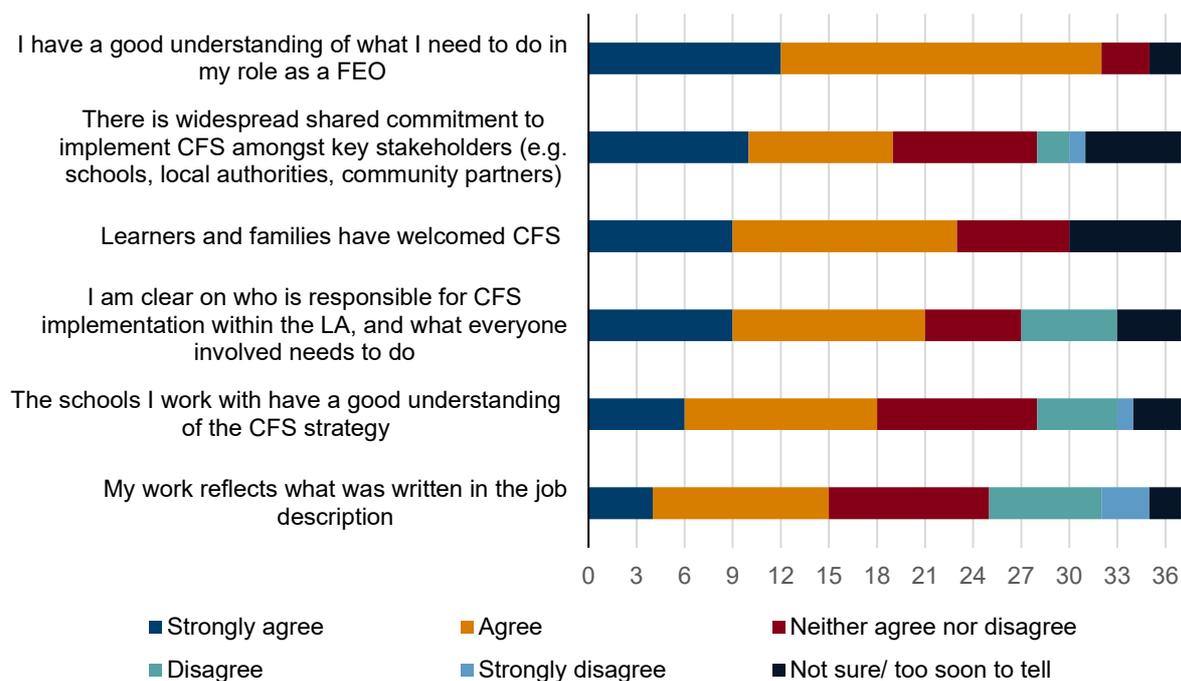
attendance and maintain regular communication with families through phone calls and text messages. Their support often extends into broader areas of family life, including assistance with budgeting, navigating housing crises, mentoring parents/carers and families, promoting emotional regulation, and supporting parent self-esteem and confidence. In addition, they help signpost to employability courses, listen to and advocate for families, provide support around additional needs, and liaise with social services.

FEOs also highlighted several barriers affecting the delivery of their work. These included heavy workloads, high caseloads, and the challenge of supporting multiple schools. Some reported being pulled into other duties, such as class cover (mentioned in 3 responses), which limits the time available for their core responsibilities. Additionally, a term-time only contract was considered insufficient for FEOs to effectively support working families. A lack of dedicated physical space for FEOs in some schools was also identified as a barrier to fulfilling their role successfully. Difficulties in engaging parents/carers were another common theme. It was reported that stigma around seeking support can make engagement difficult; some FEOs noted that parents/carers can feel anxious when interacting with other parents/carers and professionals.

On the other hand, FEOs also identified facilitators that support them in their role. Freedom, flexibility, and the ability to make their own decisions were frequently highlighted as important. For example, having the autonomy to manage their own diaries to fit around families' needs and access to a work mobile phone for direct contact were seen as key enablers. The ability to adapt to the daily, changing needs of families was also valued. Previous experience was noted as helpful, such as having worked in a school or being a parent of a child with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Personal passion for the role and a strong commitment to supporting families were also seen as important strengths. Additional facilitators mentioned included everyday informal interactions, such as standing at the school gates and chatting to children and parents/carers.

All responding FEOs (37) agree or strongly agree that they are clear about what they have to do in their role as a FEO. Between 19 and 23 FEOs also agree or strongly agree that they understand who is responsible for implementing CFS within the local authority, what is expected of all those involved, that learners and families have welcomed CFS, and that there is a strong shared commitment to its implementation among key stakeholders (e.g., schools, local authorities, and community partners). However, 10 FEOs disagree or strongly disagree that their work reflects what was written in the job description. Notably, fewer than half of FEOs felt that the schools they work with have a good understanding of the CFS strategy, with 16 responding that they neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

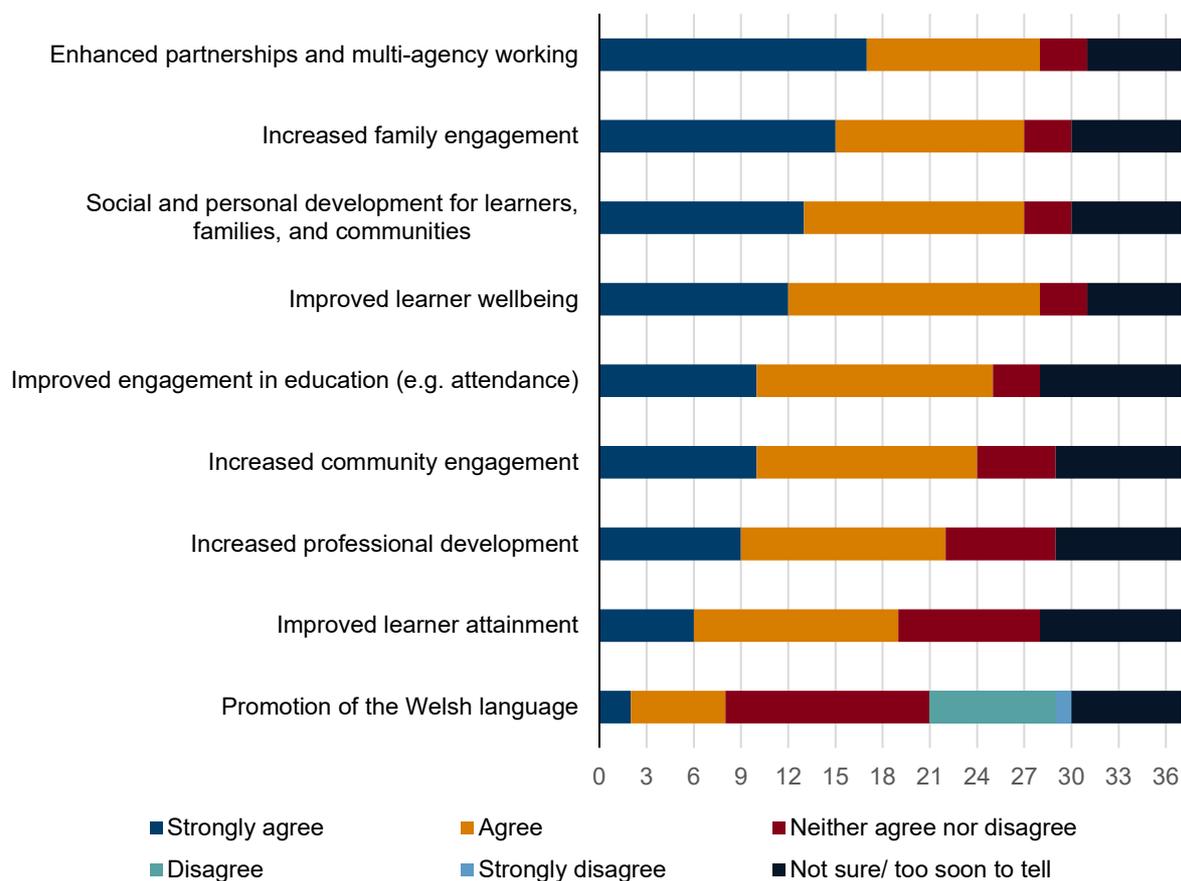
Figure 5: Enablers and barriers to CFS implementation: Please indicate the extent that you agree or disagree with the following statements



Source: Survey for FEOs, n = 37

The majority of FEOs agreed or strongly agreed with most statements about the outcomes of CFS. Twenty-eight FEOs believed that CFS has strengthened partnerships and multi-agency working and improved learner wellbeing. Twenty-seven FEOs also felt that it had increased family engagement and supported the social and personal development of learners, families, and communities. However, reflecting the views of LA officials, 9 FEOs disagreed or strongly disagreed that CFS has contributed to the promotion of the Welsh language.

Figure 6: Outcomes of CFS: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. Implementing CFS has led to:



Source: Survey for FEOs, n = 37

3.1.3. CFSM survey

Key findings:

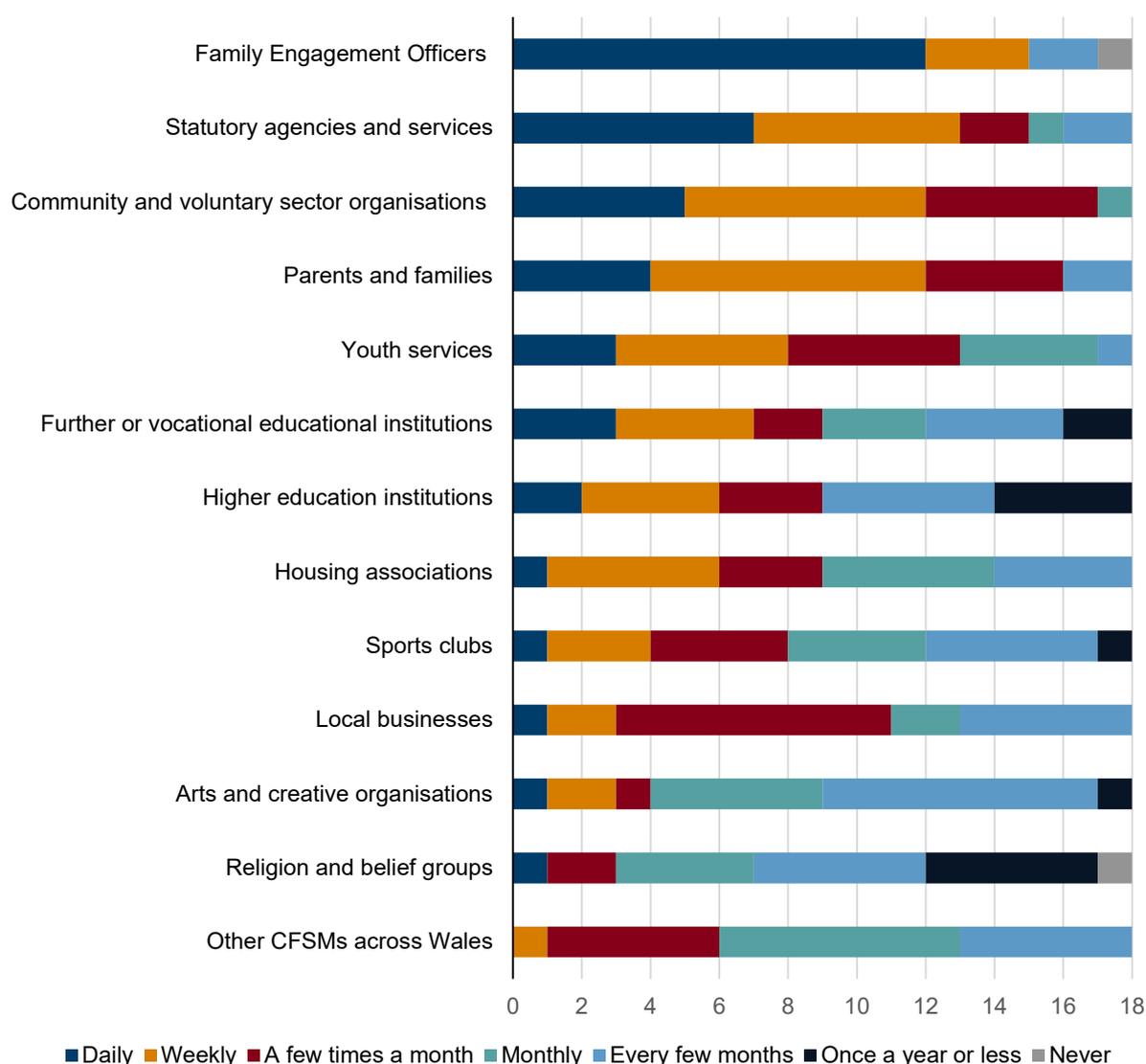
- Widespread evidence of diverse collaborations, reportedly leading to holistic family support, improved wellbeing and belonging, and reduced duplication in the system.
- Enablers include partnership working, clarity and communication, local knowledge, support from local authorities, and networking with other CFSMs.
- Barriers include funding uncertainty, challenges in engaging schools, and a lack of support from local authorities.

We received responses from 18 CFS managers from 15 local authorities. Participating Local Authorities are not listed here to protect anonymity. A majority of respondents (13 CFSMs) had been in their role for more than 2 years. Half of the CFSMs reported receiving training, guidance, or professional development to support their role every few months, while 4 reported receiving it at least once a month, and the rest a few

times a year or annually. A vast majority (17) had attended at least one CFS manager network meeting, and all had found these meetings very or somewhat useful.

According to survey responses, CFSMs most frequently collaborate with FEOs, with approximately 15 managers reporting daily or weekly collaboration. Other groups with whom CFSMs commonly collaborate at this frequency include statutory agencies and services (reported by 13 CFSMs), parents/carers and families (reported by 12 CFSMs), and community and voluntary sector organisations (reported by 12 CFSMs).

Figure 7: Implementing CFS: Partnerships and collaborations. Please indicate how frequently you collaborate with the following individuals and groups, as part of your CFSM role



Source: Survey for CFSM, n = 18

Some CFSMs also reported engagement with a broader range of partners beyond those mentioned in the graph above. These include pupils, education-related services, such as school meal contractors, early years providers, NEETs support, the Education

Welfare Service, and the music service, third-sector organisations including charities and specialist providers, local bodies such as town councils and the High Sheriff, and other public services including housing, police, GPs, health services, CAMHS, and Citizens Advice. They also worked with community volunteers and local initiatives like leisure and activity centres.

When asked about the impacts of these collaborations, several key outcomes were highlighted. It was mentioned that, as a result of the collaboration, families have received holistic and timely support, enabling improvements in wellbeing through the provision of complementary services and reducing duplication in support. In addition, pupils have developed a broader understanding of their rights, and a stronger sense of community and belonging has been fostered around schools. It was also noted that the work has helped to establish parent peer groups, providing a platform to listen to their needs and engage local services in supporting the ALN communities. One CFSM mentioned that “Without these collaborations, I would not have the knowledge or capacity to carry out my role.” However, they also acknowledged that constant collaborative working can be time-consuming, and managing the workload can at times be challenging.

Enablers reported included partnership working, especially engagement from community partners, support from within the local authority, and networking and support from other CFSMs. Clarity in boundaries and responsibilities were also highlighted, as well as local knowledge and understanding. CFSMs identified 4 main types of barriers in delivering their roles. Funding and job security were the most cited challenges. Short-term and uncertain funding was reported to limit the ability to plan long-term, affect staff retention, and undermine the sustainability of programmes. Temporary contracts, such as 6-month posts, create instability, making it difficult to build strong relationships and provide consistent support.

School engagement also emerged as an issue. Several CFSMs reported a lack of understanding or engagement from some schools, particularly in the early stages of implementation. Secondary schools were described as less receptive than primary schools, which impacted staff confidence and led some to prioritise work in more supportive settings. Misconceptions that CFS is solely focused on improving attendance also made it difficult to demonstrate the broader value of the approach and secure full buy-in.

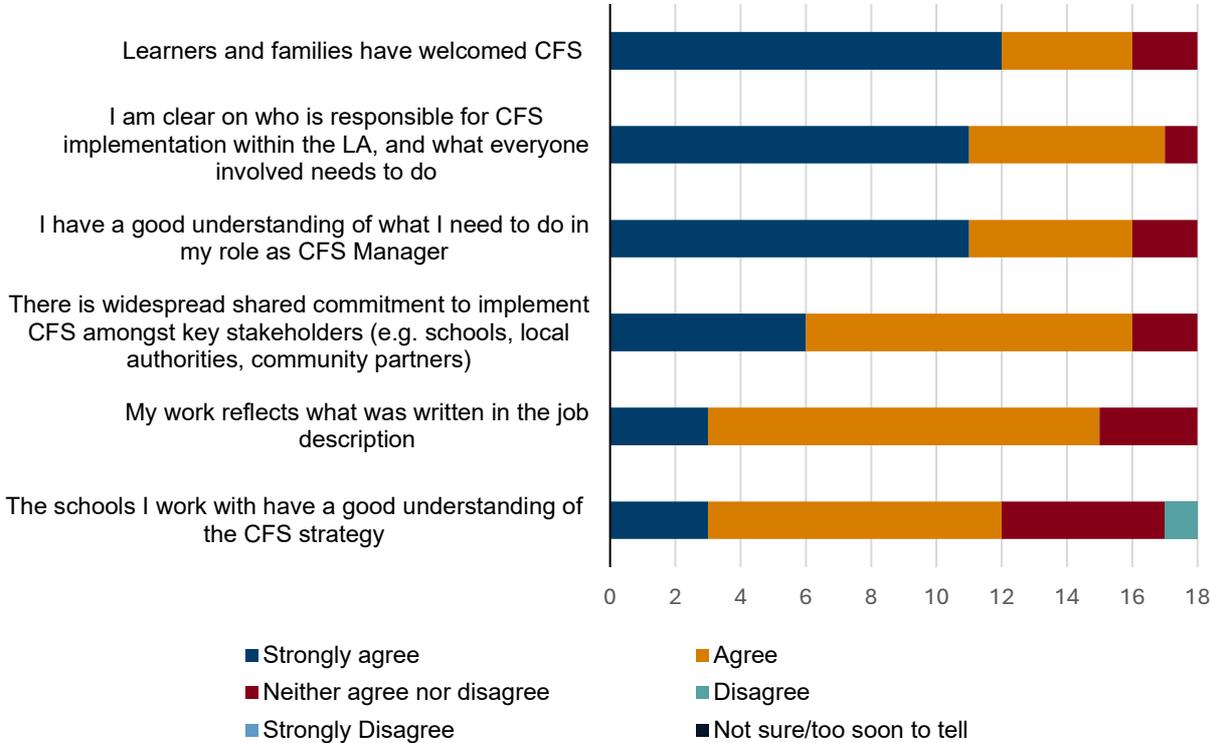
Challenges related to local authority engagement were also reported. Some departments within local authorities were perceived as lacking understanding or empathy regarding the complex situations faced by families. There were also instances of reluctance from local authority teams to collaborate with CFS staff due to concerns about role duplication and a lack of clarity around responsibilities.

Finally, barriers faced by families themselves were also mentioned. Families often face practical challenges, such as transport issues and limited access to services and

activities. These barriers can affect their ability to engage fully with the support offered through CFS.

Most CFSMs agreed or strongly agreed with statements indicating a good understanding and acceptance of CFS. Twelve felt that the schools they work with have a good understanding of the CFS strategy, and 15 said their work aligns with their job description. A vast majority (16) reported widespread shared commitment to implementing CFS among key stakeholders, and the same number felt confident in their own understanding of their role as CFSM. Furthermore, 17 managers said they are clear on who is responsible for CFS implementation within the local authority and what is expected from everyone involved. Additionally, 16 agreed that learners and families have welcomed the CFS approach.

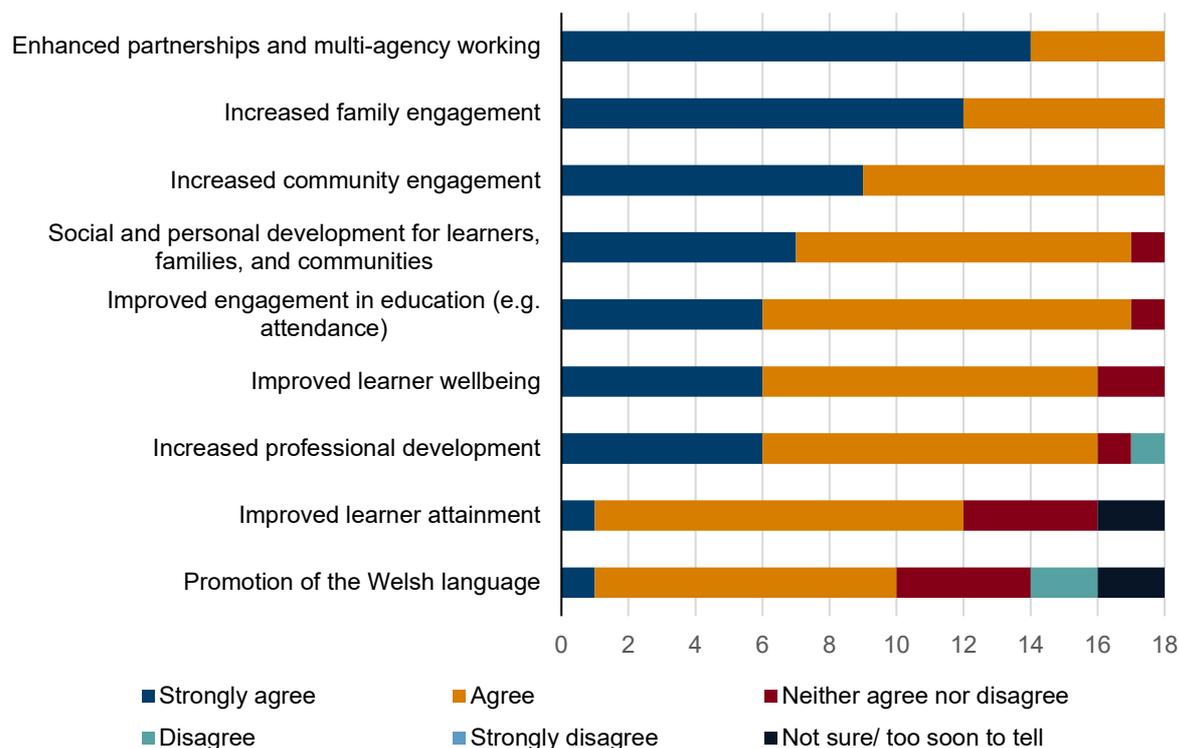
Figure 8: Enablers and barriers to CFS implementation: Please indicate the extent that you agree or disagree with the following statements



Source: Survey for CFSM, n = 18

The majority of CFSM respondents agreed or strongly agreed with most statements about the outcomes of CFS. All respondents believed that CFS has increased community engagement, strengthened family engagement, and enhanced partnerships and multi-agency working. Between 17 and 18 CFSMs felt that CFS has improved engagement in education (e.g., attendance) and supported the social and personal development of learners, families, and communities. Additionally, 17 agreed that CFS has contributed to increased professional development and 12 to improved learner wellbeing. However, only 2 CFSMs disagreed that CFS has contributed to the promotion of the Welsh language.

Figure 9: Outcomes of CFS: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. Implementing CFS has led to:



Source: Survey for CFSM, n = 18

3.1.4. School survey (short)

Key findings:

- Almost all schools report family and community engagement as a priority, and just over 2/3 report a good understanding of CFS.
- Key reasons for not fully implementing CFS include not having enough resources or information, and not feeling that CFS is the right approach.

Responses were received from 91 schools. Schools could either provide their reference number or answer additional questions about their characteristics, such as local authority and size. For those that provided a valid reference number, responses were linked to data on the number of students, percentage of students eligible for free school meals (FSM), pupil–teacher ratio, pupil attendance rate, and school budget per pupil, using sources such as the [Pupil Level Annual School Census](#), for the academic year 2023/24, and [My Local School](#), figures from 2024. Forty schools provided a reference number, but data could only be matched for 30 of them. For the remaining 61 schools, information they reported directly in the survey was used, where available.

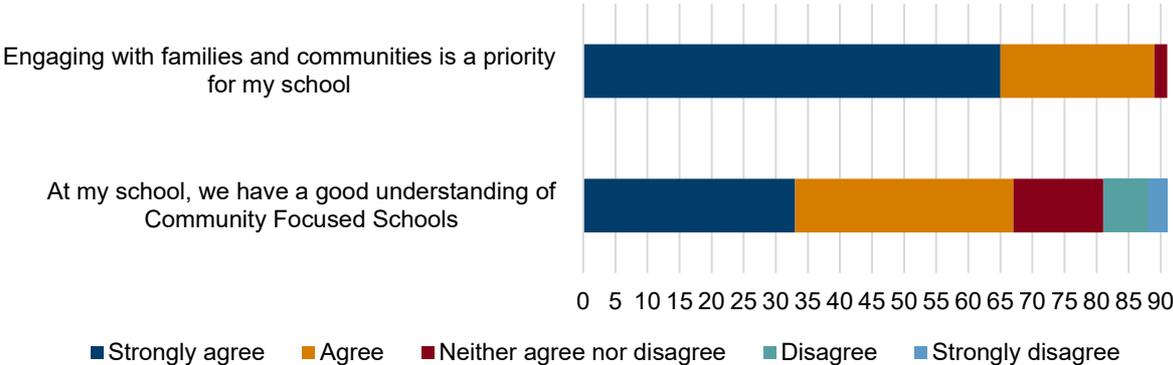
Amongst the schools for which this data was available, the highest number of responses came from schools in Powys (8 schools), followed by Swansea (4 schools).

Responses were also received from schools in Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Neath Port Talbot, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Vale of Glamorgan, Torfaen, and Wrexham.

The majority of responses came from primary schools (72 schools), followed by secondary schools (6 schools), special schools (3 schools), nurseries (2 schools) and all-age/pob oed (one school). These schools’ pupil numbers ranged from 33 to 1,200, and the percentage of eFSM ranged from 1% to 71%. Among those that provided a valid reference number, the average attendance rate was 91.3% (range: 85% to 95%), the pupil-teacher ratio was 20:3 (range: 13.5 to 29.2), and the average budget per pupil was £4,931 (range: £4,000 to £6,000).

Most of the schools that responded to the survey (89 schools) strongly agreed or agreed that engaging with families and communities is a priority for their school. Sixty-seven schools strongly agreed or agreed that they have a good understanding of CFS, while 10 schools disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 10: CFS implementation: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

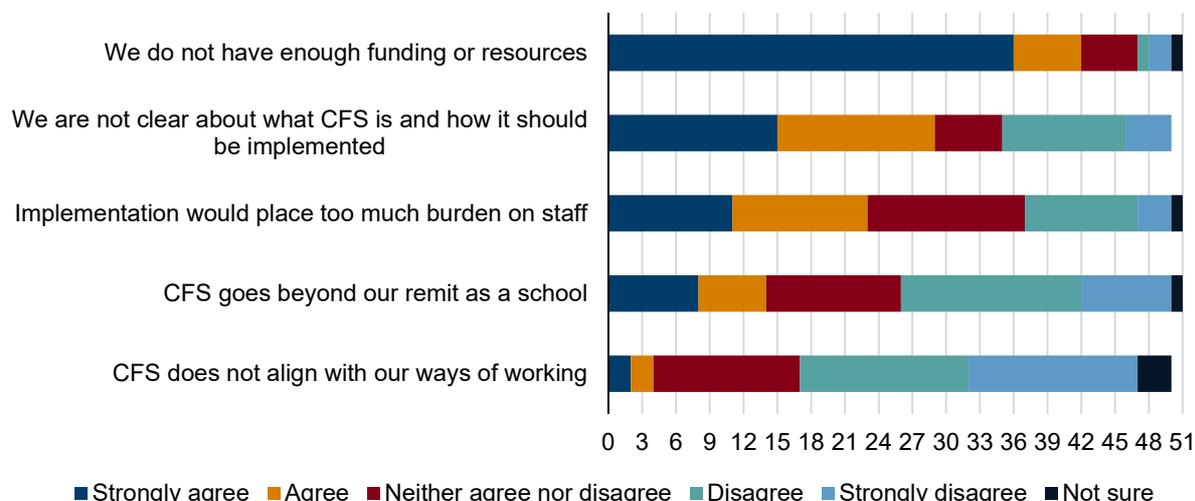


Source: school survey (short version), n = 91

Less than half of respondents (40 schools) reported actively implementing CFS, 39 reported implementing it to some extent, and 12 reported not implementing it at all.

The 51 schools that were not fully implementing CFS were asked about the reasons for this. A majority of 42 schools agreed or strongly agreed that a lack of funding and resources is a key barrier. Over half (29 schools) reported not being clear about what CFS is or how it should be implemented. However, 30 schools disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “CFS does not align with our ways of working,” suggesting that the issue might be due to a lack of resources rather than compatibility with the ethos of the programme.

Figure 11: Please tell us to what extent you agree with the following possible reasons why you are not fully implementing CFS



Source: school survey (short version), n = 51

In open-text responses, schools provided further context on why they were not implementing CFS fully. Most responses highlighted a lack of time or resources to release staff members to support CFS implementation. Any attempts to do this would leave the school unable to deliver its core teaching responsibilities. Some stakeholders also felt there was a lack of transparency regarding how schools are selected to receive an FEO and how to apply for CFS-related funding, with others having not heard anything about the strategy. A few other responses suggested that CFS places excessive demands on schools, extending their responsibilities beyond teaching, and leading some to feel that these responsibilities have “gone too far.”

“We are not corporate parents, we are educators.” (School short survey respondent)

3.1.5. School survey (detailed)

Key findings:

- There is a wide range of activities delivered under CFS, with those relating to parental engagement being the most common.
- There is widespread evidence of increased collaboration, especially with parents and families, but limited evidence of entirely new collaborations.
- Two-thirds were not aware that CFS capital funding was available.
- High levels of clarity were reported on CFS and its implementation, but funding and resources were reported as a prominent barrier.

Responses were received from 22 schools, mostly from headteachers or deputy headteachers. As with the shorter survey, schools could choose to provide a reference number. Thirteen did so, although 4 of these could not be validated (see school survey (short) for details on how data was obtained).

The highest number of responses came from schools in Neath Port Talbot (9 schools), followed by Conwy (3 schools), and Newport (2 schools). One response was received from each of several other local authorities. Local authority data was missing for 4 schools.

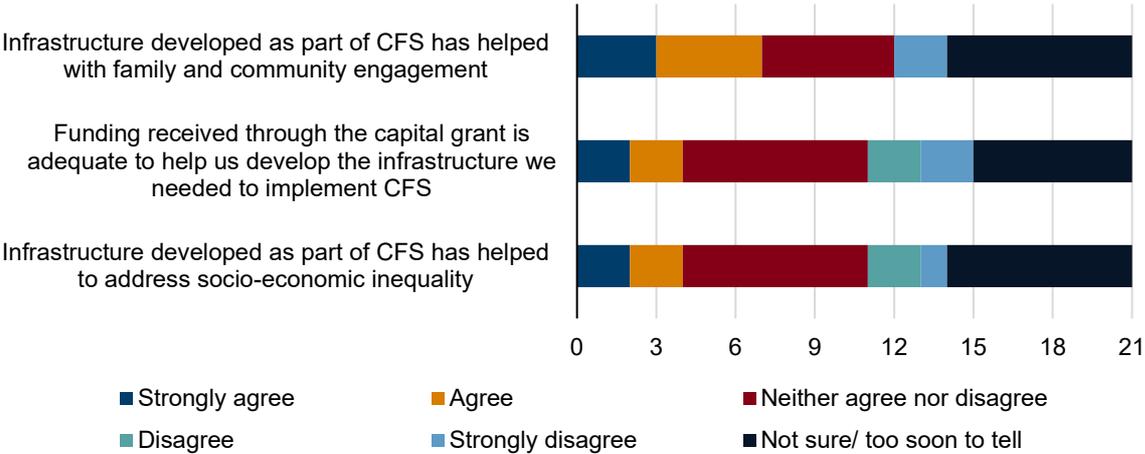
Most participating schools were primary schools (13 schools), followed by secondary schools (4 schools) and one special school. On average, these schools had 392 learners (range: 126 to 1,025) with 30% eligible for free school meals (range: 2% to 71%). Among the schools that provided a valid reference number, the average attendance rate was 90% (range: 86% to 93%), the pupil–teacher ratio was 20 (range: 15:25), and the average budget per pupil was £5,217 (range: £4,350 to £6,700).

Nine schools reported implementing the CFS as part of a cluster, typically working with an average of 5.5 other schools (ranging from 3 to 8). The remaining 12 schools were not part of a cluster, and one school was unsure. In most cases, where schools were working with FEOs, they were employed directly by the school (12 schools), while the remaining (8 schools) were employed by the local authority.

When asked about awareness of capital grant funding available for building and facilities development under the CFS strategy, 14 schools said they were not aware, 5 schools said they were, and 3 schools were unsure.

Of schools that were aware, most neither agree nor disagree, are unsure, or feel it is too early to say whether: i) the infrastructure developed through CFS has supported family and community engagement (14 schools), ii) funding is adequate to develop the infrastructure needed for CFS implementation (13 schools), and iii) the infrastructure has helped address socioeconomic inequality (12 schools). However, among these alternatives, 21 schools agree or strongly agree that the infrastructure developed as part of CFS has supported family and community engagement.

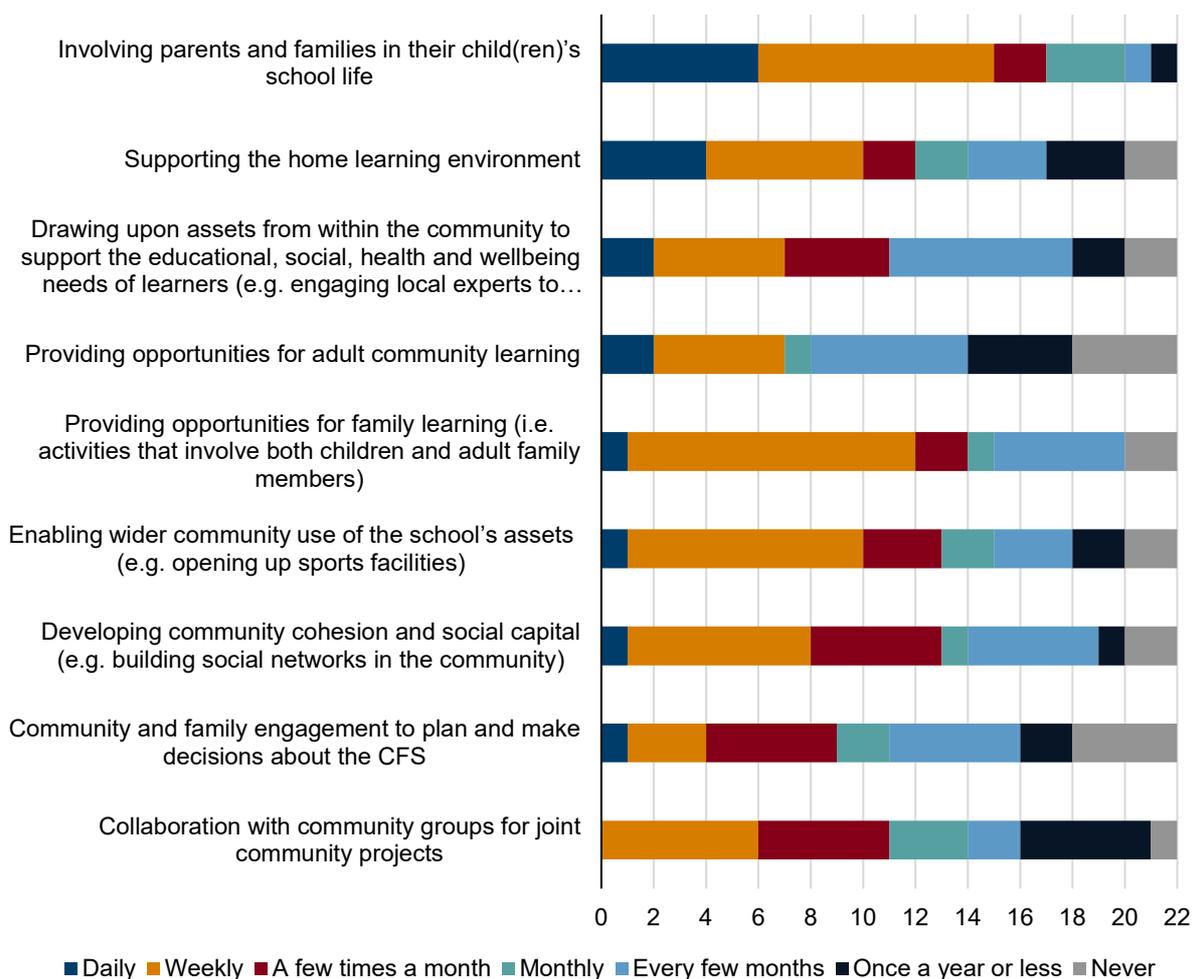
Figure 12: Implementing CFS, Infrastructure: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements



Source: school survey (detailed version), n = 21

Overall, weekly activities were much more common than daily ones across all categories. The most frequently reported activity was involving parents/carers and families in their child(ren)’s school life, with 15 schools reporting that they carry out these activities on a daily or weekly basis. Other activities commonly undertaken on a daily or weekly basis include providing opportunities for family learning (12 schools), enabling wider community use of the schools (10 schools), and supporting the home learning environment (10 schools). In contrast, the activities with the largest proportions of “never” responses were community and family engagement to plan and make decisions about the CFS (4 schools) and providing opportunities for adult community learning (4 schools).

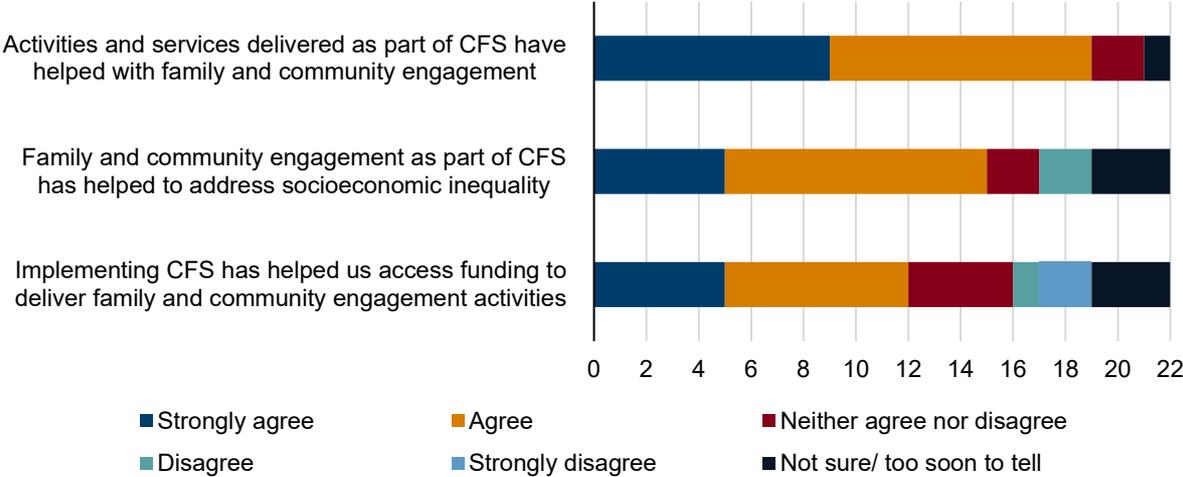
Figure 13: Implementing CFS, Family and community engagement: How frequently does your school deliver the following types of activities, services, or initiatives as part of the Community Focused School?



Source: school survey (detailed version), n = 22

Most school respondents agreed or strongly agreed that implementing CFS has helped them access funding to deliver family and community engagement activities (12 schools), family and community engagement as part of CFS has helped to address socioeconomic inequality (15 schools), and the activities and services delivered as part of CFS have helped with family and community engagement (19 schools).

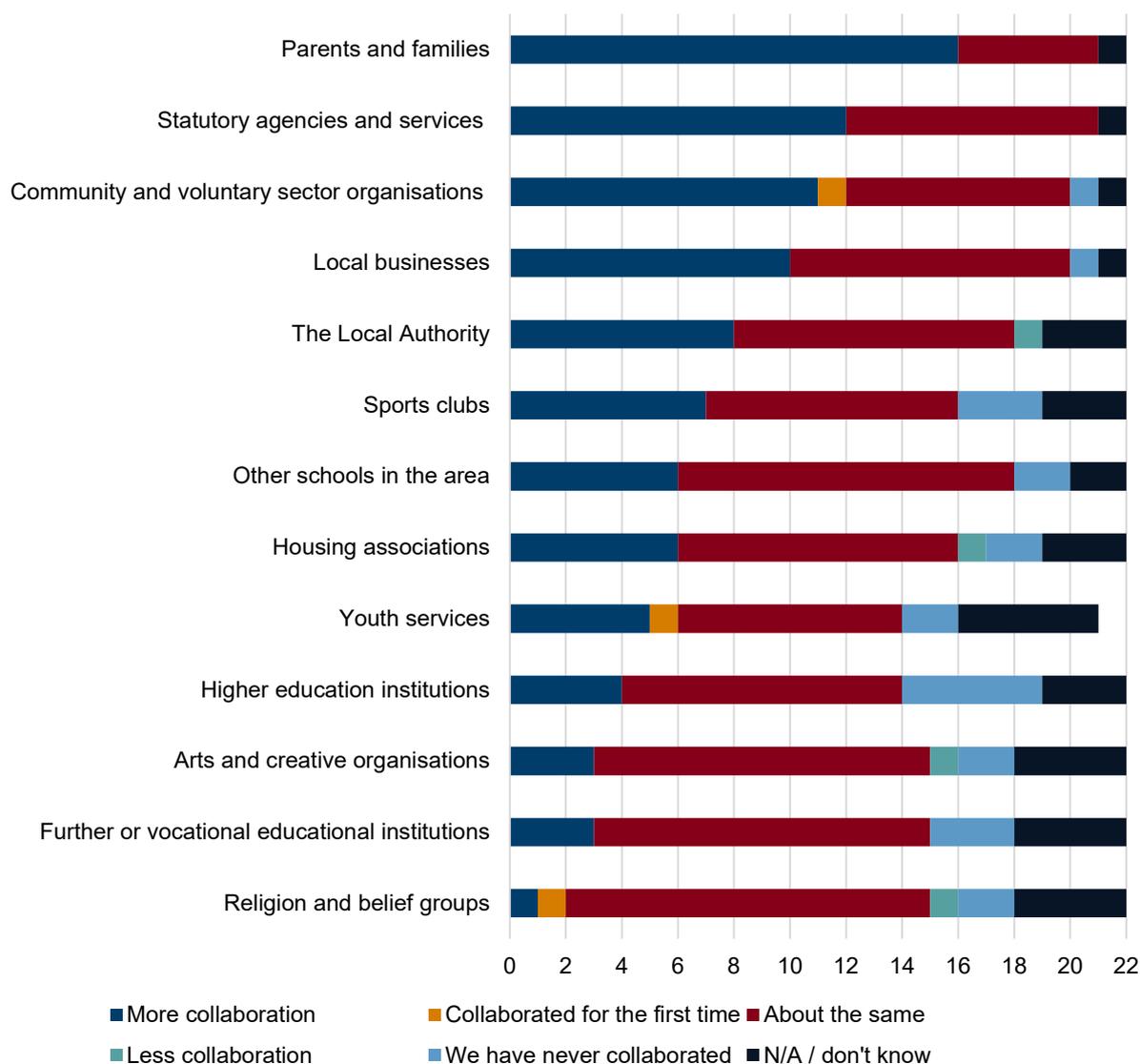
Figure 14: Implementing CFS, Family and community engagement: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements



Source: school survey (detailed version), n = 22

Since the implementation of CFS, the group that schools reported collaborating with more frequently is parents/carers and families (16 schools), followed by statutory agencies and services (12 schools), and community and voluntary sector organisations (11 schools). Interestingly, one school reported initiating collaboration for the first time with community and voluntary sector organisations, higher education institutions, and religion and belief groups as a result of CFS. In contrast, a proportion of schools (between 8 and 13 schools) indicated that their level of collaboration with most groups, except parents/carers and families, mentioned by 5 schools, has remained unchanged. Also, one school per case reported decreased collaboration since the implementation of CFS, particularly with religion and belief groups, arts and creative organisations, housing associations, and the local authority. As with the local authority surveys, there was limited evidence of collaborations that were entirely new.

Figure 15: Implementing CFS, Partnerships and collaborations: Since implementing CFS, how have your partnerships and collaborations with the following changed?



Source: school survey (detailed version), n = 22

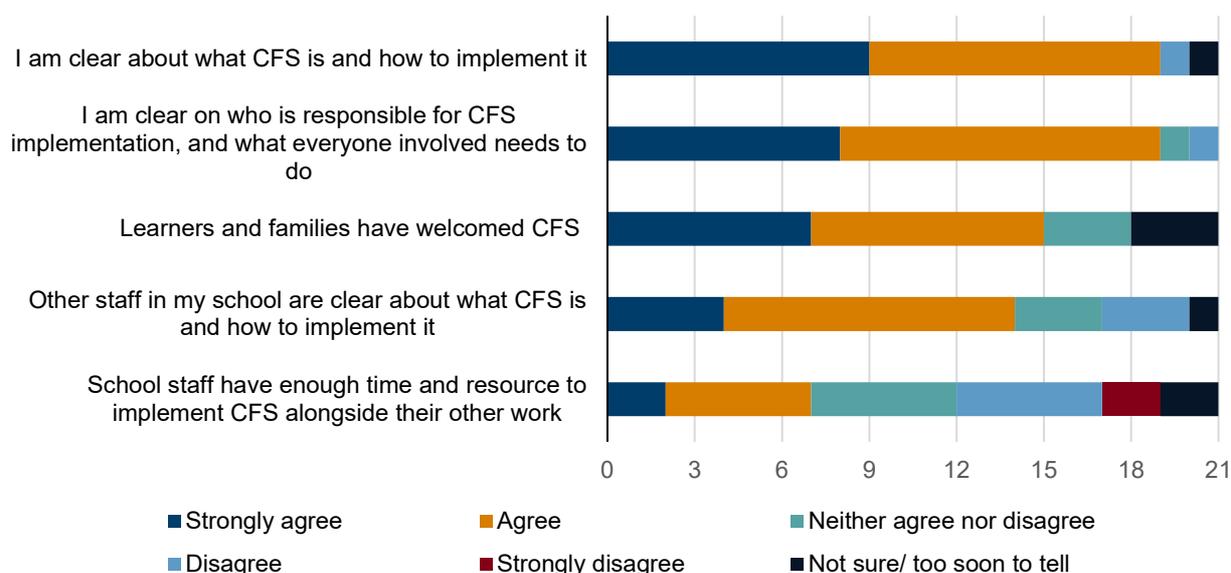
Schools reported that they also collaborate with a wide range of other individuals and groups. Key partners include external agencies such as Barnardo’s, Action for Children, and local community groups. Collaboration also extends to services such as housing and benefits agencies, local food banks, local family centres, and youth workers. Staff work jointly with adult learning providers, outdoor learning coaches, and local artists, and run initiatives such as self-defence classes and young carers drop-in sessions.

The reported impacts of these collaborations included increased parental engagement in children’s learning and school activities, improved wellbeing, and stronger

relationships between parents/carers, schools, and the local community. These benefits included that some families have been signposted to community assets. Collaboration and sharing of practice among professionals have fostered positive outcomes for pupils, families, and community members, including improved attendance, reduced exclusions, and better outcomes at KS4. There were also reported improvements in youth club attendance and overall student wellbeing. However, some schools also reported that it was too early to tell if the collaborations are yielding results.

Most schools agreed or strongly agreed with statements indicating a good understanding and acceptance of CFS. Over half of schools (14 schools) agreed that other staff in their school are clear about what CFS is and how to implement it, a majority (15 schools) said that learners and families have welcomed CFS; and a vast majority (19 schools) felt clear both on who is responsible for implementing CFS and what is required from those involved, as well as on what CFS is and how to implement it. However, less than half of schools (7 schools) agreed or strongly agreed that staff have enough time and resources to implement CFS alongside their other responsibilities, with an equal proportion (7 schools) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this.

Figure 16: Enablers and barriers to CFS implementation: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement

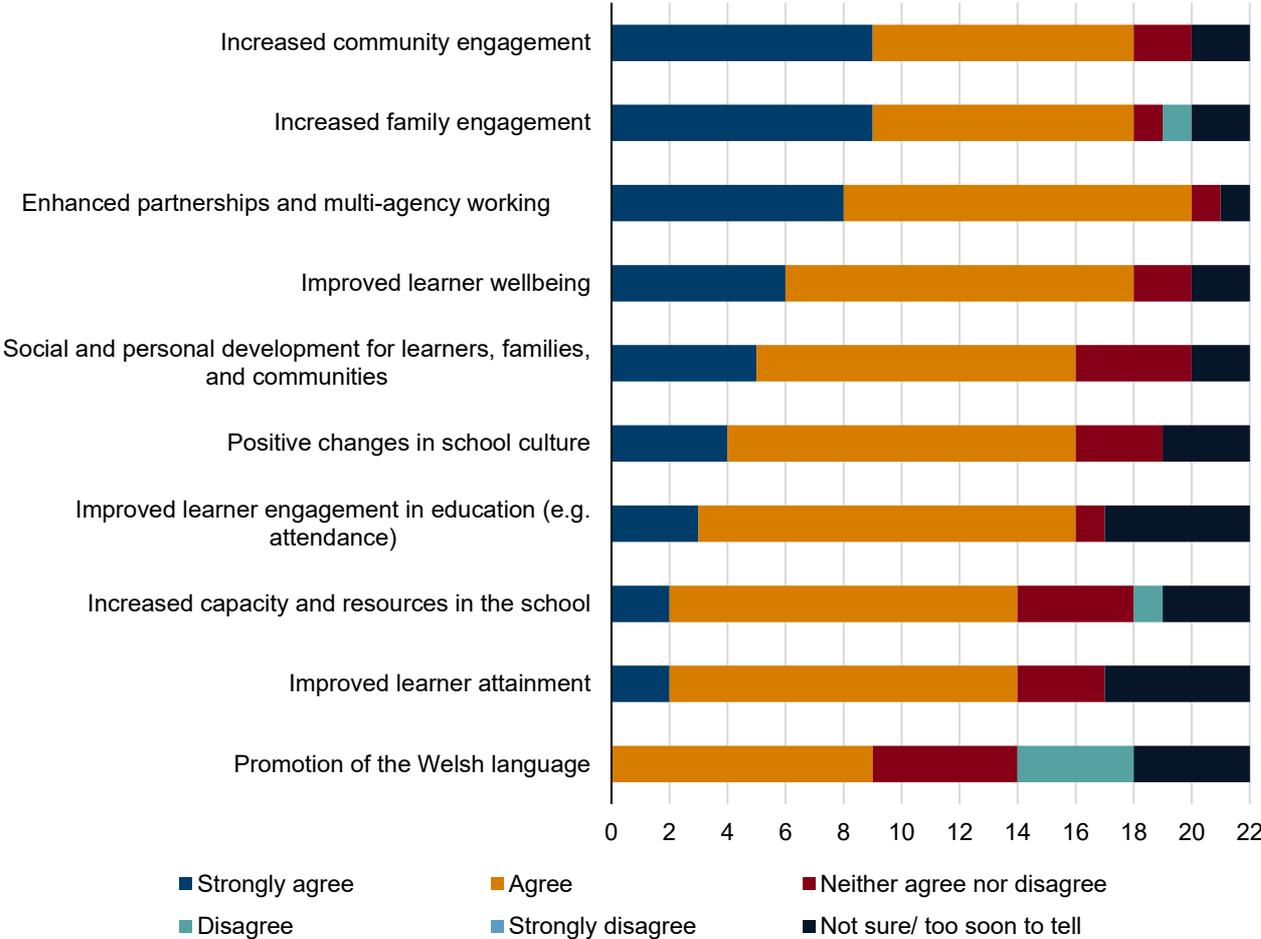


Source: school survey (detailed version), n = 21

Most school respondents agreed or strongly agreed with most statements about the outcomes of CFS. A vast majority of schools (20 schools) believed that CFS has enhanced partnerships and multi-agency working, while a majority (18 schools) felt it had improved learner wellbeing, increased family engagement, and strengthened community engagement. Sixteen schools agreed that CFS has led to improved

learner engagement in education, positive changes in school culture, and enhanced social and personal development for learners, families, and communities. Additionally, 14 schools reported improvements in learner attainment and increased capacity and resources within the school. However, 9 respondents disagreed that CFS has contributed to the promotion of the Welsh language.

Figure 17: Outcomes of CFS: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. Implementing CFS has led to:



Source: school survey (detailed version), n = 22

3.1.6. Parent and carer survey

Key findings:

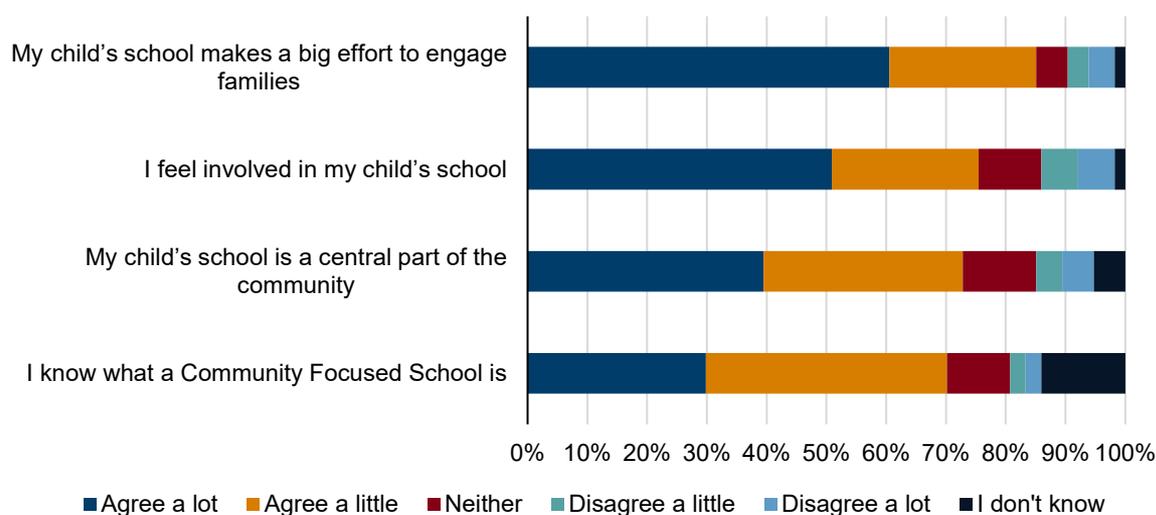
- Most parent/carers felt involved in their child’s school and that the school made an effort to engage families.
- Parents/carers valued communication, opportunities for shared learning, and feeling listened to.
- Challenges reported in having time to engage with activities for working parents/carers.

The survey was completed by 114 parents and carers across the case study areas. Most responses came from Cardiff (44%) and Neath Port Talbot (39%), with fewer responses from Wrexham (7%) and Pembrokeshire (6%). None were received from Gwynedd. Four per cent of respondents did not specify their child’s school, so their local authority could not be identified.

When asked whether their child’s school makes a strong effort to engage families, whether they know what a CFS is, whether they feel involved in their child’s school, and whether their child’s school is a central part of the community, most parents and carers (at least 70%) agreed either a lot or a little with these statements. Notably, the statement with the highest level of agreement was “My child’s school makes a big effort to engage families,” with around 85% of respondents agreeing a lot or a little. Similar patterns were observed across local authorities.

In contrast, awareness of what a Community Focused School was was the statement with the highest proportion of uncertainty or disagreement. Around 30% of parents/carers either disagreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, or selected “I don’t know.”

Figure 18: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

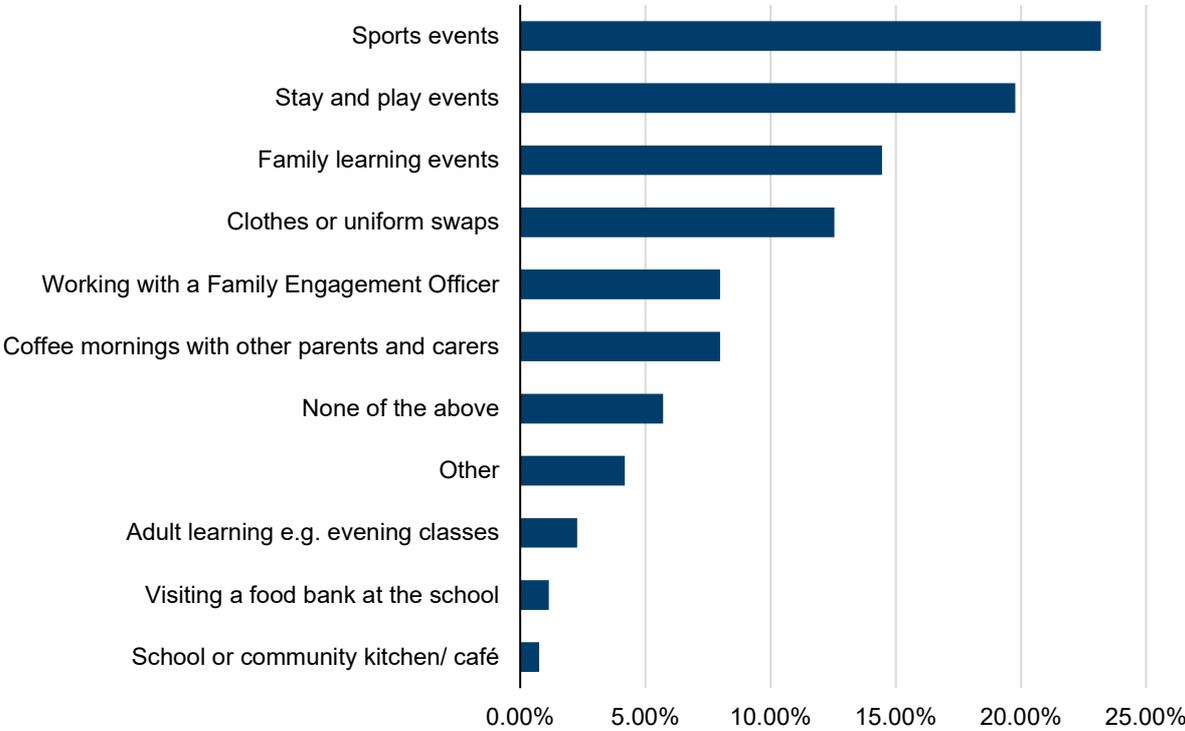


Source: survey for parents and carers, n = 114

When asked about which school-related activities they had attended, no single activity stood out as dominant across the overall sample. The 2 most commonly mentioned activities were sports events (around 23%) and stay-and-play sessions (approximately 20%). The least common activity was a school or community kitchen/café, selected by fewer than 1% of respondents. Additionally, around 4% of parents/carers mentioned other activities, including attending church, viewing children’s books, concerts, or Christmas events.

However, some variation was observed across local authorities, though these trends should be interpreted with caution, given the different number of responses received per area. In Cardiff and Neath Port Talbot, sports events and stay-and-play sessions were the most frequently selected activities, with over half of the Cardiff respondents mentioning at least one of these (28 and 30 respondents, respectively). In contrast, these activities were less common in Pembrokeshire and Wrexham. In Pembrokeshire, the most frequent responses were working with an FEO, attending family learning events, and “none of the above,” each mentioned by roughly 22% of respondents (3 parents/carers). In Wrexham, the most commonly mentioned activity was also working with an FEO, selected by 3 respondents. It should be noted that survey distribution approaches varied across areas, and where FEOs played an important role in distribution, this might have influenced the proportion of parents/carers reporting they had worked with FEOs.

Figure 19: Which, if any, of these activities have you taken part in, connected to your child's school?



Source: survey for parents and carers, n = 114, multiple answers

Parents/carers were asked about the most important ways to be involved in their child’s education. A key theme that emerged was the importance of strong communication and positive relationships with teachers. Parents/carers want to be kept informed about their child’s progress, wellbeing, and school activities, and to feel that their concerns are heard and addressed.

“Good communication with teachers, honest feedback.” (Parent or carer)

Another aspect highlighted by parents/carers was the opportunity to “learn together” with their children. Activities such as family learning classes, cooking or gardening sessions, and shared educational apps were valued because they allow parents/carers to understand what their child is learning and support them at home.

“Learning together. More chances to see how I can help my child at home at his level. More school activities like a veg garden parents can come in and help with. More face to face opportunities.” (Parent or carer)

Parents/carers also noted the challenges in participating due to work or other time constraints. Many requested more flexible arrangements or advance notice about school events to enable wider participation.

“Meetings with teachers after school hours as we struggle to make other activities as we both work full time.” (Parent or carer)

“I love that they have parent engagement days however it’s really hard being working parents as we cannot attend and I feel sad for my children.” (Parent or carer)

When asked what schools could do better to work with families and communities, parents/carers highlighted several key areas. Clear and timely communication was seen as essential, with parents/carers valuing advance notice of events, regular updates on their child’s progress, and guidance on available support or community resources.

“To give plenty of notice of when activities are taking place.” (Parent or carer)

“Regular honest updates and signpost to groups or outside agencies if required.” (Parent or carer)

Many parents/carers also emphasised the importance of being listened to and having their perspectives considered, suggesting that schools could enhance involvement by actively seeking feedback and recognising that not all families will agree with every decision.

“Be open to the fact that not everyone agrees with their decisions, and asking parents more about certain things would enhance their involvement.” (Parent or carer)

Finally, some parents/carers were satisfied with how schools were already performing.

“Honestly, don’t think it needs improving. Communication has been great and even better since using the dojo app.” (Parent or carer)

3.2. Follow-up interviews

This section contains findings from interviews with CFSMs (n=6) and FEOs (n=5) that were conducted in June 2025.

3.2.1. CFSMs

Key findings:

- CFSMs reported tension between valuing autonomy and feeling there was a lack of initial guidance.
- Approaches to engaging schools varied – some used data to target need, some targeted secondary schools and their clusters, and some aimed to spread resources as evenly as possible.
- Success factors included buy-in from key people, especially the local authority, infrastructure, tailoring to local needs, and family consultation.
- Barriers included a lack of clarity on strategy and outcomes, challenges in gaining school buy-in, funding uncertainty, and local authority capacity.

3.2.1.1. Roles and responsibilities

Findings from the follow-up interviews with CFSMs revealed the nature and rationale of variations across Wales. CFSMs are positioned within a range of local authority departments, leading to variations in their operational structures. Participating CFSMs also came from a range of professional backgrounds, including youth work and education, which influenced their approaches to and implementation of the CFS strategy.

While the specific responsibilities of CFSMs varied across local authorities, a common focus of the role was on strategic planning and coordination. This included identifying alternative funding sources and grants, establishing networks, and advocating for broader changes within both the local authority and local communities to support CFS. The diverse implementation of the role was widely acknowledged amongst CFSMs in the interviews. Although this flexibility was often viewed as a strength, interviewees also noted challenges in selecting a strategic direction aligned with CFS, questioning whether their efforts were aligned with the intended outcomes.

Delays in the release of guidance from the Welsh Government were cited as contributing to inconsistencies in how the strategy was interpreted and implemented; one CFSM described it as coming out “far too late.” These delays also led some CFSMs to question whether they were applying the strategy “correctly.” However, when it was released, most reported that the guidance provided was helpful and served as a strong foundation for schools and communities implementing CFS. Several participants suggested that involving CFSMs in the development of future iterations of the guidance would enhance its relevance and effectiveness.

“The guidance was good because it laid the foundation, it gave us the stepping stones – what the principles or ideas were behind what it is that we are now trying to achieve.” (CFSM)

There were also varied approaches to monitoring and evaluation. While some CFMSs prioritised it as a way to measure impact, this was not consistent across all local authorities and often reflected the individual manager’s priorities and background. For example, in Cardiff, the Welsh Government guidance has been adapted into a table that is tailored to each CFS setting at the start of each academic year, with a Red Amber Green (RAG) rating applied to assess performance across different important areas.

3.2.1.2. CFS priorities

Overall, CFMSs and local authority leads appeared to prioritise schools with the greatest need for further support and intervention, considering factors such as the proportion of students eligible for FSM, Estyn inspection feedback, and other contextual indicators. At the individual school level, priorities were generally set by the school or local authority and tailored to the specific needs of the local community. Examples of these priorities included improving attendance, providing transition support, and enhancing learner wellbeing. Some schools and local authorities also demonstrated strong engagement with parents/carers and the wider community to ensure community voices were embedded within the approach, and that the strategy remained relevant and responsive to local needs.

3.2.1.3. Activities

All CFS activities fell within one or more of the 3 categories outlined in the CFS model (family engagement, community engagement, multi-agency), taking place both in term-time and over the school holidays. However, in practice, the activities often overlap and operate interchangeably. Activities also varied widely across each school and community, based on local context and priorities.

Family engagement work included summer activities for children and their families, transition support, uniform shop, ‘community cwtch,’ taught courses (e.g., for teachers on engaging parents/carers; parenting courses), informal open evenings for families, wellbeing events, family network approach (bringing relevant professionals together to create an engagement plan), and utilising individual and tailored supports (e.g., helping with transport to school). The work of FEOs was also described, including home visits, FEOs supporting parents/carers attending meetings and events, and regular WhatsApp contact to provide support. Behind a lot of this family engagement work was the recognition that a holistic approach was needed to support learners, and that support within schools was not always adequate to address challenges stemming from the home.

“It’s difficult to work [with] the children and help them when home isn’t right. So that’s why we need to be going into the homes and saying right, what’s going on here?” (CFSM)

Community engagement activities included advocating for changes within the community (e.g., improving or renovating facilities), community breakfasts, networking events, adult learning, learning assistance, workshops (e.g., cooking, CV writing), and making school facilities available for community use. Community engagement was tailored based on local needs and assets available and was cited as critical to embedding a CFS ethos beyond individual schools.

Multi-agency activities involved engagement with a wide range of agencies, including Food and Fun, One Wales, Home Start, Family Information Service, local health boards, Speech and Language sessions, Cooking on a Budget, Talk with Me, Flying Start, Citizens’ Advice, Invisible Walls, Save the Children, Barnardo’s, and local police teams. This engagement often took the form of network meetings, multi-agency discussion of cases, and co-location of services (e.g., domestic abuse services, CAMHS, mental health support, etc.).

Some schools and local authorities reported challenges with specific aspects of the CFS strategy, for instance, struggling to engage families despite successfully building strong links with the wider community. One commonly cited reason for this was that some parents/carers had negative past experiences with schools, either as learners themselves or as parents/carers, which impacted their willingness to engage. Due to the limited sample size, it was not possible to determine any clear patterns in which elements of the strategy were more consistently challenging across settings.

3.2.1.4. Partnerships and collaboration

CFSMs noted that multi-agency and community partnerships emerged both from existing relationships and from proactive efforts by themselves and FEOs to seek out new opportunities. Those with extensive experience in the sector and the local area utilised and built upon their pre-established networks, with a key focus on ensuring their offer avoided duplicating what was already available. CFSMs did not report serious challenges in establishing partnerships, aside from occasional non-responses from contacts and broader logistical difficulties related to the internal structures of statutory and third-sector organisations (e.g., funding).

Throughout the interviews, collaboration and networking between CFSMs and FEOs were consistently highlighted as vital for promoting best practice and supporting effective multi-agency working, for example, sharing contact information of relevant organisations. For CFSMs, the limited number of roles in Wales meant a national network was critically important to provide support and help ensure their work remained aligned with the broader CFS principles.

“They have people coming in from different areas doing CFS to talk about what they've set up so that you can share ideas. There's always that sharing of knowledge and expertise.” (CFSM)

3.2.1.5. Funding

Consistent with the survey findings, the majority of the CFS budget was allocated to staffing, delivered either directly through schools or via local authorities. However, many also relied on additional funding sources to support the delivery of the CFS strategy. For instance, some schools used the Pupil Development Grant to fund an FEO's salary, meaning they were operating the CFS model without receiving any CFS-specific funding. As highlighted above, a key responsibility for many CFMSs was also securing grant funding to support the wider CFS delivery.

3.2.1.6. Implementation and impact

Factors for success

CFMSs identified several key factors for successfully implementing the CFS strategy. Leadership buy-in was the most frequently and strongly emphasised point. A consistent and aligned senior leadership team, including school governors, was seen as essential for the successful implementation of CFS. Strong leadership support helped secure wider staff buy-in and ensured that the CFS ethos was embedded throughout the school.

Access to appropriate infrastructure and physical space was also identified as a key enabler for effective implementation of the CFS strategy. This ranged from providing FEOs with dedicated office space to offering facilities for co-located services. However, it was noted that achieving this often relied upon additional investment.

CFMSs emphasised the importance of also focusing on local needs and tailoring the support accordingly, which was made possible through the freedom and flexibility the CFS strategy offers. Regular consultation with families through surveys and meetings, and importantly, acting on their feedback, was highlighted as crucial. This approach helped build rapport and trust, fostering meaningful family engagement and a sense of connection that was described as central to the CFS ethos.

“I think [the most important factor] is connection. [...] Because for [parents/carers] to really feel that the school is community focused, they need to feel connected. They need that sense of belonging. They need to feel valued. They need to feel that they're being listened to, and it's done, you know, with them and not to them.” (CFSM)

Challenges

CFMSs also highlighted key challenges they have faced in their role. Lack of clarity was a consistently raised issue. Two key areas were identified as needing greater clarity: job descriptions and defined outcomes. Job descriptions in particular were

frequently described as being unclear both in relation to CFSMs' own roles and those of FEOs. CFSMs noted that the lack of clarity sometimes led to FEOs exceeding their intended responsibilities, which in turn caused confusion among school staff about the scope of the FEO's position.

“They [FEOs] struggle between understanding where their role starts and the youth work and education team finishes.” (CFSM)

Another area requiring further clarity was outcomes. While CFSMs valued the flexibility provided by the CFS strategy, they expressed a need for clearer, more specific outcomes to guide their efforts. Having defined outcomes was seen as beneficial, not only for focus but also for enabling schools to better demonstrate and showcase their achievements.

“I think maybe having some sets outcomes like as a harder outcome might showcase [our work and] it might be easier for Welsh Government to showcase the work that's happening.” (CFSM)

Other CFSMs reflected on the challenges of strategic planning with CFS, particularly as many had not previously taken such an approach within schools and were unsure how to navigate it. One CFSM highlighted difficulties with implementing certain elements, specifically family engagement, citing that the schools they worked with “were not quite there yet.”

“If it's never been done before, how are we going to navigate that?” (CFSM)

Another CFSM suggested that increased strategic support from the Welsh Government would be beneficial, including supporting schools to engage local businesses, especially those that received Welsh Government funding. Further support would allow for wider collaboration and expertise-sharing.

A further challenge highlighted by CFSMs was the uncertainty surrounding grant funding, which hindered long-term planning and staff retention. Several noted that these funding challenges limited the capacity and effectiveness of their CFS approach. For example, it was noted that the use of temporary FEO contracts can result in the loss of experienced candidates, as the lack of job security and adequate compensation deters potential experienced applicants.

Another fundamental challenge identified was securing buy-in from schools. CFSMs noted that when their role is not based within a school, it can be difficult to promote the benefits of the CFS strategy. One CFSM observed that gaining buy-in has been particularly challenging in secondary schools compared to primary schools. This was in part put down to the fact that parents/carers do not tend to drop their children off at the gate at secondary level, which reduces the opportunity for them to engage with staff. This issue was also highlighted for settings like special schools and Welsh-medium schools in predominantly English-speaking areas, where learners travel in by

bus from outside the local area, and there is no distinct 'community' served by the school. Others noted that viewing the CFS strategy as a short-term intervention has led to hesitancy in making long-term commitments, particularly as schools are already navigating broader educational reforms.

"A couple of the schools are still a bit apprehensive on engaging because in their minds, they've told me, it's a short-term intervention. We're going to be gone next week, kind of thing. And they're like, oh, well, I can't be bothered engaging because it's not long term. So that's been difficult." (CFSM)

Some CFMSMs expressed concerns about the capacity within local authorities to fully implement the CFS strategy, noting that demand from schools often exceeds available resources. Several CFMSMs emphasised the importance of integrating the CFS model across all schools to maximise its impact, highlighting the need for additional funding to support this expansion. One noted that, as awareness of CFS's successes in some schools was growing across their local authority, there was increased interest from other schools that the CFS team did not have the capacity to support.

3.2.2. FEOs

Key findings:

- FEOs based in schools faced challenges with being pulled to other tasks, not working year-round, and sometimes pay inequity with local authority-employed FEOs; however, for local authority-employed FEOs, splitting time across schools could also be challenging.
- When engaging families, informal approaches were crucial, taking time to build relationships and embed in the community.
- Success factors included taking time to build connections, school culture and staff attitudes, family consultation, infrastructure and space to work, and individual passion.
- Barriers included a lack of clarity on roles and approaches, inadequate support from schools and leaders, capacity, temporary contracts, the unquantifiable nature of impact, and a lack of development and progression.

3.2.2.1. Roles and responsibilities

Similar to CFMSMs, findings from interviews with FEOs revealed considerable variation in how the role was structured. Some FEOs were employed directly by schools, while others were employed by local authorities. Additionally, some worked within a single school, whereas others supported multiple schools across a cluster. Despite differences in school demographics, there was a clear priority given to schools serving communities facing socioeconomic disadvantage.

There was also variation in whether the FEO position was full-time or part-time, with some balancing other responsibilities that could often take priority (e.g., support within the classroom). Full-time FEOs highlighted the advantages of dedicating their time exclusively to the role, though they acknowledged this was uncommon within schools. The role primarily involved hands-on work with children, families, and the wider community.

“I was in-house all day every day of the week, so I had a real insight and a deeper knowledge of our families, I think. Whereas some [FEOs] now in Community Focused Schools are in and out, I don't know, two days a week or they have two schools, and I can imagine that's a real hard thing to get across.” (FEO)

Line management arrangements varied, with some FEOs being supervised by their CFSM, while others were unaware of who their CFSM was and were line managed by an individual within the school where they were based. Several participants emphasised the value of having a designated contact to address CFS-related queries and provide pastoral support, with those in contact with a CFSM reflecting the benefits of having this contact. Regular supervision was noted to be less common within school environments. While it was acknowledged that every setting differs, many FEOs stressed the need for consistent supervision, both to support their wellbeing and to promote ongoing professional growth.

Fewer FEOs were aware of the CFS guidance and, as a result, did not use it. However, those who had engaged with the guidance stated that it accurately reflected their role. It was suggested that additional guidance outlining the boundaries of the role would be helpful to prevent FEOs from working beyond their intended remit.

3.2.2.2. CFS priorities

Most participants noted that priorities were primarily set by the senior leadership team. However, there were also examples of FEOs having a more hands-on role in contributing to priority setting, with it being informed by their work with families and the wider community. Across the interviews, attendance and transition emerged as key priorities identified within schools.

3.2.2.3. Partnerships and collaboration

FEOs reflected that partnerships and collaborations enabled them to effectively engage with families and the wider community, highlighting the importance of multi-agency working. FEOs made use of existing partnerships while also actively seeking new opportunities, dedicating a large proportion of time and effort to this aspect of their role. The FEO National Network, as well as regional iterations, were widely used for both inspiration and the exchange of contacts. They were also noted as valuable opportunities for learning and sharing best practice, with participants highlighting the need to prioritise opportunities to observe and learn from others' approaches.

Most FEOs emphasised the importance of ongoing professional development to support them in their roles. However, access to specific training opportunities varied, often depending on the provisions available within individual schools. In one local authority, it was ensured that FEOs employed directly by schools received the same training and supervision support as those employed through the Local Authority.

3.2.2.4. Implementation and impact

Factors for success

Dedicating time and energy to building connections was considered crucial. The importance of building rapport and forming strong relationships with families and the wider community was noted as a core element of embodying the CFS principles. This also extended to networking with other FEOs and practitioners, both as a source of professional learning and as emotional support, with some FEOs highlighting the emotionally demanding nature of the role.

FEOs noted that successful implementation of the CFS strategy also requires a cultural shift within many schools, especially with regard to how staff and parents/carers build relationships, to foster greater collaboration and meaningful engagement. Several FEOs observed a previously entrenched 'them versus us' mentality, which can hinder parental involvement. Addressing this divide was felt to be particularly important for engaging parents/carers who have had negative experiences with schools (as both former students and parents/carers) to prevent any ongoing disconnect between schools and families.

The importance of also regularly checking in with families and, crucially, acting on the feedback they provide was identified as another important aspect of building trust and strengthening engagement.

"I've learned an awful lot from [parents/carers] so our approach as a school has been feeding that back to the leadership. So this is what [parents/carers are] finding difficult. This is what we can change when they get a phone call from the school and they see the number on the phone, their immediate response, their stomach drops or something's gone wrong and if so, there's all sorts of different ways that we can we can change that and to make our approach to parents better, to make them feel more welcome and engaged in the school." (FEO)

Infrastructure was also a crucial practical barrier. One FEO highlighted the importance of having adequate space for CFS activities and noted the positive impact that appropriate infrastructure had on their school.

Another important factor for success was having individuals who were passionate, enthusiastic, and deeply committed to their work on the staffing team. CFS was implemented most effectively in schools and communities where FEOs and CFSMs

went above and beyond, a level of commitment often necessary given the demands of their roles.

Challenges

FEOs also highlighted challenges in their daily work, including engaging parents/carers in secondary schools, managing safeguarding issues, addressing attendance concerns while building relationships, and supporting working parents/carers.

The most notable challenge identified by FEOs during the interviews was a lack of clarity around key issues such as job descriptions, expected outcomes, and funding decisions. Regarding job descriptions, FEOs reported that their roles varied widely across schools, clusters, and local authorities. Many felt that having a clear, standardised job description with appropriate grading would enable them to maintain flexibility while understanding the boundaries of their role and ensuring fair compensation based on experience. Additionally, clearer guidance on expected outcomes was seen as essential to support schools in implementing CFS effectively. Furthermore, FEOs noted that funding information was often not shared with them, limiting their ability to manage resources and fulfil their roles effectively.

“What's hard, is that [the FEO role] is called different things in every school. It looks different in every school, which is why I really want Welsh Government to be like, well, no, this is it, this is where it's graded at. This is what the expectation is.” (FEO)

Securing buy-in from senior leadership and wider school staff was highlighted as a challenge by most FEOs interviewed. It was observed that senior leadership teams often expected immediate results from the role, rather than recognising that CFS is a long-term intervention that needs to be embedded within the school's culture and ethos. FEOs noted difficulties in implementing CFS when previous headteachers had deprioritised it. Conversely, it was clear that when senior leadership fully embraced the CFS strategy, the rest of the school staff were more likely to follow suit.

“It's not going to exist if the headteacher isn't buying into it, because if the budget becomes tight and somebody's got to go, if your headteacher does not recognise the work that you are putting in, then you're going to be on the chopping block.” (FEO)

FEOs also noted there was insufficient funding to fully deliver the CFS strategy, with resources often being diverted from other interventions to cover the shortfall. This could pose particular challenges in settings where FEOs were employed by the school rather than the local authority, and were therefore more vulnerable to changes in leadership priorities.

A further challenge related to capacity, especially for those FEOs working part-time. For example, one Teaching Assistant was allocated 15 hours for FEO duties but was

frequently pulled into other tasks, leaving them able to dedicate only about 3 of those hours to FEO work in that period. It was suggested that making the FEO role full-time could help mitigate this issue.

“Sometimes [FEOs] get a Friday a week, sometimes they're part time, and there was talk about job-sharing, and I was never really fond of the idea because I didn't want to have to say to my parents, oh, I can't deal with that till Monday or Tuesday when I'm in school [...] because you've then lost the parent.” (FEO)

FEOs also highlighted the prevalence of temporary contracts as a challenge. Interviewees reflected that the lack of job security could discourage many experienced and qualified individuals from applying for these roles. This issue is tied closely to being funded through year-to-year grants. Additionally, FEOs noted the need for more training and structured professional development opportunities, as access currently depends largely on what individual schools provide. It was noted that capable FEOs may leave their position if there is no potential for professional development or upskilling.

Another key concern expressed by FEOs was the lack of recognition for their role, along with the need for broader acknowledgement and greater influence. FEOs emphasised the scale of their responsibilities, which often went unrecognised.

“Our aim is to show schools it's not [just] nice to have a Family Engagement Officer, everybody *needs* to have Family Engagement Officer.” (FEO)

It was noted that if the role was appropriately recognised, then further schools and Local Authorities would utilise this resource.

3.2.3. Initial impacts reported by CFSSMs and FEOs

The initial reported impacts of the CFS strategy were wide-ranging and indicated positive perceived outcomes for families, schools, and the wider community. For example, many settings reported a clear improvement in engagement between parents/carers, schools, and local communities.

Participants felt that parents/carers had become more empowered and better informed, enabling them to advocate effectively for themselves and their children. At the same time, new or strengthened partnerships were reported with various statutory agencies and third-sector organisations, broadening the network of support available to families. As a result, parents/carers increasingly accessed external services, such as CAMHS, enhancing support for children with more diverse needs.

Learner attendance was reported to have increased in some settings, which was reported as a key priority for many using the CFS strategy. More community facilities were also adapted to better support families, and a focus on community engagement

created opportunities for schools to generate additional revenue through community-focused events and collaborative partnerships.

However, without systematic monitoring and evaluation, it is difficult to measure changes across priority areas or to break down findings by local authority or demographic groups. Some felt that this limited their ability to demonstrate the value of their work.

“I wish I could measure it because it really would show them how important this role is, and you know your small wins are often your big wins.” (FEO)

Nonetheless, participants also highlighted that the outcomes of CFS were not always quantifiable and that often the most profound impacts came from subtle changes in individual behaviours and attitudes, which would not be appropriate or even possible to formally measure.

3.3. Case studies

As part of this research, 5 case studies of CFS implementation across Wales were selected. These were chosen to showcase and share successes, challenges, and lessons learnt from varied contexts. These case studies demonstrate the breadth of work done under CFS to date, and the diverse settings in which CFS principles have been applied.

The case studies are presented here in alphabetical order by local authority name. Findings are drawn from case study fieldwork (outlined in Methodology), and where appropriate, complemented with relevant data from other evaluation strands (e.g., follow-up interviews that took place with stakeholders in the same local authority). Schools have been given pseudonyms where they did not consent to be named.

In cases where there was only one participant in a category who did not agree to be identifiable, categories have been merged in quote attributions to protect confidentiality. All figures relating to schools (e.g., eFSM percentages, roll numbers) were obtained from [StatsWales data for 2024/2025](#), and [WIMD data is for 2025](#).

It should be noted that the findings outlined are based on what was reported by case study participants. Opinions regarding the quality or outcomes of work were not verified by the evaluation team, as it was generally not feasible to obtain the data or widespread perspectives that this would require. Nonetheless, participant views provide valuable insight into how the work was understood, experienced, and perceived by those directly involved, and help to illuminate implementation processes, perceived impacts, and contextual factors shaping delivery.

3.3.1. Cardiff Eastern Community Partnership

3.3.1.1. Overview

Cardiff's Eastern Community Partnership (ECP) is a network made up of statutory agencies, community partners, and local schools. The ECP was founded by Eastern Cardiff's CFMS in early 2024 and has been growing since. Its purpose is to bring together everyone in the area who is interested in supporting learners and families to share learning, promote access to activities and supports, and avoid duplication of provision.

3.3.1.2. Case study context

Eastern Cardiff contains some of Wales's most deprived communities, with several neighbourhoods ranking in the lowest WIMD deciles in domains including income, health, education, and employment. The three schools that were engaged directly in the evaluation (Meadowlane Primary School, St John Lloyd Roman Catholic Primary School, and a third, 'Primary School A') have an average eFSM rate of over 50%, with the highest at over 60%. The impacts of long-term challenges were reflected by participants, notably how generational unemployment affects learners' ambitions. Newer issues were also highlighted, like the increasing incidence of 'county lines' gang activity and the criminal exploitation of young people. Several participants noted a historic lack of investment in Eastern Cardiff in comparison with other areas of the city, resulting in inconsistent provision of support over time and entrenchment of issues.

The community also contains considerable assets. The St Mellons Library and Hub and Llanrumney Hall Community Trust provide community-led spaces and services, including advice sessions and free family events. Being within Wales's capital city means there is an array of voluntary organisations, universities, and private companies nearby with assets, such as high-quality sports facilities in Cardiff University and Cardiff Metropolitan University (Cardiff Met) Cyncoed Campus. However, this wider range of non-community-run assets has historically been inaccessible to many of Eastern Cardiff's communities despite their proximity, with barriers including cost, transport, and lack of awareness.

While the east is less ethnically diverse than some other areas of Cardiff, some schools in Eastern Cardiff have high representation of Gypsy, Traveller, and Roma families, and participants noted growing numbers of learners with English as an Additional Language (EAL).

3.3.1.3. Findings

Background

The ECP was inspired in part by a similar initiative in West Cardiff, which began under a previous iteration of CFS policy in the 2010s. The partnership in the West has

become well-established and has since constituted and become a charity, enabling access to a wide range of funding streams. For the CFMS in the East, this highlighted a stark absence of networks locally to provide holistic support.

Early in the role, the CFMS experienced some challenges engaging schools with CFS (although many, particularly primary schools, were immediately interested). In response, the CFMS decided to pause and focus on wider engagement with organisations in the area. The CFMS emailed organisations working with families in the area, as well as schools, to come to an initial meeting. Over 40 attended this first meeting, surpassing expectations; the mailing list has since grown to over 80.

As part of a school-based approach, the ECP holds meetings every half term in an accessible location (usually the St Mellons Youth Hub, although there are efforts to find other suitable locations across the area) during the working day, to enable as many partners as possible to attend. There are also two [Padlets](#) (a digital bulletin board) to share information; for professionals, this includes resources like slides from ECP meetings and updates on services, while families have access to lists of local opportunities.

After about a year, the ECP was formalised as a group and collaboratively agreed on shared goals and values. This was marked by a celebration event with an expanded invite list and [accompanying video](#). This further served to clarify and promote the offer to potential new partners.

Schools and community partners noted they were initially interested in CFS and the ECP because it reflected an approach they already valued, and felt it would enable them to build on existing work. Community partners welcomed the opportunity to get 'a foot in the door' with schools, having previously tried with limited success; schools valued the ability to access appropriate and high-quality supports amidst the volume of communication they receive that they lack the capacity to assess.

CFS delivery

A wide range of activities, services, and supports has been delivered through the ECP. These include (but are not limited to):

- a collaboration with Cardiff Met and Cardiff University to make football facilities available to local primary schools, whose pupils were often unable to join local football clubs due to a lack of capacity
 - this was further facilitated by a donation of pairs of football boots from the Cardiff City Foundation, secured by the CFMS
- a programme run in collaboration with Cardiff Met to provide learners with access to Cardiff BMX Racing Club, a state-of-the-art facility in nearby Rumney
 - the project aims to allow selected young people at risk of being involved in anti-social behaviour and vulnerable to exploitation to have a positive, safe, and structured access to a sport

- it additionally aims to reframe learners' relationships to cycling and physical activity, while giving them a fun and exciting experience they would otherwise have been unable to access
- this was facilitated by a funding grant applied for collaboratively with Cardiff Met and the CFSM
- provision of accredited courses for parents/carers and families, delivered by trained facilitators from Cardiff and Vale College (CAVC)
 - courses cover a wide range of topics, including numeracy, maths, and digital skills
 - this provision aligns with CAVC's 'Families Learning Together' programme and Citizens' Curriculum, enabling mutual benefit in terms of recruitment and strategic alignment
- information sessions for families in which partner organisations (e.g., Warm Cymru, NHS Wales, National Literacy Trust, NSPCC, Cardiff Parenting, and local arts groups) set up stalls in school premises to engage with families to share information and opportunities (more details below)
- working with building companies operating locally to use their Social Value offering
 - in one case, a building company was engaged to build a kitchen on a school site, while other examples included careers talks on working in the construction industry
 - Meadowlane also took part in the Shape My School, Shape My Street project, where community members and building site workers engaged with learners about how they would like their local community to look
- school-based shops to provide food and uniform supplies, and other work conducted relating to food
 - in Primary School A, this has included collaboration with FareShare Cymru to redistribute surplus food from local businesses, and Meadowlane has worked with local Trowbridge and St Mellons pantries
- cooking programmes for parents/carers and children to learn together; in St John Lloyd, these were delivered in collaboration with Cook Stars
- coffee mornings for parents/carers and drop-in advice sessions with Riverside Independent Money Advice
- supporting schools and other partners to identify and apply for additional funding grants

CFS has also helped enhance regular school events, such as facilitating funding for the schools' Harvest Festival curriculum and family engagement activities. The importance of CFS in brokering the relationships to enable these activities to happen was emphasised by several participants.

“Half the schools attending [the programme] wouldn't be attending if it wasn't for Community Focused Schools, basically.” (Community partner)

Activities are carefully considered to maximise the shared impact of family, community, and multi-agency engagement. At a family information session attended by the evaluation team in Meadowlane Primary School, the timing was designed for parents/carers to visit before collecting their children from school. A system was in place in which each attendee received a slip of paper that could be stamped by each stall upon visiting. Those who visited every stall could return their slips to be entered into a raffle to win a £50 Tesco voucher; the winner of which was announced at the end.

Parents/carers who engaged with the evaluation team at the event noted the event's usefulness, and several said they had learnt about new services in the area and intended to make use of them. Many had been motivated to attend by the raffle, and attendance was facilitated by the event's timing. One parent who had migrated to the UK in the past 18 months saw the event and connection to the school in general as important in familiarising her with life in the UK and allowing her to feel part of the community.

The raffle system encouraged meaningful engagement, including with services that might be considered 'taboo' to approach without incentive, such as the Cardiff and Vale Drug and Alcohol Service. Some community partners indicated this kind of event opened up conversations that would not be possible using remote or indirect means, for example, discussing the importance of reading with parents/carers rather than just providing books.

Enablers and barriers to implementation

Clarity on the CFS offer was reported by many participants as an important enabler. Several mentioned a talk at an early ECP meeting by the facilitator of the Western Cardiff Learning Partnership, feeling it had given them a clear vision of what the partnership could look like, and inspiration to follow its success.

Local tailoring was also seen as crucial. In Primary School A, this was enabled by conducting parent questionnaires to understand what parents/carers want and practicalities, such as suitable times of day. This information was then passed to the CFSM, who could suggest and provide links to suitable opportunities. This was linked to the overall place-based approach as participants emphasised the importance of the partnership's deep knowledge of Eastern Cardiff.

“The strength of the partnership lies in the deep local knowledge each member brings. They understand the community's voice, its needs, and its nuances. That insight ensures what's offered is relevant, avoids duplication, and genuinely meets demand, because if it's not what people want, they simply won't come. Those attending the partnership meetings can give insight into whether something will work or not.” (Community partner)

Relatedly, the drive, skill, and local knowledge of individuals were important factors. The CFSM and several key community partners were identified by many participants as critical to the project's success, due to their passion and assertiveness in pursuing opportunities. Buy-in from school leaders and governors was also noted as an important enabling factor.

Critical to the ECP is a holistic, systems approach. The 'connector' role of CFS was strongly valued, as it did not add to an already busy system or duplicate provision, instead connecting individuals and promoting awareness of existing work. The approach of engaging organisations and agencies first to form a partnership, and then coming to schools with this structured offer, was seen by many to have been successful. Several participants highlighted the ECP's uniqueness in bringing so many stakeholders together in a truly collaborative way. Some further enhanced this collaboration through practices like co-working in shared spaces with different partner organisations to enable the sharing of information and ideas.

"We try and work in that systems way, [making] as many connections and understanding of what's possible rather than [headteacher] being the one point of contact, where arguably that's just too much work and it would probably not go anywhere. [...] And then it becomes almost a bit of a culture shift within the school that it's not, oh, we're going to look after ourselves and keep us quite isolated. It's actually no, it's the [area] community, and what can we learn from [school] or what can we share with [...] the other primary schools." (School-based stakeholder)

Some participants also noted how CFS can support the Curriculum for Wales, by enabling schools to make local connections to support learning, such as learning about town planning through building companies working locally. Alignment with the curriculum was seen as critical to any school-based initiative's success, as without this, it would be challenging to get leadership and governor buy-in and maintain CFS as a priority.

Some elements of CFS are less developed at this stage. Although some efforts were underway to promote the Welsh language, such as the establishment of a Welsh-language youth club, these were not strictly related to the ECP. Despite successes in schools for which family engagement had always been important, challenges persisted in engaging with other schools, particularly secondary schools, that did not see this as a priority.

Notably, the ECP's work has to date happened in the absence of funded FEOs, due to delays and changes in Cardiff's CFS funding approach. Participants were optimistic that the introduction of shared FEOs across school clusters would further enhance the work by having a dedicated individual to take on work currently being done by school staff or leaders, in addition to their core role.

Outcomes

Participants frequently commented that it was too early to be able to clearly measure or attribute impact from their work with the ECP. However, all reflected on emergent outcomes and successes. Many emphasised that outcomes were often not quantifiable and could relate to subtle changes in behaviour and attitudes, through which impacts would only become apparent in the much longer term.

Several important outcomes related to positive impacts on parents/carers. In particular, the provision of adult learning courses was seen to have a critical impact. This was highlighted by parents/carers themselves; one noted how impressed they were that the school provided courses almost every week and said this learning had helped them find a job. Working with CAVC has enabled access to accredited courses delivered by qualified staff, and further examples were provided of parents/carers going on to further education and employment, facilitated by progression opportunities within the college.

Increased engagement amongst families was noted, with indications that some families are becoming more open to coming into school settings and asking for support, due to growing confidence that the support will be there. This was closely linked to overall improvements in relationships with schools. One participant highlighted that offering enjoyable experiences like cooking classes in the school meant that families no longer solely associated the school with negative emotions, like disciplinary meetings for children or their own difficult experiences in school. It was noted that some CFS activities had been attended by families that had previously not engaged with the school, including Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller families.

Participants described a knock-on effect of these improved school-parent relationships on learners. This was linked to emerging evidence of increased attendance in some schools, which participants linked to more positive perceptions of the school by families and learners, and more holistic approaches to support and encouragement for those with low attendance.

“Rather than where the teachers over here and the families and the parents are there and [children] kind of have to fend for themselves, it's seeing that we are a community unit, and we are supporting each other, and there are things in place to support them.” (Member of school leadership team)

Relatedly, participants reflected on the enhanced opportunities for learners and families enabled by the ECP; for example, learners gained access to some of Cardiff's high-quality sports facilities that would otherwise have been inaccessible to them, despite living close by. There were hopes that these opportunities would lead to increased aspirations for learners and better attitudes and habits in relation to physical activity. Some participants also noted that the ECP approach enabled participation of schools outside Local Authority clusters, such as faith schools, which had historically often been left out of opportunities.

“It has opened up a whole world for us in [school]. And I don’t say that lightly, because in the last 12 months we’ve been able to access far more things – not just for our pupils, but for our families – that we were just not aware of.” (Member of school leadership team)

Where school leaders already saw family and community engagement as part of their ethos, the ECP was seen to both enhance their work and facilitate embedding this focus across the school community. In some cases, CFS had developed the school’s thinking to move beyond engaging parents/carers and consider the wider community as part of their remit.

“We have always wanted to be and have always tried to be a community focused school, but we’ve just been doing that kind of on our own. But now it’s a more official thing, and I think that’s supported with staff members who maybe feel that school is just about school [...] to opening their minds to saying, no, school is [...] a bigger thing than that. This is about our children, our families, and the community around us.” (Member of school leadership team)

School-based participants highlighted that being part of CFS removed a burden from them, in taking away the work required to seek and pursue opportunities for learners and families. They were reassured that any opportunities presented to them by the CFSM were of good quality and could focus on ensuring they met learners’ and families’ needs. Some participants put the challenges with engaging certain schools down to those schools not recognising this opportunity, and instead believing that CFS would create more work for them.

3.3.1.4. Lessons

The ECP case study highlights that engagement with schools, community partners, and families can be facilitated by presenting a clear vision of what CFS ‘is’ and what it can offer. Setting up a CFS structure with a clearly stated goal and bringing this to schools as a coherent offer can effectively break down initial confusion or hesitation. Nonetheless, some of the persistent challenges in Eastern Cardiff also reflect themes highlighted across the evaluation, particularly around the importance of individual passion to drive CFS and difficulties generating buy-in in the absence of this.

In the ECP, the primary role of CFS is to act as a central connecting force to bring together like-minded groups in a coordinated way and encourage further buy-in to a shared mission of holistic support for families. This model is easier to replicate in urban areas with strong community assets that can be capitalised upon and some pre-existing buy-in from local schools. However, many lessons are broadly applicable, including the value of coordinated community and multi-agency approaches and a clear and accessible CFS offer.

3.3.2. Ysgol Gynradd Maesincla, Gwynedd

3.3.2.1. Overview

Ysgol Gynradd Maesincla is a Welsh-medium primary school in Caernarfon, Gwynedd, which offers both mainstream classes and nurture classes to support children with social, emotional, and behavioural needs that create barriers to learning. They are in the second year of implementing CFS within the school, with a key focus on community engagement, which was forged through collaborations initiated by the FEO. These dedicated efforts have enabled learners to visit care centres, bookshops, and community hubs, fostering the development of key life skills, encouraging social interaction, and promoting a sense of belonging for both learners and community members alike.

3.3.2.2. Case study context

Gwynedd has the highest estimated proportion of Welsh speakers in Wales (74.3%) ([Welsh Government, 2025](#)). At Ysgol Gynradd Maesincla, the majority of learners come from Welsh-speaking homes (approximately 84%, as reported by participants), reinforcing the school's strong Welsh-medium ethos and its role in sustaining the use of the language within the community.

There are currently around 200 learners enrolled at Ysgol Gynradd Maesincla, which includes a small number of nursery-age children. The school is one of 4 primary schools in Caernarfon. It is a voluntary-controlled Church in Wales School within the Bangor Diocese; however, staff are employed by the local authority.

Around 45% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, in comparison to the national average percentage of 22.2%. The school also has a higher-than-average proportion of learners with ALN. Despite challenges, the school has over 90% attendance, only slightly lower than the national average and increasing since 2023.

Caernarfon's historical prominence and landmarks have made it a major tourist centre, and its assets include a natural harbour and Eryri National Park. However, Caernarfon ranks among the 10% most deprived areas in Wales, with particular challenges surrounding low income and community safety. Although levels of deprivation vary across the town, Maesincla's catchment area includes Peblig, which is in the most deprived decile overall on the WIMD.

3.3.2.3. Findings

Background

Ysgol Gynradd Maesincla has been delivering CFS for 2 years, having been selected by the local authority due to its high proportion of learners eligible for free school meals. As a result, an FEO was appointed to be based at the school 2 days per week. The appointed FEO had previously worked at the school in a different capacity for

many years, and therefore already had strong relationships with the school community, as well as with many learners and their families.

The FEO is employed and line managed by the local authority's Education Department. They are based at Maesincla for 2 days per week, spend 2 days at a local secondary school in another area of Gwynedd (different catchment area to Maesincla), and dedicate the remaining day to work within the community.

The school already had nurture groups and classes in operation prior to implementing CFS, which participants viewed as aligning with the CFS ethos due to its focus on holistic support (this work was reflected in a 2019 [report by Estyn](#)). Although Maesincla was initially unsure how to implement CFS due to limited guidance being available when the funding was first launched, it adopted an approach centred on supporting families and the local community, which is reflected in its CFS delivery. A key focus of the school's CFS work is also on improving attendance and supporting smooth transitions into secondary education. CFS is embedded within the School Development Plan and relevant policies, reflecting the school's strong commitment to pupil welfare.

CFS delivery

A crucial resource for Ysgol Gynradd Maesincla's CFS delivery was reported to be the FEO. The FEO's responsibilities can vary day-to-day in response to the needs of families; however, responsibilities include applying for grant funding to support CFS activities (e.g., gardening and craft activities), signposting parents/carers to relevant support services, conducting home visits, and providing practical support, e.g., transport to school for learners (although the school is within walking distance for most), assisting parents/carers with filling in important forms.

“Last year a family didn't have much for Christmas. So, I managed to get toys and stuff for them. The parent said it was one of the best things that has ever happened to them.” (FEO)

As part of this work, the FEO helped to establish Siop Shafins, a shop run by parents/carers that provides free food, clothing (e.g., recycled school uniforms), and books. Initially, the FEO managed the shop's operations, including sourcing donations from local supermarkets. However, it is now successfully run by parents/carers, who found that families were often more comfortable seeking help from peers in similar circumstances than directly from the school. This collaboration of parents/carers led to a PTA being set up for the first time in many years.

More broadly, the FEO and wider CFS work have placed particular emphasis on community engagement, such as:

- learners undertaking regular visits to Plas Maesincla Residential Care Home alongside the FEO

- this care home provides care for older persons, dementia, learning disabilities, and mental health, with residential and respite care
- learners participate in activities such as singing and gardening, as well as residents visiting the school for an afternoon tea
- learners have also conducted visits to Y Frondeg, a centre for adults with learning difficulties, to celebrate the centre's 50th anniversary
- attending Porthi Dre, which is a community hub in Caernarfon that aims to tackle poverty, reduce food waste, and combat loneliness, taking part in craft activities with local community members
- visiting Palas Print, a local independent bookshop, to conduct reading sessions with staff members

Other activities organised by the school include a [Macmillan Coffee Morning](#) to raise funds for individuals living with cancer, as well as a car boot sale held on school grounds to engage and support the local community.

“I think it's so important that the community knows we're here, but also that we know the community is out there and supports us too.” (FEO)

Although Maesincla is a Welsh-medium school, participants reflected that the CFS work has not increased the use of the Welsh language, primarily because Welsh is already the predominant language within the local community.

Enablers and barriers to implementation

A key enabler of early successful CFS implementation was reported to be securing the right person for the FEO role. Various participants reflected that the school benefits from having an FEO who understands the school and community context, which has been vital in building trust and developing meaningful relationships with families. The structure of the role also supports the prioritisation of community engagement as the FEO spends 4 days across the 2 schools and one day in the community, as outlined by the previous CFMS in the original job specification. The FEO was also reported to have strong local contacts and knowledge of the community, having worked at the school in another role previously, and uses this knowledge to set up partnerships. They have also contacted businesses in the local vicinity to foster links.

Another important factor identified was wide staff buy-in and understanding of the CFS principles. The FEO's prior experience working within the school meant that relationships with both staff and parents/carers were already established, which greatly supported the smooth introduction of the initiative. Staff are fully aware of the aims and processes of CFS, having discussed these regularly in meetings. The FEO's consistent presence in school for 2 days each week ensures visibility and accessibility, further embedding the programme in daily school life. Teachers frequently engage with the FEO to share concerns about learners, reflecting a shared commitment to the approach and strong collaboration across the team.

Despite these positive enablers, challenges remain around transitions to secondary school, particularly when receiving schools are not themselves engaged with CFS. Ensuring continuity of support and maintaining the relationships built through CFS as learners move into secondary education was an area identified for further development. As noted, the secondary school the FEO also works with is outside of Maesincla's cluster. School staff reflected that wider buy-in within secondary schools within the local authority would support this goal.

Another challenge for the school in delivering CFS has been the uncertainty surrounding funding. Various stakeholders highlighted a perceived lack of transparency around the budget, which has created challenges for financial planning. This challenge was compounded by the departure of the original CFSM in summer 2025, with no immediate replacement available to provide support. Senior leaders explained that the school budget could not sustain the FEO post or wider CFS activities independently, leaving the school heavily reliant on CFS funding. Concerns were raised about the extensive impact on provision should this funding be withdrawn. They suggested introducing a longer, 3-year funding cycle to support both job security for the FEO and the planning and implementation of the CFS strategy.

Another barrier in implementing the CFS strategy is that the FEO is only based in the school for 2 days a week. Various staff members and governors highlighted the high level of need within the school community and suggested that establishing a full-time position would provide more consistent and effective support for families at Maesincla.

A further challenge experienced by the school was the lack of clear guidance at the start of the CFS programme, as Welsh Government guidance was released gradually following the launch of funding. Initially, there was uncertainty about the overall aims and desired outcomes of CFS, though these became clearer over time. Staff expressed that written guidelines provided at the outset, such as a comprehensive package outlining the purpose, structure, and expectations of CFS, would have been extremely helpful.

School leadership and the FEO also acknowledged challenges with engaging parents/carers, as some were initially reluctant to accept support or acknowledge that help was needed. The FEO reflected on the patience required and dedicated efforts to build trust and positive relationships with families, particularly those who might have had negative experiences of the education system in the past. Nevertheless, the number of families now engaged demonstrates the success of this dedicated approach and provides a strong foundation for further development.

“So much depends on how parents view education and their own experiences at school. Some see education as a threat, where they did not fit in or failed, or it might not be important to them. [CFS] has shown them that there is more to school than just education. This project has enabled

us to chip away at the old challenges that they may have had for a long time.” (School-based stakeholder)

Outcomes

Although CFS is still in the early stages of development at Ysgol Gynradd Maesincla, stakeholders within the school and wider community have already identified a range of positive outcomes. A key effect has been the strengthening of relationships between families, the school, the community, and learners. For example, within the school, parents/carers have become more open and willing to seek support, reflecting the trust built through the FEO’s work and the wider school’s efforts to change some long-held, negative perceptions of educational settings. This has resulted in word of mouth supporting further parental engagement.

Beyond this, the FEO has also supported teachers in gaining a better understanding of the challenges parents/carers face in engaging with the school, fostering greater empathy and collaboration.

Similarly, for learners, the FEO was reported to provide a different kind of relationship compared with the typical teacher-pupil dynamic. School staff noted that learners often feel more comfortable sharing personal concerns with the FEO than they would with their teacher, reflecting the trust and rapport the FEO has established. As learners became more comfortable speaking with the FEO, they were better able to access the support they needed and maintain engagement with the school setting.

“Without the CFS there would be children going through the net.” (Member of school leadership team)

Another notable outcome of CFS has been the development of learners’ skills and confidence through community engagement. For example, when residents of Plas Maesincla Residential Care Home visited the school, learners assisted in preparing the afternoon tea, an activity that not only developed their practical life skills but also fostered social interaction and reinforced their sense of community.

Teachers highlighted that many learners spend a large amount of time at home, making opportunities to engage with the wider community particularly valuable. Similarly, community members have benefited from increased social interaction and a strengthened sense of belonging through their engagement with the school.

"The skills our children get are so important as well as the attention that all older people get. The cooperation between them develops empathy and the children come to understand our society better." (School-based stakeholder)

Building strong relationships and boosting learners’ confidence was also reported to have had a positive impact on attendance. Senior leaders observed noticeable

improvements in attendance among the learners and families with whom the FEO has been closely engaged.

“At the school there’s a child that doesn’t want to come in every day. But through building confidence he will now come out to the community and talk to the elderly where previously when he was with the teacher, they were just sitting by themselves. So, it’s something small like this we can do.”
(FEO)

3.3.2.4. Lessons

This case study reflects a wide range of activities Ysgol Gynradd Maesincla has undertaken to support both family and community engagement. In particular, their focus on taking learners to community settings, including care centres, bookshops, and community hubs, has enabled learners to develop essential social and practical skills while making positive contributions to areas of society that are often overlooked. These activities have strengthened community cohesion and engagement, aligning closely with the goals of the CFS strategy. This focus may have been encouraged by the previous CFSM’s establishment of a dedicated community outreach day each week for the FEO.

However, the school has faced challenges in supporting learners’ transitions into secondary education, particularly when some secondary schools in the catchment area are not themselves engaged with CFS. Fundamentally, Maesincla remains highly dependent on the FEO to deliver the CFS strategy, raising concerns about the sustainability of funding. Despite this, CFS appears to have demonstrably benefited learners, families, school staff, and the wider community. Stakeholders emphasised that establishing the role as full-time would be particularly valuable given the high level of need within the school.

3.3.3. Neath Port Talbot

3.3.3.1. Overview

CFS is more well-established in Neath Port Talbot (NPT) than in many other parts of Wales. Even before the initiation of this round of CFS in 2022, a community-focused approach was promoted by the local authority as part of a policy priority to tackle educational inequality. Over time, NPT has built towards a model where the majority of schools have access to an FEO, structures are in place to ensure shared learning and effective supervision, and activities are driven by evidence and evaluation.

The case study focuses primarily on 3 primary schools around Neath that were visited by the evaluation team as part of a CFS Celebration Week in March 2025 – Coedffranc Primary School, Abbey Primary School, and Ysgol Maes y Coed.

3.3.3.2. Case study context

Having historically been a centre of industry in Wales, particularly steelmaking around Port Talbot, NPT has faced challenges with unemployment and decline since the mid-20th century. Fifteen of NPT's LSOAs are ranked in the 10% most deprived in Wales, one of the highest proportions in Wales. Deprivation is particularly concentrated around former industrial areas like Sandfields in Port Talbot, and former mining communities in the Valleys. NPT has a higher-than-average proportion of adults with no qualifications, at 12.2% ([StatsWales, 2025](#)). The rural location of many of NPT's communities also limits access to services and supports.

NPT's local authority has placed a strong emphasis on education to mitigate the effects these challenges may have on children. A strong sense of independence led NPT to leave the Welsh regional education consortia in 2020, feeling it was better positioned to make decisions locally. This enabled greater autonomy in educational policy, including rolling out the Curriculum for Wales and leading on CFS from the beginning. A 2025 Estyn report recognised NPT's efforts regarding education, highlighting notable successes in the use of FEOs ([Estyn, resources, 2025](#)).

Coedffranc Primary School has a pupil population of 310, 31% of whom are eligible for free school meals. Its attendance was at 90.3% in 2024. Coedffranc was one of the earliest CFS pilot schools, with leaders travelling to New York on a learning trip in around 2015. Abbey Primary School is a new school that recently combined 3 primary schools into one large, modern facility. The school has an eFSM rate of around 16% and an attendance rate of 92.2%. Ysgol Maes y Coed is a special school, which caters for 120 pupils of all ages with a variety of complex learning difficulties.

3.3.3.3. Findings

Background

As noted, NPT was a leader in implementing CFS, with 4 local schools taking part in pilots and research trips to New York in the mid-2010s. The most recent Welsh Government announcement and guidance on CFS provided an opportunity to build on existing work.

CFS sits within the school improvement section of the Education Department, which was cited as an important enabler, as the approach is grounded in educational equity and collaboration with communities. Schools were initially targeted through the use of WIMD and eFSM data, and identifying which schools were already funding an FEO through their PDG. The priority was identifying and filling gaps to ensure equity across the local authority, aiming to provide every school with 15 hours of FEO time per week. Some FEOs were shared across clusters of smaller schools to make efficient use of resources.

At the time of evaluation fieldwork, 28 FEOs were in post, with this number intended to increase to 43 by late 2025. Three Learning Community Managers have been

appointed to provide support for FEOs, acting between the school and CFMS. For schools without access to an FEO, they are supported to recruit a 'community champion' who can attend FEO network meetings and share important information.

The CFS team has established a half-termly community network in one learning community, inviting every relevant agency and organisation to build links and enable holistic support. These are facilitated by a long-running partnership with Save the Children, which has provided support in developing the overall pilot CFS model, building on a previous Family Connect project, which supported parental engagement. A directory of agencies has also been developed to support FEOs with signposting.

Monitoring and evaluation have been made central to the CFS approach in NPT. NPT established 'Team Teulu' as a pilot model using the first round of CFS funding. Team Teulu is a team of 5 FEOs working across all primary schools in the Llangatwg cluster, employed by the local authority and managed by the CFMS. The pilot was informed by consultation with existing FEOs, and in 2023, Save the Children was commissioned to carry out a feasibility study on this approach. NPT has also worked closely with Professor Janet Goodall at Swansea University to ensure the approach is firmly evidence-informed.

An FEO network has also been established across the local authority. The network also includes subgroups working on distinct themes such as transitions. In addition to regular contact by WhatsApp, FEOs meet every half term to share learning and listen to targeted talks.

Phase 1 of CFS in NPT focused on overseeing FEOs to provide family support. At the time of evaluation fieldwork, NPT was moving to Phase 2 of its CFS approach, which aimed to train up whole school communities and fully embed the CFS ethos across NPT. Engagement has steadily grown. At the Celebration Event attended by the evaluation team, half of the 62 schools in the local authority attended; the CFMS noted that when CFS initially launched, only one school expressed interest.

CFS delivery

At Coedffranc, a Family Engagement Worker (FEW) was appointed around 2016 following the New York learning trip. The school places strong emphasis on early intervention and building trusting relationships with families, recognising that parents/carers can find it difficult to hand over responsibility for their children to the school. The FEW's approach was developed in response to the introduction of the Childcare Offer for Wales in 2019, providing 30 free hours of childcare a week, which enabled more parents/carers to work. This created a need and an opportunity for the school to provide wraparound support to children of all ages. The FEW role began with playgroups for younger children, developing into family groups in a dedicated room, which is now used by multiple partners and agencies. At the time of the evaluation team's visit, 118 children and parents/carers were being supported.

Another Teaching Assistant was sent on secondment to a comprehensive school and is now working with older children at the school. The school also has a CFS lead, whose role includes meeting parents/carers and learners at the door and overseeing elements of CFS coordination. The school works closely with agencies and services like speech and language teams, health visitors, nurses, and GPs. Flying Start is co-located on the school premises, enabling referrals and alignment of provision. The school has engaged in 'poverty proofing' measures in collaboration with the Child Poverty Action Group (along with 8 other schools across NPT), which aims to reduce the cost of attending school for families and improve awareness of poverty amongst school staff. Other initiatives include the PTA's swap shop located in the playground, which aims to reduce stigma around affordability.

Abbey Primary School has employed an FEO for 3 years, for 3 days a week. The FEO previously worked in the early years at the school and had well-established relationships with families. Early consultation with parents/carers indicated that parents/carers wanted to be more involved in the school, and that the school's modern facilities were not being utilised and shared enough with the community. The FEO's role includes searching for additional grant funding, running workshops and parent and toddler groups, and strengthening the PTA. Due to the FEO's personal experiences and interests, many activities have focused on ALN and providing parents/carers with skills and knowledge to support their children. The school has an ALN assessment centre attached, and the FEO has taken the opportunity to engage with and support these parents/carers as well. School premises have been shared with other organisations and agencies, such as educational psychology, drama, and arts groups, a local play library, and the 'Knitting Nanas.'

At Maes y Coed, CFS funding has been used to employ a full-time FEO. The school has a strong history of family engagement, having won an award during COVID, but this work was previously carried out by the deputy headteacher. The FEO's appointment was reported to have considerably freed her up to focus on other priorities. The FEO's role focuses on improving attendance through regular check-ins, home visits, and early engagement before the school year, as well as working with parents/carers through workshops and informal sessions. The school also provides practical supports, such as a fully-stocked food bank, vouchers, and holiday boxes, and ensures no leaders are excluded from trips or activities for financial reasons.

Because many learners come to school by bus or taxi, parental engagement has been more challenging in the absence of a 'school gate' community. The school has worked hard to build connections through newsletters, [Class Dojo](#) (a school-parent/carer communication platform), Facebook, and a Parent Council (which was soon to be established at the time of fieldwork). The FEO attends network events, which also help overcome the isolation that can come with being in a niche setting. The school links closely with local organisations and holds events like craft fairs in the school, which both boost connections to the community and raise funds for the school.

Implementation enablers and barriers

NPT's commitment to research and evaluation has meant that good practices are captured and shared. Collaborative inquiry networks have been set up to explore how school leaders can support each other through research. The local authority has also been developing a self-evaluation toolkit for schools to understand how they are mitigating the impact of poverty. Nonetheless, participants reported navigating challenges of prescriptiveness versus flexibility, even as more evidence emerged on the effectiveness of different practices.

“[We've been] grappling with it for the last three years in terms of, do we put out a structure, how do we put through the guidelines? And it's really hard to get that balance right. It's something I feel like I'm tiptoeing around at the moment.” (Local authority representative)

CFS in NPT has made use of several unique assets. For example, NPT has an early years community educational psychology service, one of only a few across Wales. This team of 5 is funded by Flying Start and the local authority and provides holistic advice, support, and assessments with a multi-agency ethos. They have worked within several schools in the area, in contrast to the usual need for formal referrals and waiting lists for children to see educational psychologists ([Wright, 2023](#)).

Networking between FEOs was reported to have enabled the implementation of new practices and connections with services and agencies that would otherwise not have been known. More broadly, the collaborative ethos across the local authority, including community networks, was seen as central to the success of CFS. Some participants reported engagement of community partners to be a challenge, feeling there was limited understanding of CFS and difficulties keeping partners engaged and proactive. However, others did not share this view and stated that community partners had been very positive about the approach. This likely varies by area.

Participants emphasised the importance of having the 'right person' in key roles, such as FEO, CFSE, and within the local authority. FEOs/FEWs effectively brought their own skillsets and passions to tailor the role, but local relationships and deep knowledge of the community, being open and approachable, and a proactive and positive attitude were all highlighted as crucial.

“The person in that [FEO/FEW] role is critical. They need to have a particular skillset, along with a particular approach. They have to be very genuine, authentic. They don't necessarily have to be from the community, but they have to be able to empathise and be able to put themselves in that position and be approachable, know that our families get good days, they get bad days.” (Member of school leadership team)

NPT's CFS team emphasises the need for schools to understand their own communities, both to develop appropriate action plans and also as a beneficial

engagement process in itself. Schools' approaches were grounded in continuous consultation and learning. Tools such as surveys, Class Dojo, and qualitative engagement were all used to understand communities' wants and needs and address these.

"We're forever mindful of, you know, different cohorts change, their needs change. So [we are] mindful of what can we offer, or asking the parents what do they need, so that we can put things into place then to support them." (Member of school leadership team)

Many FEOs across NPT are employed by schools rather than the local authority. This has at times led to inequities in role structure, pay, and progression. School-employed FEOs are unable to work during school holidays, leaving gaps in provision. Certain mitigations have been put in place; for example, training and networking opportunities are open to all FEOs regardless of employment structure. At Coedffranc, the school requested that the local authority provide supervision for the FEW (through a Welsh Government programme focused on support for those working in child protection); this has enabled appropriate independent support for the FEW's wellbeing.

At Coedffranc and Abbey, the FEW/FEO is directly employed and self-funded by the school through PDG funding, sometimes topped up with small grants. Staff described this as allowing them to "stand still but not move forward" due to financial constraints and the uncertainty of short-term grants. The impact of short-term funding cycles on planning and sustainability was highlighted across all participant groups.

"It's about the long-term security of funding, because we can't keep having this battle year after year and be having to choose between having support in class and having support outside." (Member of school leadership team)

The role of governors was highlighted as an enabler. CFS has been enabled in Coedffranc by a dedicated governing body who have prioritised CFS and early engagement and ringfenced funding for it, despite ongoing financial challenges and sacrifices. Their community governor plays an active role in promoting and supporting CFS at the school. The FEW produces termly reports for the governors to demonstrate impact and the value of the work. In Maes y Coed, the chair of the governing body is a parent governor, ensuring parent and family engagement remains a priority.

While CFS formed part of schools' improvement and self-evaluation plans, participants highlighted the importance of it being embedded as a whole-school ethos. One example of good practice was a primary school where the FEO has run sessions with teachers to build their understanding and confidence in working with parents/carers and supporting them to deliver their own family engagement activities.

In Abbey, parents/carers have been invited into classes to learn with their children. This has the dual effect of building staff understanding and buy-in to family engagement, while developing parents/carers' relationships with the school.

“It's more than just having it in a plan. It's the holistic approach that we take to it. And you know, you know, [FEO/FEW] is obviously the face of that. So [FEO/FEW] is out on the front door regularly meeting and greeting and being there for parents if they need them. She's holding attendance meetings with families, picking up the phone, checking in with them. So, it's that holistic approach rather than, you know, it's just being done because it's on a plan. It's everything that we do.” (Member of school leadership team)

This ethos was shared across the local authority, with the belief in a whole-school, sustainable approach to family support emphasised. Training has been developed for newly qualified teachers and middle-level leadership, and training was under development for governors. The CFS team was also exploring engagement of community champions within schools, to ensure the responsibility for CFS promotion did not lie entirely with the CFSM and committed leaders. Local authority representatives, including the CFSM, attend groups like NPT-wide headteacher meetings and cost-of-living poverty prevention groups to share the value of CFS and ensure it is kept on the agenda.

Outcomes

For many schools, observable and measurable impacts had occurred across metrics, including attendance, exclusions, and parental satisfaction with the school. An Estyn report for Coedffranc recognised the school's family engagement work as exceptional ([Estyn, 2022](#)). The Save the Children evaluation feasibility study in the Llangatwg cluster found that FEOs and the community network had been key facilitators in positive shifts in family engagement, although staff capacity and ongoing funding posed challenges (Save the Children, unpublished). CFS was considered to enable access to a wide range of services and agencies “on our doorstep” for schools that they had not previously been aware of or had access to.

In many settings, CFS was reported to have successfully created strong relationships with parents/carers and families. Many participants noted that while this had been challenging at first, consistent relationship-building over time had successfully overcome initial barriers. ‘Trial and error’ was noted as an important factor, and ensuring that not just activities but the way they were communicated was adequately tailored for families' needs.

“It's just a bit of a cultural shift really, for parents and staff. But some parents maybe don't have a good experience of school and they're a little bit frightened or wary to come in. With the maths workshop, we had a really, really good attendance. But the cooperative learning perhaps wasn't

as well attended. Because they weren't quite sure what cooperative learning involved, you know. So, it's about making that as explicit as we can, and obviously making parents feel comfortable within the environment as well." (FEO)

When the evaluation team attended a parent and baby group run by the FEW in Coedffranc, parents/carers described it as a supportive and confidence-building space that has helped them feel less isolated and more connected to the school community. Many heard about the group through existing links with the school or Flying Start, and valued the chance to meet other parents/carers, share advice, and establish daily routines. They spoke about learning songs and activities they could use at home, discovering local opportunities they would not otherwise have known about, and developing trust and confidence in the school. One parent noted the convenience of having all her children educated on the same site and appreciated the school's efforts to involve families through events such as Christmas concerts.

At Maes y Coed, parents/carers described the weekly sessions run by the FEO as a vital source of support, communication, and connection. They valued being regularly consulted about what would help them and seeing the school respond to their suggestions. Many highlighted how communication was much stronger than in mainstream settings, with daily updates and photos helping them stay connected to their children's learning when verbal communication at home can be difficult. The FEO also organises inclusive activities, such as Halloween events, cinema trips, and soft play sessions, that allow families to take part in experiences without fear of judgement, while also helping parents/carers build friendships and reduce isolation. These sessions provide opportunities to learn practical skills, such as sign language, and to take strategies home to support their children.

Positive outcomes and good practices were reported from other schools across NPT, as well as those directly engaged in the evaluation. For example, at Croeseuw Primary School in the Afan Valley, a co-design process with teachers, learners, and parents/carers led to the development of new policies like positive recognition of learner behaviour. This was linked to a reduction in exclusions and reduced timetables, an increase in parent evening attendance, and an increase in literacy scores. At Melin Primary School in Neath, the 'Ready, Steady, School' programme aimed to support transition from preschool, leading to positive changes in the school environment and staff skillsets. This was developed collaboratively with representatives from educational psychology, speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy, as well as parents/carers and learners. At Eastern Primary School in Port Talbot, a detailed data mapping project using metrics including job seekers allowance, foodbank use, and qualification level was developed to identify levels of support needs amongst families. Targeting the families with the greatest level of need led to increased attendance, increased parental engagement, and numerous parents/carers pursuing accredited courses.

The importance of the local authority-wide approach was emphasised by participants in building the profile of CFS as a key part of the educational approach, not an additional burden. Local authority representatives stated that NPT’s vision aligned with the Welsh Government’s, and that ‘now was the time’ for CFS, given opportunities provided by the Curriculum for Wales and broader changes across education.

“I think what this strategy has definitely done is really raise the profile of [CFS] as I think it that may depend on the headteacher, or the senior leadership team or the staff. Whereas this actual strategy is raising the profile of and the benefits of Community Focused Schools [...] The way Neath Port Talbot have done it in terms of almost like an LA-wide push on it – I think that's really enhanced our perception of it and that it's not an add-on, it's not a built on, it's something that can be embedded within our school and not add extra workload to people.” (Member of school leadership team)

Learning events like the Celebration Week in March 2025 provided opportunities to promote CFS and its successes, building interest and buy-in from schools that might have been hesitant. Their success is highlighted in the growing number of schools engaging with CFS across NPT. Despite challenges, there was a sense of excitement amongst many participants about the increasing numbers of FEOs across NPT’s schools and the continuing building of momentum.

3.3.3.4. Lessons

In NPT, strong buy-in from the local authority and a clear, multi-phase implementation plan have enabled CFS to begin to bed in across some settings. The approach has placed a strong emphasis on local tailoring, informed by close collaboration with learners, families, and wider communities, ensuring locally appropriate plans. At the same time, this is underpinned by a strong commitment to monitoring and evaluation, community networks, and FEO networks, which enable the dissemination of knowledge and good practice across the local authority, so all schools receive a consistent level of support.

Nonetheless, NPT continues to face challenges associated with inadequate and inconsistent resourcing. Short-term contracts create issues with recruitment and retention, as well as impacting staff wellbeing, while at the school level, underfunding has led to deteriorating infrastructure that cannot always accommodate what is required to maximise delivery of CFS. This element demonstrates that effectiveness and sustainability cannot be built without adequate long-term funding.

3.3.4. Pembrokeshire Learning Centre

3.3.4.1. Overview

The Pembrokeshire Learning Centre (PLC) is a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) maintained by the Local Authority, offering specialist education and support for children and

young people of statutory school age whose behavioural, emotional, social, or other additional learning needs cannot currently be met within a mainstream school environment.

A community-focused ethos was already embedded in the PLC's culture through their participation in a similar project; however, the CFS strategy has further reinforced and validated this approach through the dedicated support of an FEO, who has helped implement the CFS through widespread family, community, and multi-agency activities within the setting. According to participants, one of the most notable outcomes of this approach has been a marked improvement in the school's reputation within the local community. By actively challenging long-held perceptions associated with PRUs and fostering meaningful relationships, the PLC has strengthened its connection with families and local stakeholders, enhancing trust and engagement across the community.

3.3.4.2. Case study context

The PLC is a county-wide service that offers short- to medium-term placements designed to stabilise and support learners, with the aim of reintegrating them into mainstream education where appropriate or transitioning them to suitable long-term educational pathways. Admissions are managed by Pembrokeshire County Council, which serves as the admissions authority. Each application is reviewed by a multi-agency panel, including representatives from the Inclusion Service, Educational Psychology Service, and nominated schools. At the time of writing, the PLC supports approximately 150 learners; however, this number is expected to rise by the end of the year due to increasing demand for specialist placements.

The PLC provides tailored support for learners with varying needs through the following provisions:

- [Learning Resource Centre](#) supports learners with additional learning needs and complex needs by offering small class sizes, specialist teaching staff, and a flexible, individualised curriculum
- [Stepping Stones](#) offers enhanced support for pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 who struggle to attend mainstream education due to high levels of anxiety or poor mental health
 - the provision delivers a personalised curriculum, access to qualifications, alongside dedicated social and emotional support
- [Outreach](#) delivers bespoke education packages for learners transitioning between schools or specialist settings, as well as for those who have experienced prolonged absence from education
 - the programme facilitates reintegration and ensures continuity of learning

They also provide support for [Primary](#), [Key Stage 3](#), and [Key Stage 4](#) learners with a focus on behavioural support and emotional wellbeing.

Although the Neyland area, where the PLC is based, is ranked as moderately deprived in the WIMD, this is not fully representative of the wider learner population. Many learners travel from outside the local area to access the specialist support offered by the PLC, reflecting a broader range of socioeconomic backgrounds and needs. The percentage of learners eligible for free school meals at the centre is currently 44%. The needs of this cohort were felt to contribute to persistent absenteeism, which is prevalent amongst 70% of learners.

3.3.4.3. Findings

Background

The PLC was among the first educational settings in Pembrokeshire to receive CFS funding with the introduction of an FEO role in 2022. It was selected due to its high proportion of secondary-aged learners and substantial numbers eligible for free school meals. However, the core principles of the CFS initiative were already well-established within the setting, supported by strong commitment from senior leadership and previous involvement as a pilot site for the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) programme.

Compared to other settings implementing CFS, the PLC faces distinct challenges. As a PRU, many learners are transported in from across Pembrokeshire, limiting opportunities for informal interactions at playground drop-offs, which typically support engagement with parents/carers. There are also many instances of parents/carers' own negative experiences of school impacting their willingness to interact with the PLC and their child's education. Therefore, a key priority of the PLC is providing a sense of belonging and community for all young people attending and their families.

Furthermore, the lack of a catchment area complicates efforts to build a meaningful connection with the local community, as families do not typically live in the local area.

“I think it's harder for somewhere like the PLC to implement the model because it serves the entire county, not just a catchment area. There [are] kids from all over the county there for one reason or another.” (Local authority representative)

Stigma associated with PRUs, which include an association with exclusion, negative media representation, and limited public understanding of underlying social inequalities, has historically hindered community engagement. In response, and alongside its CFS work, the setting rebranded as the Pembrokeshire Learning Centre (previously named the 'PRU') as part of broader efforts to shift perceptions and foster a more inclusive identity.

CFS delivery

A fundamental role within the PLC's delivery of the CFS ethos is the FEO, who is the designated point of contact for many families. The FEO plays a particularly vital role in this context, given the considerable needs of learners and their families. The local authority currently funds 3 days of the FEO contract, with the PLC covering the costs for the additional 2 days. Recognising the vital role of family engagement in supporting learners, the PLC volunteered to be a pilot setting for the FACE programme in 2021. FACE involved a 10-week series of training sessions for parents/carers, covering topics such as cooking, reading, support with homework, and general empowerment of parents/carers in their roles. Although FACE adopts a non-judgemental, trauma-informed approach, it was widely observed that many parents/carers face substantial barriers to engagement, such as past negative experiences with education, which can make entry into the school a daunting prospect. This learning contributed to the development of the CFS approach. The role of the FEO was understood as crucial in encouraging participation, building trust, and fostering meaningful relationships with families.

“The FEO role is imperative in having a strong working relationship with the families. If you have the families on board then you quite often see that in the children's behaviour and that helps them to learn or overcome any barriers. It really is key.” (School staff member)

All stakeholders engaged in the evaluation emphasised that the FEO role at the PLC provides a vital link between families, the school, and other statutory services. This is achieved through regular communication with families via phone calls, Class Dojo, home visits, and, when preferred by parents/carers, meetings in more neutral settings (e.g., cafes). An important focus of the role is improving attendance, particularly among learners with persistent absenteeism. The FEO also plays an important advocacy role, supporting parents/carers during meetings that can often feel intimidating or be filled with confusing jargon. At the core of their role is responding to families facing critical needs.

Beyond this, the FEO is responsible for signposting and making referrals to relevant services, applying for funding and organising community-facing events aimed at strengthening relationships with families and fostering a sense of belonging within the wider community. It should be noted that the PLC is not overseen by a CFSM, with the Assistant Headteacher (Pastoral) acting as the line manager for the FEO. This approach to line management was reported to have been effective at the PLC, largely due to strong leadership support.

The FEO has a dedicated budget to provide support where needed, for example, when a learner came into the PLC with nothing provided for a weekend away, the FEO was able to buy them some necessities.

“Those are just unexpected things that you have to be quite reactive to and have that funding available so that when you need it, you can make sure that you know they've got what they need.” (Member of school leadership team)

The many CFS-related initiatives undertaken by the PLC have been categorised below to reflect the breadth of the PLC's work across family engagement, community engagement, and multi-agency working. However, in practice, these activities often overlap and operate interchangeably; for instance, many family and community events are delivered in collaboration with multi-agency partners.

Family engagement

- Ongoing commitment to the FACE project since 2021-22.
- Parent Reading Groups provide an opportunity for parents/carers and learners to work through shared texts together, where effective reading strategies are modelled to build confidence amongst families to continue the practice at home.
 - To encourage reading at home, participants received incentives such as age-appropriate books, a bookshelf, and a beanbag to help create a dedicated reading space in the home.
 - The groups also organised trips to the local library to further nurture a love of reading and promote library use.
- Caffi Croeso is a monthly pop-up café for parents/carers to attend, designed and run by learners, with funds raised reinvested into community activities.
- Parent drop-in sessions are offered on a fortnightly basis, particularly aimed at families of new starters, which recognises that learners start across a school year at a PRU.
 - These sessions provided opportunities to meet the FEO, build relationships, and resolve any early challenges.
- Free uniform provision for all learners to foster a sense of belonging and connection to the PLC, while also eliminating any stigma associated with the financial burden of uniform costs.
- Weekly food parcels provided to families and referrals to PATCH (a charitable organisation aiming to relieve the effects of poverty for individuals and families within Pembrokeshire) to support families struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.
- Fruit scheme (weekly fruit delivery for learners) to ensure pupils are given healthy snacks within the school day.
- [Greggs Breakfast Club](#) ensures healthy and nutritious breakfasts are provided daily, so learners start the day ready to learn.
 - This is particularly important as many learners have long commutes to the PLC and may not have had the opportunity to eat before arriving on-site.

- [Greggs Foundation Hardship Fund](#) enables the PLC staff to apply for essential household support (white goods, beds, grocery vouchers, clothing vouchers, and utility support) on behalf of families.
 - The Fund only accepts applications from referral partners pre-approved by the Greggs Foundation, of which the PLC is one.
- Arts and crafts opportunities under the Springboard programme for families, including mosaic installation at the main entrance to ensure a more welcoming learning space.
- Holiday Club provides sessions for targeted learners/families (though open to all) to ensure learners have access to activities during the school holidays.

Community engagement

- Collaborative ventures with Neyland Town Council have supported local events to enhance community links:
 - for example, holding a Winter Wonderland event in 2024, which was open to local residents and the wider community, with access to an ice rink and other attractions
- School facilities opened after hours to host a wide range of groups and services, including Neyland AFC, Youth Service, Sea Scouts, Action for Children, GroBrain Toddler Programme, Trauma-Informed Schools Training, Neyland Flying Start Playgroup, and Doodles Day Nursery.
- Further adult learning opportunities provided through Springboard, which offers free courses to adults and families to develop maths and numeracy skills in partner schools in Pembrokeshire.

Multi-agency engagement

- On-site services and regularly hosts multi-agency meetings, such as TAPPAS ([Team Around The Pupil Parent and School](#)) and schools in-reach, ensuring joined-up working.
- Transition support for learners moving into post-16 options, including [Pembrokeshire College](#), [PRP Training](#), [Futureworks](#), and [Youth Outreach](#).
- Careers planning embedded through close collaboration with Careers Wales.
 - The PLC is the first PRU in Wales to achieve Stage 2 of the Careers and Work-Related Experiences award.
- Employment links forged through partnerships with local employers, further education colleges, and training providers enhance learners' access to real-world opportunities and skill development.

Enablers and barriers to implementation

An important enabler for the work of the FEO and broader CFS implementation was strong leadership buy-in. The senior leadership team and Management Committee (equivalent to school governors, comprising a wide range of individuals, including local authority statutory services and partnerships) recognised the value of the CFS

approach, and their support was reported to create a positive ripple effect throughout the setting, influencing teachers and support staff alike.

More broadly, the success of CFS at the PLC was attributed to the commitment of passionate individuals, including the FEO, senior leaders, and other key staff, who brought a deep understanding of the community and consistently demonstrated a non-judgemental and empathetic approach. The FEO at the PLC, in particular, was praised by the senior leadership team and teaching staff alike for their patience, perseverance, and empathy, qualities that were seen as vital to the programme's successful delivery.

Another factor in the successful implementation of CFS at the PLC was the availability of the FEO network coordinated by the local authority. This network brings together FEOs from across Pembrokeshire in half-termly meetings, providing a valuable forum to share effective practices, discuss common challenges, and generate collaborative solutions. Guest speakers are regularly invited to present best practice and highlight local services, fostering opportunities for partnership and promoting multi-agency working. Community partners and the FEO noted the network was essential for maintaining consistency and aligning best practice across Pembrokeshire. In parallel, the PLC has supported the professional development of the FEO and other staff by facilitating access to training in trauma-informed practice, an approach considered key to the success of the initiative.

While staff turnover poses a potential challenge in all settings, school staff felt that the CFS ethos is well-embedded within the PLC, which should support the long-term sustainability even if staffing changes. This is further reinforced by the inclusion of the FEO provision in the School Improvement Plan. However, having dedicated funding for the FEO role was seen as critical in enabling them to champion CFS effectively.

While the PLC receives regular income through school placement fees and benefits from the support of the Friends of PLC (a group of volunteers who raise funds to provide enriching experiences for the learners at the PLC), the school is often required to find creative solutions to sustain the wide range of initiatives it delivers. This includes hosting paid events and generating income by renting out facilities for community activities.

Despite these efforts, the Management Committee reflected that securing consistent funding for the FEO role remains a particular concern. The primary issue lies in the short-term CFS funding cycle, which creates uncertainty around the long-term sustainability of the role, especially as the funding for the initiative is unclear after the 2025/26 financial year. It was suggested that a longer-term funding model would offer greater stability and support more effective financial planning.

“From an FEO point of view, they are on rolling 12-month contracts, so they don't know if they've got job security. And the concern is that we are

upskilling these people who are doing fantastic jobs but the risk is that they will not stay with us. So, we've lost some really good FEOs [across the local authority] this academic year [... due to] career progression or [they've] gone on to somewhere where they have more job security. And that is a concern." (Member of Management Committee)

Another barrier faced by the PLC relates to infrastructure. Although the building is scheduled for redevelopment, this has been deprioritised, reflecting broader challenges currently affecting the PRU sector. Although they are making the best use of the available space, limitations remain due to the need for a newer building.

In addition, the PLC continues to adapt to changing parental expectations, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a lasting impact on families and their engagement with education. While efforts to strengthen relationships with parents/carers have been overwhelmingly positive, this has, at times, created challenges around handling unrealistic expectations. Staff have observed that a small number of parents/carers occasionally express expectations that go beyond what the school can reasonably provide. Moreover, while the FEO plays an invaluable role in supporting both the school and the wider community, it is recognised that it cannot resolve all of the wider social challenges that families may experience.

Outcomes

One of the key outcomes of the CFS approach at the PLC, reported by participants, has been a notable improvement in the school's reputation within the local community. By actively challenging previously held perceptions and building meaningful relationships, the PLC has strengthened its rapport with families and local stakeholders. While a community-focused ethos was already embedded in the PLC's culture, the CFS initiative has reinforced and validated the importance of this approach. The Management Committee reflected that the introduction of the FEO role has also been instrumental in furthering these ambitions, effectively 'legitimising' the PLC's outreach work with parents/carers and the wider community. Furthermore, the Management Committee model at the PLC demonstrated that Local Authority services (e.g., social services) benefited from the PLC's outreach work, which supported more effective collaboration across statutory services.

Community partners and teaching staff highlighted that many parents/carers might have had negative experiences of school themselves, which initially contributed to their reluctance to engage with the PLC and previous schools. However, the FEO has played a crucial role in building trusting, non-judgemental relationships with these families, helping to dismantle long-held assumptions about educational settings. These relationships are often difficult for teaching staff to establish, particularly due to previous breakdowns in communication or the association of teachers with disciplinary roles, making the FEO's position especially valuable. As a result of this trust-building, many parents/carers are now more willing to access support for both themselves and their children. For example, the FEO has provided critical welfare support during times

of crisis, such as following the recent hospitalisation of a parent, as well as securing funding to support families struggling financially, particularly in the cost-of-living crisis.

“With families that [the FEO has] been working with, we sometimes need to have difficult conversations and provisionally change provision for the pupils, and parents will not always react in a positive way. [The FEO] will come into those meetings to primarily support the parents and will always consistently throughout the meeting check on the parents’ wellbeing, asking ‘Do you understand what’s being said?’, ‘Is there anything you want to ask?’ Sometimes it can be quite overwhelming when you’re a parent sat in a meeting with professionals. We might use terminology that we would understand but they might be too embarrassed to ask what we meant. In those cases, the feedback from parents would be that [the FEO] is their support mechanism in those difficult situations”. (School staff member)

In addition, CFS-led events have created opportunities for parents/carers to form connections amongst themselves. Initiatives such as Caffi Croeso have enabled families to form supportive peer networks, with parents/carers reflecting that they have been able to bond over shared experiences and offering one another emotional support, practical advice, and a sense of belonging.

Another important outcome of introducing the FEO role at the PLC has been the reduction of pressure on teaching and support staff. All professional stakeholders reflected that the presence of an FEO has increased overall capacity, enabling staff to focus more on classroom-based work, rather than managing complex family issues for which they may lack the time or specialised skills. Staff also recognised the FEO as a vital source of information and expertise. The FEO’s in-depth understanding of individual family contexts and knowledge of external support services have been invaluable in guiding staff responses and referrals. Through this work, the FEO has developed a deep understanding of the complex challenges the PLC faces in areas such as attendance, parental engagement, community relationships, and partnership working.

Importantly, CFS has also played a role in supporting staff wellbeing alongside family wellbeing. Staff highlighted that initiatives such as taster sessions in home cooking, gut health, alternative therapies, and wreath making have been organised for both staff and families, reflecting a whole-community approach to wellbeing at the PLC.

The impact of the CFS role has also extended to learners, particularly in relation to attendance and learner wellbeing. While measuring improvements in attendance can be challenging in a setting like the PLC, when learners are on shorter-term placements and often arrive mid-way through the academic year, it was acknowledged by senior leadership and a local authority representative that the FEO has contributed meaningfully to both attendance management and performance. One example included taking learners and their families on a tour of the PLC outside

regular hours to help them acclimatise to the environment. More broadly, the FEO role has been identified as a key factor in the success and stability of certain student placements.

“It's probably saved some placements. I think that we would have had situations where we were scratching our heads trying to figure out what to do because it just wasn't working. The parents weren't playing ball, the [child] wasn't coming [in], whatever it might be. And I think [the FEO's] work has averted some of those scenarios.” (Local authority representative)

Another important outcome for learners has been accessing new experiences that they might not otherwise have had without CFS. In the primary provision, for example, teachers reflected that learners have benefited from off-site and extra-curricular activities, such as visits to farms and boxing sessions. Additionally, the Winter Wonderland event, organised in collaboration with Neyland Town Council, provides young people with an opportunity they might not have otherwise experienced due to the costs of attending such events elsewhere. These opportunities not only enrich their learning but also support personal development and wellbeing.

More broadly, staff consistently emphasised that the true impact of the CFS approach is best seen in individual learner case studies, which highlight the important, and often transformative, effects on families and learners.

3.3.4.4. Lessons

The PLC case study highlights the critical role of the FEO in championing the CFS approach, which is enhanced when the role is respected within the setting and given the autonomy and resources to fulfil their responsibilities (e.g., control over their own budget). When combined with strong leadership support and buy-in from the wider school staff, CFS has proven successful across diverse educational environments, particularly when implemented with creativity to address local barriers and challenges (for example, the absence of a playground drop-off culture). Crucially, the CFS initiative has the potential to strengthen efforts to improve negative community perceptions, particularly for PRUs, which often face preconceived assumptions.

However, this case study also reflects challenges consistent with broader themes identified in the CFS evaluation, notably the uncertainty surrounding grant funding and ongoing infrastructure issues, particularly related to school buildings. While the PLC has demonstrated innovative responses to these challenges, the findings suggest that the CFS strategy would benefit from more sustained and widespread financial support.

3.3.5. Wrexham secondary schools

3.3.5.1. Overview

CFS in Wrexham is guided by a youth work approach, which emphasises trust, participation, and empowerment as means of achieving both educational and social outcomes for young people. Wrexham’s CFS team have prioritised working with secondary schools as a starting point, with the work branching out into cluster primary schools. The 2 secondary schools involved so far are both currently in special measures, and the CFS team have developed tailored approaches to support the schools’ journeys of change and improvement.

Most of the information in this case study relates to Ysgol Clywedog, due to greater staff availability to participate in the evaluation.

3.3.5.2. Case study context

Wrexham is the largest settlement in north Wales, and was awarded city status in 2022, making it one of the UK’s newest cities. This development was envisaged to generate opportunities for economic and social regeneration and improvement, leading to enhanced use of and investment in cultural assets and building on civic pride ([Wrexham County Borough Council, 2021](#)). Wrexham County Borough contains pockets of serious deprivation, linked to industrial decline and reduced public spending in recent years. Community safety is a particular issue; the borough has considerably higher-than-average rates of crime and anti-social behaviour, especially in the urban centre. Although employment rates are in line with Wales as a whole, the rate of 16–64-year-olds with no qualifications is higher than average ([StatsWales, 2025](#)).

Ysgol Clywedog is a large comprehensive school on the edge of Wrexham’s urban centre, with 800 pupils on roll. Over 20% of the school’s learners are Black, Asian, and minority ethnic, notably higher than the borough’s average non-White population of less than 7%. The school was prioritised for CFS in part due to its assets, including the presence of youth workers in the school, its sports centre, and the education team’s familiarity with the school’s context. However, the school has faced a challenging recent history. It has been in special measures since 2019, with Estyn’s report particularly highlighting challenges with standards, teaching and learning experiences, and leadership and management ([Estyn, 2019](#)). Over 30% of Clywedog’s learners are eligible for free school meals, and its attendance stood at 82.7% in 2024, lower than the national average of 88%.

The other secondary school engaged in CFS, ‘Secondary School A,’ is located in a rural village with a strong mining history and a high population of Welsh speakers. Around 1/3 of its learners are eligible for free school meals. The school has been in special measures since early 2025, with areas for improvement including attendance, teaching quality, and provision for learners with ALN. However, Estyn’s report also

highlighted positives, including effective engagement of pupil voice, family engagement, and the school's approach to pupil wellbeing, which includes collaboration with outside agencies and partners to provide support and a range of activities to support transition into the school for new Year 7s.

3.3.5.3. Findings

Background

The CFS team initially identified Clywedog as a priority school, based on data highlighting challenges with behaviour and attendance. After some initial challenges building understanding of CFS, the appointment of a new headteacher in 2024 provided an opportunity to begin to develop and embed the CFS approach as part of wider changes in the school. The work in Secondary School A began later, also capitalising on the opportunity of a new headteacher, and aiming to build on established family engagement work within cluster primary schools to address challenges at the secondary level.

The CFS team developed a detailed strategy in 2024, splitting into 2 clusters, each with its own KPIs and action plan. KPIs focus on 3 main areas of pupil support, family support, and community work. The approach is underpinned by robust management structures, including regular supervision, team meetings, and wider meetings between local authority teams.

Both schools serve different communities and face distinct challenges and opportunities, and the relative success of different CFS elements in each setting can shed light on how CFS approaches can be tailored across contexts. In Clywedog, the work has focused on learner support and community engagement as a route to family engagement, while in Secondary School A, family engagement has been stronger, enabled by a close-knit community and ongoing engagement work at primary schools in the cluster.

CFS delivery

CFS in Wrexham is held within the Prevention and Support strand of the local authority's Education Department, working closely with the other two strands of ALN and Inclusion and School Improvement. Prevention and Support were considered to align best with the youth work approach that the team intended to take. CFS funding is retained and allocated by the Education Department, rather than distributed to schools. The rationale for this approach was that this would be easier to track and monitor, and to ensure the funding was targeted in line with CFS principles. Six FEOs are employed by the local authority, with 2 based in each of the secondary schools and supporting the clusters. More recently, 2 further FEOs have been employed, one focusing on adult and family learning and one focusing on learners in Education Other Than At School (EOTAS).

Participants broadly thought that the funding approach worked well. FEOs stated that it was beneficial that they were seen as independent of the schools, because this overcame negative perceptions some parents/carers and learners might have around engaging with schools. Another important benefit was that the CFS team had a wider perspective on community needs in comparison to individual schools, enabling more effective targeting.

“[The CFSM] is in other schools and she sees the similarities about what's going on in the community and what the community needs. I don't think a school can do that, because [we] just don't have the people all the time to get out into that community in the same way.” (School-based stakeholder)

At Secondary School A, parental engagement activities have included fortnightly coffee mornings, adult learning sessions, and collaboration with the Little Learning Company to deliver craft sessions. Signposting to different services and agencies has also been a focus, as well as follow-up with referred parents/carers to track how they are getting on. Parent engagement sessions were reported to be well-attended and positively received, with numbers growing over time and offshoot benefits developing, like parent WhatsApp groups.

At Clywedog, the CFS team receives referrals of young people in need of support from the school, and then ‘triages’ them based on shared needs. The team provides some direct support to young people, including home visits and one-to-one engagement. The FEOs’ room at Clywedog was referred to as a ‘safe space’ where learners could come to if they were struggling throughout the school day. FEOs also support some small groups of learners with [Agored](#) qualifications around wellbeing, confidence, and mental health. Where CFS targets attendance, it explicitly adopts a less punitive approach, aiming to understand learners’ barriers to attendance and support them through strengths-based approaches.

In line with its youth work ethos, Wrexham’s CFS team aims to engage with young people as a first step and listen to what they need, then seek appropriate opportunities to address them. It was noted that this approach can clash with many schools’ more ‘traditional’ hierarchies, and at times, the CFS team reported struggling to convey their ethos. This was particularly the case where young people were taken out of class to attend activities, as school staff and leadership were concerned that this would negatively impact learners’ education, while the CFS team stated it would be beneficial.

The CFS team have worked with a range of local organisations to provide opportunities for learners, and local assets like the Vic Youth Club have been used to host provision. One initiative that was mentioned frequently was with a local boxing club, in which young people were selected to join boxing classes based on identified issues around attendance, behaviour, and anxiety. Participants reflected that for young people who were struggling in school, these classes gave them a sense of

ability and pride in themselves. One participant noted that during these boxing classes, some young people could open up and communicate feelings that they had not previously felt safe to express.

Other community partners included [RockWorks Music Academy](#). An example was given of a young person who was struggling with the transition to secondary school, who was given access to music lessons set up by an FEO. This led to the young person performing live at a local music festival, suggesting increased confidence as well as learning a new and possibly lifelong skill.

Food and Fun was also highlighted as an important initiative. In addition to its practical benefits in offering support and recreation over the summer, participants noted that it enabled new connections and referrals for some families and young people who had not previously engaged. Forest school has also been delivered, which was reported to be effective in supporting struggling learners. The CFS team has worked with [Groundwork North Wales](#) to deliver adult learning classes to parents/carers, although uptake has been limited at Clywedog.

CFS has also contributed to community cohesion efforts. The CFMS was able to bring a range of community stakeholders together, including Show Racism the Red Card, following some issues raised around racism within Clywedog. CFS funding has also contributed to the setup of a multi-faith prayer room in the school.

Capital funding has been secured for an external building on the school site, which is intended to host learning opportunities, including a barista course for parents/carers and learners. There has also been a focus on utilising school facilities for community benefit, with participants feeling that these had historically been underutilised. CFS capital funding has also been used to enhance school facilities, including changing rooms in the sports facilities and external classrooms used for pupils struggling with mainstream school.

Enablers and barriers to implementation

Participants noted that an initial lack of KPIs enabled flexibility and creativity, but that as needs and priorities became clearer, structured action plans ensured consistency and targeting. There was an ongoing balance needed between avoiding overburdening staff while making sure activities are effectively monitored and tracked.

At a strategic level, the work is grounded in a strongly collaborative approach, in which the sharing of resources and knowledge is central. One participant described the approach as “just constantly talking.” CFS was envisaged as a central part of wider attempts to move to a more holistic and collaborative approach to service delivery across the local authority.

“People will challenge, will actually say you shouldn’t be doing that, that’s [the schools’] job. [...] one thing we’re not, we’re not precious. Anything that we’ve got belongs to everybody.” (Local authority representative)

The youth work approach was considered valuable in the Clywedog context, where many parents/carers and families were reported to have negative relationships with the school and with statutory services. By working initially with learners and giving them positive experiences that they could share at home, it was thought that this could open the door to changing parental perceptions.

“You've got to start somewhere, and you can't go into a lot of these individual homes and get a positive outcome because a lot of people see services as quite negative [...] So, if you can come into the schools and show the kids that [services] aren't the nasty people, they're not here to rap you over the knuckles all the time, they're here to help.” (School-based stakeholder)

The youth work ethos was also considered important to support the wellbeing and development of young people who were struggling with issues around attendance and behaviour, in line with the less punitive approach mentioned previously.

“You don't always hear the young person's story. It's overshadowed by parents talking, adults having conversations. So I think [CFSM's] way of doing this coming in is that she does have those adult conversations, you know, but she's also very aware that the child has a voice as well.” (School-based stakeholder)

In Secondary School A, pre-existing family engagement structures at the primary level were noted as an important enabler in providing opportunities for FEOs to build on existing relationships and encourage parents/carers to stay engaged during the transition into secondary school, rather than starting from scratch. This engagement was further enabled by the small, close-knit community in the school's village, where many parents/carers knew each other and were more open to joining community events and initiatives.

By contrast, Clywedog's challenges with engagement were compounded by its geographic location. It is located beside a main road, and not within a residential area. There are hopes that CFS may enable school-related activities to take place in more central community spaces, to mitigate this challenge in future.

Some participants reflected on reasons why parental engagement was more challenging at the secondary level in general. It was commented that parents/carers tend to view their children as more independent at secondary level, and see less need to engage; similarly, learners entering secondary school might want to embrace their independence and not want their parents/carers to attend events and interact with teachers.

Gaining buy-in to CFS in a context where a school is facing deep and urgent challenges was not easy. Particularly at the beginning, participants reported difficulties convincing school leaders to prioritise something perceived as an external additional

initiative, when they were facing day-to-day crises amidst limited resources. Issues were highlighted with the sharing of information by schools, which made it initially challenging to plan and develop the CFS offer. Some ongoing challenges were noted, like CFS staff sometimes not being invited to events where they could have promoted their offer. Given the focus on learner wellbeing in Clywedog, the CFS team have sometimes had to push back on being viewed as a behaviour or attendance service. Early challenges were noted in clarifying the FEOs' roles to wider school staff, who did not understand why they were not taking on responsibilities like hall monitoring.

These issues were attributed to a need to build trust and understanding, and for school staff and leadership to fully recognise and buy into what the CFS team could bring. An element of this was a need to change culture and attitudes, and to find ways to align with CFS with school structures in mutually beneficial ways. In Clywedog, the CFMS set up regular meetings with the headteacher to collaboratively develop a plan for CFS and how it fits within the school. These meetings were reported to be informal and characterised by openness, honesty, and mutual respect. Over time, this approach began to break down initial misunderstandings and hesitations, and the CFS team could effectively tailor their approach to meet the school's needs.

“To me, the biggest barriers to Community Focused Schools are the fences around the schools, but we understand why they're there. I use that [metaphor] because there's barriers to Community Focused Schools being two-way. We've got the dilemmas, the barriers, the challenges we face within the school structures, because we are at odds with the school structure in a lot of ways, but we complement it in a lot of ways and they complement us and we support each other, so we've gone through a real journey there.” (Local authority representative)

Central to overcoming such challenges was dedicating time and ensuring clear communication was needed to build a shared understanding of CFS and embed this across schools and communities. Some participants suggested that embedding a more structured approach to CFS might make it easier for stakeholders to understand, for example, implementing Terms of Reference, developing and circulating online materials, and having regular, well-publicised meetings.

Outcomes

CFS is still in its early days in Wrexham, but a cooperative, mutually respectful approach between the CFS team and school leadership is beginning to open the door to new ways of thinking and initial outcomes. At Secondary School A, parental engagement was reported to be leading to increased openness and willingness to ask for support, and generally improved support systems, reducing parental stress. This was enabled by FEOs' flexibility to support individuals in tailored ways and their ability to build trusting relationships.

More work is needed to bring full staff and leadership teams on board and make full use of the CFS offer, but school-based stakeholders engaged in the evaluation considered CFS to be central to Clywedog's journey out of special measures. It was reported to have enabled learning from other schools, brought in new ways of working with learners and families, and facilitated connections with community groups.

"[The CFS team] are just a godsend, basically. So, the more that we can utilise them - [at the moment] we're not using them for everything that they've got. But without them, I think we'd be lost." (School-based stakeholder)

There was some initial evidence reported of increased attendance and behaviour in Clywedog, an important target area for both schools' improvement. This was put down to the less punitive and more holistic approach to supporting learners, as well as increased capacity to identify and target those who were struggling. In addition to being important in itself, increased attendance was seen as an indicator of wider, harder-to-measure outcomes like parental trust and improved perceptions of the school.

"We are starting to see [increased attendance], but that's because again of that communication, that ability to talk to those parents. Because you know, many of them were told off themselves as children or treated in a particular way, and the very idea of coming to school and sitting in the head's office to talk rationally about their own child to support attendance is just not going to work." (School-based stakeholder)

Several school-based stakeholders reflected that CFS represented a different way of thinking about school, which could begin to change entrenched cultures that had not served the school well historically. Embedding CFS as school policy and having the CFS team visible and proactive within the school was seen by some as an important factor in influencing more 'traditionalist' teachers who were not as open to holistic approaches.

"[CFS] is showing some of those teachers that there are other ways to tackle someone's lack of motivation, or someone's difficulty in challenging themselves, or someone's negative view on something. You know, they've put up their barriers, and there are other ways that you can take the barrier down." (School-based stakeholders)

CFS was reported to be increasing the holistic nature of support for young people, in a context where resources were scarce to provide timely and long-term support. Connections with community partners like boxing clubs could enable young people to be 'held' both as they waited to receive counselling or other mental health support and once they had finished their allocated sessions. Participants considered that this was

improving learners' sense of trust in the school's support system, which was hoped to have knock-on effects on their overall engagement with school.

Relatedly, CFS was said to be enabling connection with seldom heard learners and families, because FEOs and the CFSM could act independently and overcome negative perceptions around engaging with school or statutory services.

“[CFS] would help us with the hardest to reach kids. And I think because it's like a different level of engagement. You know, people might have perceptions about school, but when somebody comes from an outside set and then starts to talk to them in different ways, and talk to them about how they can actually help, and how it's going to benefit them, and how it'll benefit the family as well - I think they provide a different way of communicating it to people.” (School-based stakeholder)

Community partnerships set up by CFS were also seen to have important impacts in opening up opportunities to learners and parents/carers who would otherwise not have access to things that could have important impacts on their health and wellbeing, like sports classes and enrichment activities. There was an overall sense that CFS was filling gaps in provision that schools did not have the resources or structures to provide.

“I think it's providing the opportunity for the pupils that they otherwise maybe wouldn't have had. It's giving them extra support service in school to help with their education. It's giving the families that link with the school that they wouldn't have had before and being that person that can go into meeting with these families and school to be there as support for them which they wouldn't have had before either. And just being that consistent person in their lives, that is making a difference to them and helping the education of the pupils and supporting the wellbeing of the whole family.” (FEO)

Some participants thought the CFS approach was leading to greater connection and awareness between services and agencies, which in time could lead to better structures of multi-agency working.

“I certainly believe it's opened up a lot of the agencies that you hear about and that are always given to you with a phone number. You have now an opportunity to actually see them face to face.” (School-based stakeholder)

A few participants considered that this higher-level connection was less developed at this stage, and hoped for a clearer and more structured offer in future.

3.3.5.4. Lessons

This case study demonstrates the value of CFS in settings where schools are facing profound and entrenched challenges. Far from creating additional work and distracting schools from addressing critical needs, participants reported that the CFS approach reduced the burden on schools and provided much-needed support to learners and families. This support was believed to be contributing to tackling long-running issues with attendance and behaviour that the school was struggling to address alone. Central to these emergent successes was a slow, mutually respectful approach to building trust and shared goals between the CFS team and school leadership. Further development of a clear CFS offer and structure will continue to enhance community and multi-agency engagement. Additionally, the work in Wrexham highlights the value of a youth work approach, particularly in secondary school contexts where young people can open the door to wider family engagement.

The contrast between Clywedog's challenges and Secondary School A's successes in engaging parents/carers also highlights important practical barriers to CFS implementation. At a basic level, it is harder to use a school as a community asset and build relationships with families when the school is not geographically accessible. Small, close-knit communities with pre-existing relationships tend to naturally be more amenable to engaging (although effective engagement, including tailoring and proactive communication, is still essential). There is no simple solution to this; however, there are some initial indications that adapting approaches may help, such as working with young people first as links to their families and using more accessible community spaces for engagement.

3.4. Summary and triangulation of findings

Findings across surveys, interviews, and case studies were strongly consistent on key elements of CFS implementation. A range of prominent themes came through repeatedly, particularly in relation to key roles, collaboration, and funding. Examples of good practice consistently emphasised the role of trust, local knowledge, and relational practice in engaging families and learners. Relatedly, across all sources, the presence of a dedicated, skilled FEO emerged as one of the most powerful enablers of CFS, with schools consistently attributing their ability to engage families, coordinate partnerships, and deliver activities to the quality and stability of this role. FEOs themselves identified important factors to further facilitate their role, including training opportunities, longer-term and more consistent contracts, professional development, and networking.

Funding uncertainty emerged as a universal concern. Across the case studies and interviews, short-term funding cycles and unclear longer-term plans generated anxiety around job security and limited stakeholders' ability to plan sustainably. These themes align closely with short school survey responses identifying lack of resources as the most common barrier to full implementation.

There was also strong agreement across data sources that an initial lack of guidance had led to some confusion and inconsistency. However, case studies highlighted the importance of flexibility and locally tailored approaches, indicating a need to find a balance between consistency and adaptation. Variation was strongly shaped by local authority structures and history. NPT's long-standing investment in family engagement produced a coherent, well-supervised model with clear expectations, while Cardiff's and Wrexham's approaches were more emergent, flexible, and shaped by individual leadership. Rural or sparsely populated areas such as Gwynedd and Pembrokeshire adopted CFS in ways that leaned more on deep local relationships and targeted support rather than large-scale community networks. Differences were also evident between school types and phases. Both surveys and case studies suggested that primary schools typically found it easier to engage families, while secondary schools and non-mainstream schools (e.g., PRUs and special schools) faced greater barriers.

Different evaluation elements also provided depth and context to findings from others. For example, data from the short school survey captured important findings directly from schools that were not implementing CFS, which could only be reported anecdotally by those taking part in interviews or case studies. These responses indicated that while schools almost unanimously viewed family and community engagement as central to their work, many also reported strong reasons for not implementing CFS. These included a lack of resources, feeling that too much was being asked of them, and not having enough information about what CFS is. These views reflect CFSMs' experiences of challenges with engaging certain schools, while also providing further context as to why these schools may be non-responsive; beyond that, they simply do not see the value of CFS. Case studies additionally provided 'counterarguments' to the concerns of some schools that implementing CFS would create additional strain on limited resources; in Wrexham, for example, close working between the CFSM and headteacher reportedly led to a reduced burden on a school experiencing considerable challenges.

It is notable that while survey data indicated increased collaboration between many key stakeholders and groups, there were limited reports from schools or local authorities of working with partners for the first time. This echoes findings from interviews and case studies that CFS can be particularly effective when building on existing structures and relationships, and may be more challenging where these are not in place to begin with.

Findings across evaluation elements also contained certain inconsistencies that highlight differences in contexts, stages of implementation, and perceptions. A key area of divergence relates to schools' and local authorities' understanding of CFS. School survey respondents tended to report high levels of clarity about what CFS is and how to implement it, and 2/3 of CFSMs agreed or strongly agreed that the schools they worked with understood CFS. However, more than half of FEOs did not agree that the schools they worked with understood CFS. This discrepancy suggests that

understanding of CFS may not be consistent across staff roles or school contexts, and that frontline practitioners may be encountering practical uncertainties or misconceptions that are less visible at a strategic level. Interviews and case studies added further depth, as participants frequently emphasised initial confusion, limited guidance at the outset, and a gradual process of refining the approach over time.

Finally, although surveys suggested strong early outcomes across engagement, wellbeing, and partnership working, the case studies painted a more cautious and varied picture. Many participants stated that it was too early to attribute measurable change to CFS, and emphasised that improvements were often subtle, relational, and slow building. While some settings reported early evidence of outcomes such as improved attendance or confidence among learners, others stressed that outcomes would take time to emerge and depend on sustained staffing, stable funding, and long-term relationships. Case studies also revealed some unexpected outcomes; for example, CFS implementation in the PLC was reported to have led to reduced stigma and an improved relationship between the school and the wider community.

4. Main findings and conclusions

This section summarises the findings above, addressing the evaluation's key objectives in understanding funding distribution, implementation fidelity, enablers and barriers, and emerging outcomes.

4.1. CFS funding distribution

Across the local authorities engaged in the evaluation, both through surveys and qualitative work, funding approaches broadly appeared to fall into the following structures:

- all CFS funding is kept within the local authority, and the local authority makes all decisions in relation to its allocation
 - these decisions may be based on data such as PDG, eFSM, and WIMD, as well as teams' local knowledge
- CFS funding is kept within the local authority, and they have the final say in relation to its allocation, but schools have some level of input, for example, through applying to have access to an FEO
- the local authority retains some CFS funding, often using this to hire key personnel like a CFSE, and allocates the rest directly to schools to decide how best to spend it
 - these schools may be selected based on data, or by applying to access the funding
- the local authority distributes all CFS funding to schools to decide how best to spend it (this approach was not mentioned in any of the qualitative data, but was reported by some local authority representatives in the survey)

At a school level, the funding allocated through CFS was often 'topped up' by schools through PDG or central budgets to employ FEOs, and in many areas, CFS teams supported schools and partners to access additional funding grants. It is possible that different approaches exist in local authorities that did not take part in the evaluation.

However, the structure of funding distribution was not always entirely clear. There was widespread lack of clarity amongst participants in all groups on the nature, amount, and structure of CFS funding available. This is particularly highlighted by the finding that over half of the 22 schools responding to the detailed survey were not aware that CFS capital funding for infrastructure existed. Conflicting information was given on how much funding was available for family engagement, and participants frequently blurred together discussions on capital funding and funding for roles.

Some participants reported that where local authorities retained CFS funding, they could be slow to share information about timeframes, amounts, or what the CFS funding could be used for within the local authority. This did not only apply to school-based participants, but some CFSEs also reported not receiving important information

from their local authority. For many stakeholders, this was experienced as a lack of transparency; some short school survey respondents who were not implementing CFS expressed frustration that they did not know how to access CFS funding, or indeed, had not heard of it at all.

“There is not enough clarity about how to access the funds within this LA - there is no information shared about the initiatives funded by CFS or how to access the funding - allocation in previous years does not seem 'fair'/no clarity/communication - more needs to be done to support ALL schools to access the funding.” (School short survey respondent)

4.2. Fidelity and adaptation in CFS delivery

The evaluation demonstrated that CFS looks very different across Wales, as this flexibility and local tailoring were central to the strategy’s design. CFS funding has enabled the delivery of a vast range of supports, initiatives, and activities. Below is an indicative selection categorised under the 3 CFS strands (although in practice, many activities overlap across multiple strands):

- family engagement: FEO home visits and one-to-one support for families and learners; welfare support; parent workshops and coffee mornings; family learning classes (e.g., literacy, numeracy, digital skills); holiday provision (e.g., Food and Fun); support with attendance and transitions; parenting courses and wellbeing sessions; school food banks and uniform exchanges; holiday activity boxes and family resource packs
- community engagement: Use of school facilities for community events; after-school and youth clubs; community fairs and fundraising events; adult learning opportunities in partnership with local organisations; partnerships with local voluntary organisations; forest school and outdoor learning activities; community gardens and shared green spaces; multi-faith prayer rooms; food and clothing support initiatives
- multi-agency engagement: Collaboration with health visitors, social services, and education welfare officers; integration with Flying Start and Families First programmes; attendance panels and early intervention meetings; partnerships with local housing and employment services; links with local police and youth justice teams; networking and peer learning between schools; engagement with local authority safeguarding and wellbeing teams.

CFS activities have, in particular, targeted learners and families experiencing barriers to education. All case studies related to settings with higher-than-average levels of deprivation, and demonstrate ways in which holistic supports can begin to address some contributing factors to educational inequality. Local authorities have used datasets like WIMD and FSM eligibility to target resources, while at the school level, data on learners and families has been used to identify those most in need of support. CFS was reported to provide enriching opportunities for learners and families that they

would not otherwise have had access to, such as BMX facilities and accredited adult learning courses in the Cardiff ECP (see case study in section 3.3.1). CFS has also successfully supported learners experiencing diverse challenges, with the Pembrokeshire case study demonstrating positive outcomes for learners with behavioural needs, additional learning needs, and high levels of anxiety or poor mental health.

Importantly, activities delivered through CFS appeared to align with the priorities of parents/carers who took part in the evaluation. Parents/carers engaged in case studies reported they wanted to be engaged in their children's learning, to have open channels of communication with the school, and to feel listened to and supported. Many valued approachable staff and trusted relationships, particularly with FEOs, as well as opportunities to participate in workshops and informal events where they felt comfortable and supported. Practical support, such as food banks, uniform exchanges, and holiday activities, also strengthened connections between home and school.

In addition to intentional tailoring to meet local needs, differences were influenced by several factors. The position of CFS within the local authority impacted upon approach; for example, in Wrexham, CFS being within Prevention and Support lent itself to a youth work-centred approach, while in NPT, CFS sitting within School Improvement aligned with the focus on embedding evidence-informed approaches in school clusters. Similarly, the background, skills, and interests of key personnel like the CFSM, local authority leads, and FEOs influenced their CFS approach.

For example, the FEO's role at Ysgol Gynradd Maesincla in Gwynedd is structured so that one day a week is dedicated to working within the community. This approach has resulted in strong engagement between learners and settings ranging across care centres, bookshops, and community hubs. Similar approaches have been taken in other areas, with FEOs taking on dedicated roles relating to community engagement, adult learning, ALN, or other areas as appropriate locally. Localised tailoring and flexible approaches were frequently highlighted as important benefits of the CFS model, and participants provided multiple examples of how they had adapted their work to meet their communities' unique needs.

However, the level of variation was more problematic in relation to monitoring and evaluation conducted in different local authorities, with CFSMs and local authority leads more likely to prioritise implementing these systems if this was part of their professional background. Notably, 42% of local authorities (5 local authorities) reported in the survey that they did not collect any monitoring and evaluation data in relation to CFS. While local adaptations in approach are appropriate (and it is right that the individuals hired should have backgrounds that align with that approach), critical elements like monitoring and evaluation should have some level of national standardisation.

4.3. Enablers and barriers to implementation

Strong relationships and buy-in were highlighted as crucial to enable the culture change required for CFS success – but participants consistently emphasised that this takes time and consistency. CFS was reported to substantially enhance the work of schools where leaders were already committed to an ethos of family and community engagement, as CFS teams reduced staff workload by taking on these responsibilities. However, challenges persisted in generating initial buy-in where school leaders did not see the value of the CFS approach within their own setting. This was particularly the case in secondary schools, with the challenge of greater numbers of staff, making it harder for CFS to become fully integrated throughout the school.

Additionally, a clear vision for CFS, supported by a well-articulated implementation plan and structured approaches to delivery, emerged as important enablers of both buy-in and effective implementation. Where expectations, roles, and processes were clearly defined, stakeholders reported greater confidence in the approach and a strong sense of shared purpose. This suggests that clarity and structure are not only supportive of implementation in practice but also play a key role in securing engagement from schools and partners, particularly in contexts experiencing wider pressures and competing priorities.

Buy-in can be compromised by CFS being seen as a short-term policy. Some CFS managers reported challenges getting schools to engage, because leaders say CFS is ‘just another thing’ that would ultimately pass. This perception was encouraged by the prevalence of short-term funding cycles and temporary contracts, as well as a history of similar initiatives (including previous iterations of CFS) being discontinued before the work could bed in. Referring to a previous round of CFS funding in the early 2000s, one participant emphasised the need to stick with a policy long-term in order to see impacts.

“If we’d stuck at this in terms of policy, in terms of direction from Welsh Government, if we just stuck at this for the last 20 years, we’d be in a very different place. [...] There needs to be a long-term investment. [...] At the moment it’s all very, ‘you may have a job next year, but you may not. We may be doing this next year, or the guidance may change.’ I think there needs to be a commitment in terms of – this is what we’re doing. This is this is working, let’s invest in it.” (CFSM)

This issue could be mitigated in cases where there was clear strategic buy-in from the local authority (as seen in NPT), where CFS approaches are co-developed with school leadership and demonstrate alignment with longer-term school priorities (as seen in Wrexham), and where schools could buy into a clear and sustainable pre-existing offer (as seen in Cardiff). The inclusion of CFS principles as part of Estyn inspection

frameworks was also noted to be effective in demonstrating to schools and governing bodies that CFS was 'here to stay.'

Several participants suggested that there is an onus on the Welsh Government to promote CFS as a policy priority, rather than this responsibility falling to schools and CFS teams. Some suggested greater alignment with other policy areas and promotion as part of the Welsh Government's engagement with other sectors, such as business, to fully embed this holistic ethos across Welsh communities.

"There's a lot of information available to schools on what Community Focused Schools is, but is that information equally available to those community partners that we are trying to engage with? Do they know that it's a priority? Because we're knocking on doors saying, 'we're Community Focused Schools, this is really important, this is Welsh Government guidance'. And they are saying, we haven't heard of that. And I think, if it's important – and it is important – you should be promoting it to everybody."
(CFSM)

The evaluation highlighted the commitment and expertise of many individuals driving CFS forward at the local and school levels. However, progress in some areas appeared to depend heavily on a small number of highly dedicated professionals. This reliance can pose a risk to sustainability, particularly given challenges around staff retention and capacity, linked to short-term contracts and funding uncertainty. Sustainable CFS implementation requires embedding CFS principles and practices across a wider group of professionals and the community, ensuring collective ownership and leadership. Positive examples of this included joint governor training developed between neighbouring local authorities, FEOs working alongside teaching staff to build their confidence working with parents/carers, and CFS being integrated into School Development Plans.

The FEO and CFSM roles are critical to the strategy's success, and the skills and passion of these individuals were frequently raised by all participant groups. However, the evidence also highlighted variability in how these roles were structured and supported. In particular, training and professional development were widely viewed as important enablers of effective practice, but provision was described as patchy and inconsistent across areas. Where roles were unclearly positioned, such as FEOs sitting between local authorities and schools, or CFSMs operating with a high degree of autonomy, this could result in limited supervision and support, with implications for professional development, wellbeing, and confidence in navigating complex safeguarding contexts. This was particularly the case for some FEOs who were dealing with challenging contexts of child protection and working with very vulnerable families.

These issues, particularly in relation to limited opportunities for professional development, were also cited as a barrier to recruitment and retention. Some good

practices were identified in this area; for example, in NPT, school-employed FEOs were provided supervision by the local authority, and Learning Community Managers provide supervision and support to the team of local authority-employed FEOs.

Several barriers were highlighted in relation to long-term challenges that are beyond the control of CFS teams. Infrastructure (including physical space and quality of facilities) was identified repeatedly, as some schools simply did not have the space to run community events, allow FEOs to work on-site, or host co-located services. In some areas, longstanding distrust between schools and communities has been hard to break down, exacerbated at times by practical barriers like schools' locations or space available for activities. For settings with larger catchment areas where many learners arrive by bus, such as PRUs, large secondary schools, and some Welsh-medium schools in predominantly English-speaking areas, engaging families is naturally more difficult as parents/carers are less likely to attend the school premises. Approaches to address these barriers have included using more accessible community spaces to host events (as in Wrexham) and consulting closely with families to understand the motivations for participation (as in Pembrokeshire).

4.4. Emerging outcomes

Many participants reported that it was too soon to be able to attribute measurable outcomes to CFS, which is in line with what would be expected at this stage of implementation. However, there were strong indications that positive outcomes were beginning to emerge in settings where CFS had had time to become established.

These included improved relationships between schools and families, increased parental engagement and confidence, greater attendance and participation among learners facing barriers, and a stronger sense of community connectedness around schools. Many participants reflected on how positive and engaging activities delivered through CFS could address longstanding negative perceptions that parents/carers had regarding school, based on their own difficult experiences with education. Participants also described more collaborative working both within and across local authorities, as well as strengthened partnerships with local organisations, which in some areas expanded opportunities for learners through access to sports, community, and other shared facilities.

Participants also noted early signs of reduced stigma in seeking support and more collaborative working between schools and local partners. For example, one of the key CFS outcomes reported in the PLC in Pembrokeshire was an important improvement in the school's reputation within the local community, breaking down the lack of awareness and stigma associated with PRUs, which had historically hindered community engagement.

There was some evidence that CFS may have a role in improving community cohesion in more diverse contexts. For example, a school in Cardiff reported that

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller families had attended some CFS events, having previously been challenging to engage. Parents in the same school who had recently moved to the UK reported that school-based events made them feel more part of their community. In Wrexham, the CFS team was able to coordinate a multi-agency response to issues of racism in a secondary school.

Importantly, despite concerns that CFS would overload schools, settings in which CFS was well-established reported that it reduced the burden on them. By creating clearer structures for partnership working and enabling FEOs or community partners to take on roles previously absorbed by teaching staff, schools were better able to focus on learning and wellbeing. Participants described feeling more supported, with improved referral pathways, stronger collaboration across services, and a shared responsibility for addressing barriers faced by families.

4.5. Summary

Evaluation data indicates that CFS has the potential to strengthen the role of schools as hubs for community engagement, while supporting schools to tackle some entrenched challenges and improve opportunities for families and learners. Across local authorities, CFS funding has supported an enormous range of activities, across family engagement programmes, adult learning, holistic support for learner wellbeing, provision of food and resources, community use of school facilities, and multi-agency partnership work. Activities appear to be particularly valuable in areas of high deprivation, where CFS can provide important resources and act as a central connection and support point for families.

Implementation has been strongest where there is clear local leadership, established relationships across communities and partners, and dedicated staff, including FEOs. In these settings, CFS has enhanced collaboration between schools, community organisations, and local services, improving referrals, early intervention, and parental confidence. Initiatives like community cafés, coffee mornings, and adult learning sessions have supported social connections and met practical needs.

However, delivery has been uneven across Wales. Schools and local authorities have navigated challenges, including short-term and fragmented funding, capacity constraints, inconsistent understanding of the CFS model, and difficulties establishing and maintaining communication between different partners.

Where CFS has had time to bed into local contexts, there is evidence that it is contributing to important cultural shifts, reframing schools as part of their local ecosystems rather than stand-alone institutions. CFS's most successful examples demonstrate relational work, trust-building, and the way in which leveraging can mitigate the complex causes and effects of educational inequality.

5. Recommendations

One of the evaluation's objectives was to provide actionable recommendations to guide future improvement of the CFS initiative. This section contains 10 recommendations that should be considered at the Welsh Government, local authority, and school levels.

Recommendation 1: Commit to CFS as a long-term approach, with sustained funding arrangements.

The need for long-term implementation to enable meaningful and sustainable change was the clearest finding to emerge from this evaluation. Moving away from annual funding cycles towards longer-term commitments would strengthen planning, recruitment, and stability within schools and local authorities. A clear and consistent funding framework, including clarity on which funding streams can be used for which activities, would further support effective implementation.

Whilst the Welsh Government typically operates on one-year budgets, establishing longer-term funding commitments could strengthen buy-in amongst hesitant schools and partners by demonstrating that CFS is firmly part of Wales's educational future. It would also facilitate recruitment and retention of skilled and qualified individuals for key roles by enabling longer-term contracts and professional development. Crucially, a longer timeframe would allow for systems and structures to become established across schools and communities to enable sustainability, and for measurable outcomes to emerge.

Recommendation 2: Establish consistent national guidance for monitoring and evaluation, while recognising local flexibility.

Currently, monitoring and evaluation practices for CFS vary substantially across local authorities, leading to inconsistent or incomplete data on delivery and impact. Welsh Government should lead a review of existing monitoring practices (in CFS and related initiatives) and develop national guidance setting out minimum expectations for reporting, while maintaining flexibility for local adaptation and qualitative approaches. This review should consider and share best practice examples. This would help ensure that evidence is gathered consistently and meaningfully across Wales.

It is also important that monitoring frameworks are aligned with those of related initiatives rather than attributable solely to CFS. Outcomes are often shaped by a combination of programmes and policies, with relevant initiatives including (but not limited to) Poverty Proofing, ALN, MEGRT funding, and PDG. A coherent approach would enable a more accurate understanding of collective impact and support future evaluation and learning.

Recommendation 3: Ensure timely provision of clear and practical guidance for future initiatives.

At the outset of CFS, the full suite of [national guidance](#) had not yet been fully developed and published. This created some uncertainty about expectations and roles, which in some areas slowed progress and led to inconsistent interpretations of the aims of the approach. For future programmes, guidance should be made available at an early stage to support effective planning and shared understanding across local authorities and schools. This should include clear role descriptions (e.g., for FEOs and local leads), a light-touch monitoring and evaluation framework, and practical examples of implementation. However, it should also emphasise flexibility, allowing schools and local authorities to adapt approaches to their local context and community needs.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen cross-sector infrastructure and national visibility to embed CFS more widely.

The Welsh Government will need to work with delivery partners towards a holistic policy and infrastructure approach that connects CFS with other departments and sectors, ensuring it becomes a shared national priority rather than a school-led initiative. This could include aligning CFS objectives with business and community grant agreements, integrating CFS opportunities within Social Value commitments, and embedding the approach in local and regional partnership frameworks. Increasing national visibility and guidance would help ensure that engagement does not depend on a small number of active schools or individuals but becomes systematically supported across communities.

Recommendation 5: Future iterations of the approach should include specific guidance to promote and develop the Welsh language within CFS.

There are opportunities in CFS to align with the Cymraeg 2050 Welsh language strategy, as schools are an important setting for Welsh language development, and the family engagement element also provides a link for adult learning. Findings indicate CFS could do more to promote and develop the Welsh language. Actions might include ringfenced funding for Welsh language initiatives and formalised engagement with Welsh language organisations.

At the same time, it should be noted that CFS teams may face particular challenges in communities where English is commonly prioritised above Welsh. In areas where barriers to Welsh language development are more pronounced, guidance should, where feasible, be designed to promote and support this development.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen equitable access to FEO support across all school clusters.

FEOs are central to the success of CFS, but access to them remains uneven across Wales and within local authorities. Local authorities should adopt an equity-based approach to ensure that schools and areas with the greatest need are prioritised for FEO support, while working towards the longer-term goal of all school clusters having access to this resource. Cluster-level approaches (e.g., allocating one FEO per cluster) can strengthen transitions between primary and secondary phases and help embed family engagement more systematically. Local authorities that have already made progress in this area could share learning and models through national networks to support wider rollout.

Recommendation 7: Ringfence CFS funding within local authorities to protect its strategic purpose and ensure fair, transparent allocation.

Ringfencing CFS funding within local authorities can help prevent this funding from being absorbed into wider budgets and maintain its focus on strategic community engagement rather than day-to-day operational pressures. Evaluation findings suggest that this approach supports stronger alignment with local CFS strategies and more consistent delivery across schools. Transparency and collaboration between local authorities, CFSMs, and school leaders are essential to ensure funding decisions are well-understood and perceived as fair.

Recommendation 8: Ensure structured supervision and wellbeing support for CFSMs and FEOs.

Supervision is essential to provide space for reflection, feedback, and professional support for staff working in complex, emotionally demanding roles. Many CFSMs and FEOs reported operating independently and sometimes with unclear management structures between schools and local authorities, creating limited opportunities to discuss challenges or seek guidance. Regular supervision would help staff discuss challenges, reflect on decisions, and build confidence in their practice.

Supervision structures could be developed collaboratively across schools and local authorities, ensuring that all staff delivering CFS have access to consistent professional and wellbeing support. Approaches should be flexible to local context but clearly defined so that no individual is left without appropriate oversight or opportunities for reflection and development.

Recommendation 9: Develop a national framework for the FEO role description.

There is currently a wide variation in how FEO roles are defined and delivered across Wales. While this flexibility is one of the strengths of CFS, it can also lead to uncertainty around responsibilities, expectations, and progression. The Welsh Government could work further with local authorities, CFSMs, and FEO networks to

develop the national framework that sets out the range of ways the role can be structured, supported, and developed. This might include examples of effective practice across family, community, and multi-agency engagement, as well as indicative role profiles and potential progression routes. Such guidance would not restrict local flexibility but would provide a shared reference point to support consistency, inspire local adaptation, and promote equity in how the role is valued and supported.

Recommendation 10: Networking and sharing opportunities should continue to develop and be encouraged.

This recommendation encourages continued prioritisation rather than the introduction of something new. National-level sharing between CFMSs is well-established and should continue. FEO networks are well-established in many local authorities as well as nationally; where they are not, this should be developed. Collaboration should take place at the Local Authority and national level, and where appropriate at the sector level, e.g., secondary schools, Welsh-medium schools. This could include conferences and learning networks.

Annex A – Theory of Change

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes (1-2 years)	Medium-term outcomes (3-5 years)	Long-term outcomes (5+ years)
Funding to Local Authorities	Hiring and training for key roles	CFS and FEOs operating in appointed schools/LAs	Increased professional development: Key roles and school staff are upskilled to enable better family and community engagement	Capacity building in schools: Schools have increased capacity to address diverse needs through enhanced resources, training, infrastructure, grants, and partnerships	Policy influence: Insights and evidence from the initiative inform and influence broader educational policy and practice, promoting sustainable changes
	Development and sharing of guidance and strategy	Forging community partnerships and multi-agency working relationships	Community partnerships and multi-agency working are established in Local Authority areas		
Networks established between key roles and local areas		Community Focused Schools across Wales share learning and best practice	Increased family engagement: Higher levels of family involvement in school activities	Sustained engagement: Levels of family and community involvement continue to improve, fostering a collaborative environment	Resilient and inclusive communities: Stronger communities with schools acting as central hubs for resources and support
Consultation with learners, families and local communities to create bespoke localised implementation plans		School infrastructure is built, improved, or opened up to facilitate family and community engagement	Increased community engagement: Higher levels of community involvement in school activities	Cultural shifts in schools and communities: Positive changes in school and community culture, including attitudes, behaviours, and norms; increased pride in schools and communities	Contribution to the local economy: Local economies are supported through opportunities for job creation in the local area, as well as growth of local businesses
Provision of resources to schools		Holistic support services are offered to families, learners and communities	Social and personal development: Learners, families, and the local community develop practical life skills and experience reduced isolation	Academic improvement: Improvement in learner performance, particularly among eFSM students	Educational equity: Reduced disparities in educational outcomes, contributing to greater equity
Access to other funding streams and grants		Tailored activities, programmes and initiatives are delivered to families, learners, and communities	Initial impact on wellbeing: Early signs of improved learner wellbeing, including emotional and social health	Educational outcomes: Long-term improvements in educational attainment and achievement, particularly for eFSM learners	
			Improved engagement in education: Increased learner attendance and engagement in class, and reduced exclusions		

Annex B – Case studies sample

Here is a further breakdown of the stakeholder groups engaged for each case study:

	NPT	Wrexham	Cardiff	Gwynedd	PLC	Total
CFS Managers	1	1	1	1	0	4
FEOs	4	5	0	1	1	11
Local authority representatives	1	2	1	0	1	5
School leadership team	3	1	5	1	4	14
School governors/ Management Committees	1	0	1	1	7	10
Teachers and other school staff	1	1	0	3	3	8
Community partners	1	2	14	0	1	18
Parents/carers	7	0	15	0	4	26
Total	19	12	37	7	21	96

Individuals are only counted where they engaged in direct conversation with the evaluation team. There were additional observations made at in-person visits across the case studies, such as at a community café with parents/carers and learners, painting sessions with parents/carers and learners, a parent-baby group, and a residential home visit (community partner of a CFS).

Where participants were engaged through different strands of the evaluation (e.g., follow-up interviews), and this data was included in the case study, these participants have been counted.

Annex C – Surveys

5.1. Schools survey

5.1.1. Tier 1 survey

This short survey contains just a few questions assessing whether you are aware of and implementing the Community Focused School strategy. It should take you fewer than 5 minutes to complete.

About you

1. Can you provide your school's Reference Number? Entering your Reference Number allows us to analyse your responses alongside other data about your school, such as demographics. If you do not want your school to be identifiable, we will ask you a few more questions about your school, like size and type. Please note, we will never share identifiable school data with the Welsh Government or any other third party.
 - a. Yes
 - Please enter your school's Reference Number
 - b. Prefer to remain anonymous
2. [if school Reference Number not provided]
 - a. What type is your school?
 - Nursery
 - Primary
 - Middle
 - Secondary
 - Special school
 - Pupil referral unit
 - Other
 - b. How many learners are currently enrolled at your school?
 - [Open text - number]
 - c. What proportion (%) of learners are eligible for Free School Meals? (please include even if all learners are receiving Universal Primary Free School Meals)
 - %
 - d. Please select your Local Authority from the list
 - [Full list of Local Authorities]

Community Focused Schools implementation

3. Please indicate the extent you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure/ too soon to tell
Engaging with families and communities is a priority for my school	-	-	-	-	-	-
At my school, we have a good understanding of Community Focused Schools	-	-	-	-	-	-

4. Is your school actively implementing Community Focused Schools?

- a. Yes
- b. To some extent
- c. No

5. [if No] Please tell us to what extent you agree with the following possible reasons why you are **not** implementing Community Focused Schools.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Implementation would place too much burden on staff	-	-	-	-	-
CFS goes beyond our remit as a school	-	-	-	-	-

We do not have enough funding or resources	-	-	-	-	-
We are not clear about what CFS is and how it should be implemented	-	-	-	-	-
CFS does not align with our ways of working	-	-	-	-	-

6. If you would like to give any more details about the reasons you are **not** currently implementing Community Focused Schools, please outline below:

- [Open text]

Further research

Thank you for completing this short survey. **Would you be happy to take part in a more detailed survey as part of the evaluation?**

This second survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. It asks for more detailed information about how implementation of key CFS elements is going, and what its impacts are. Most questions are multiple choice, and all open-text questions are optional.

5.1.2. Tier 2 survey

This survey will ask you some more detailed questions about how implementation of the Community Focused Schools strategy is going, and what difference it is making. It should take you about 15 minutes to complete.

About you

1. Can you provide your school's Reference Number? Entering your Reference Number allows us to analyse your responses alongside other data about your school, such as demographics. If you do not want your school to be identifiable, we will ask you a few more questions about your school, like size and type. Please note, we will never share identifiable school data with the Welsh Government or any other third party.
 - a. Yes
 - Please enter your school's Reference Number
 - b. Prefer to remain anonymous
2. [if school Reference Number not provided]

- a. What type is your school?
 - Nursery
 - Primary
 - Middle
 - Secondary
 - Special school
 - Pupil referral unit
 - Other
- b. How many learners are currently enrolled at your school?
 - [Open text - number]
- c. What proportion (%) of learners are eligible for Free School Meals? (please include even if all learners are receiving Universal Primary Free School Meals)
 - %
- d. Please select your Local Authority from the list
 - [Full list of Local Authorities]

3. What is your role within the school?

- a. Headteacher
- b. Deputy Headteacher
- c. Assistant Headteacher
- d. Community Focused School Manager – [DIVERT TO APPROPRIATE SURVEY]
- e. Family Engagement Officer – [DIVERT TO APPROPRIATE SURVEY]
- f. Other (please specify)

Community Focused Schools funding and approach

4. Are you implementing CFS as part of a cluster?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Don't know

5. If you are part of a cluster, how many other schools are involved?

- [Open text - number]

6. Community Focused Schools receive funding through Local Authorities for key roles (i.e. CFS Managers and Family Engagement Officers), and through capital grants for infrastructure. Aside from these, do you receive any **other funding or grants** that contribute to implementing Community Focused Schools (for example, you may use the Pupil Development Grant for some CFS-related activities)? If so, please outline briefly below:

- [Open text]

7. If known, please indicate approximately how much funding from these **other sources** (i.e. not CFS-specific funding) is used towards implementing the CFS?

- [Open text - number]

Implementing Community Focused Schools: key elements

This section will ask about how implementation is progressing with some key elements of CFS.

Family Engagement Officer

8. How many Family Engagement Officers are in place that work with your school? (answer 0 if no one is appointed to this role)

- [Open text - number]

9. Is/are the FEO(s) employed:

- a. Directly by the school
- b. By the Local Authority

10. Please can you briefly describe the FEO role, as it is implemented in your school?

- [Open text]

11. Do you have any further comments on the effectiveness or impact of the FEO role? If yes, please outline below.

- [Open text]

Infrastructure

12. Please indicate which infrastructure has been funded under this capital grant (select all that apply): Community centre(s); Other community spaces; Food facilities e.g. community café or kitchen; Sports facilities; None of the above; Don't know; Other [please specify]

13. Were you aware that funding has been made available through a capital grant to make developments to school buildings and facilities, as part of the Community Focused Schools strategy?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

14. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure/ too soon to tell
Funding received through the capital grant is adequate to help us develop the infrastructure we needed to implement CFS	-	-	-	-	-	-
Infrastructure developed as part of CFS has helped with family and community engagement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Infrastructure developed as part of CFS has helped to address socio-economic inequality	-	-	-	-	-	-

Family and community engagement

15. How frequently does your school deliver the following types of activities, services or initiatives as part of the Community Focused School?

	Daily	Weekly	A few times a month	Monthly	Every few months	Once a year or less	Never
Involving parents and families in their child(ren)'s school life	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supporting the home learning environment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Providing opportunities for adult community learning	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Developing community cohesion and social capital (e.g. building social networks in the community)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Providing opportunities for family learning (i.e. activities that involve both children and adult family members)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Community and family engagement to plan and make decisions about the CFS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Drawing upon assets from within the community to support the educational, social, health and well-being needs of learners (e.g. engaging local experts to deliver training)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Collaboration with community groups for joint community projects	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enabling wider community use of the school's assets (e.g. opening up sports facilities)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

16. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure/ too soon to tell
Implementing CFS has helped us access funding to deliver family and community engagement activities	-	-	-	-	-	-
Activities and services delivered as part of CFS have helped with family and community engagement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Family and community engagement as part of CFS has helped to address socio-economic inequality	-	-	-	-	-	-

Partnerships and collaborations

17. Since implementing CFS, how have your partnerships and collaborations with the following changed?

	Collaborated for the first time	More collaboration	About the same	Less collaboration	We have never collaborated	N/A / don't know
Parents and families	-	-	-	-	-	-
The Local Authority	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other schools in the area	-	-	-	-	-	-
Community and voluntary sector organisations	-	-	-	-	-	-
Local businesses	-	-	-	-	-	-
Statutory agencies and services	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sports clubs	-	-	-	-	-	-
Youth services	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religion and belief groups	-	-	-	-	-	-

Arts and creative organisations	-	-	-	-	-	-
Housing associations	-	-	-	-	-	-
Further or vocational educational institutions	-	-	-	-	-	-
Higher education institutions	-	-	-	-	-	-

18. Do you collaborate with any other individuals or groups as part of your role? Please outline briefly below:

- [Open text]

19. What have been the impacts of these collaborations?

- [Open text]

Enablers and barriers to Community Focused Schools implementation

This section will ask about some factors that might act as either enablers or barriers to CFS implementation.

20. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure/ too soon to tell
I am clear about what CFS is and how to implement it	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other staff in my school are clear about what CFS is and how to implement it	-	-	-	-	-	-
I am clear on who is responsible for CFS implementation, and what everyone involved needs to do	-	-	-	-	-	-
School staff have enough time and resource to implement CFS alongside their other work	-	-	-	-	-	-
Learners and families have welcomed CFS	-	-	-	-	-	-

Outcomes of Community Focused Schools

This final section will ask about what difference CFS is making to your school.

21. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.
Implementing CFS has led to:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure/ too soon to tell
Enhanced partnerships and multi-agency working	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved learner attainment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased family engagement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased community engagement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Social and personal development for learners, families, and communities	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved learner wellbeing	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved learner engagement in education (e.g. attendance)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased capacity and resources in the school	-	-	-	-	-	-
Positive changes in school culture	-	-	-	-	-	-
Promotion of the Welsh language	-	-	-	-	-	-

Further views on Community Focused Schools

22. If you have any other views you would like to share about Community Focused Schools, please share these below:

- [Open text]

5.2. Local Authority representatives survey

About you

1. Do you work in a Local Authority in Wales, and have a key role in Community Focused Schools implementation?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No [DIVERT TO END OF FORM]
2. Please select your Local Authority from the list
 - [Full list of Local Authorities]
2. What is your role in the Local Authority?
 - [Open text]
3. In your Local Authority, which department has responsibility for CFS implementation?
 - [Open text]
4. Do you think this is a good fit for overseeing CFS implementation?
 - a. Yes
 - b. To some extent
 - c. No
5. Please briefly give a reason for your previous answer.
 - [Open text]

Community Focused Schools implementation

5. How many schools are actively implementing CFS in your Local Authority?
 - [box for primary / box for secondary]
6. Of these, how many are working in clusters?
 - *X schools in X clusters*
7. Have you experienced any challenges in engaging schools in the Community Focused Schools strategy? Please outline briefly below:
 - [Open text]

CFS funding

8. To decide on allocation of CFS grant funding, does your Local Authority:

- a. Distribute money to schools
- b. Keep funding centrally
- c. A combination
- d. Don't know

9. Community Focused Schools receive funding through Local Authorities for key roles (i.e. CFS Managers and Family Engagement Officers), and through capital grants for infrastructure. Aside from these, does your **Local Authority provide any additional funding or grants** that contribute to implementing Community Focused Schools? If so, please outline briefly below

- [Open text]

10. Other than Local Authority sources outlined above, do schools in your area receive any **other funding or grants** that contribute to implementing Community Focused Schools? If so, please outline briefly below

- [Open text]

Implementing the CFS: key elements

This section will ask about how implementation is progressing with some key elements of the CFS strategy.

Partnerships and collaborations

11. Since implementing the CFS strategy, how have partnerships and collaborations between your Local Authority and the following changed?

	Collaborated for the first time	More collaboration	About the same	Less collaboration	We have never collaborated	N/A / don't know
Parents and families	-	-	-	-	-	-
Local schools	-	-	-	-	-	-
Community and voluntary sector organisations	-	-	-	-	-	-
Local businesses	-	-	-	-	-	-
Statutory agencies and services	-	-	-	-	-	-

Sports clubs	-	-	-	-	-	-
Youth services	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religion and belief groups	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arts and creative organisations	-	-	-	-	-	-
Housing associations	-	-	-	-	-	-
Further or vocational educational institutions	-	-	-	-	-	-
Higher education institutions	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Local Authorities implementing Community Focused Schools	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other departments within my Local Authority	-	-	-	-	-	-

12. Do you collaborate with any other individuals or groups as part of your role? Please outline briefly below:

- [Open text]

13. What have been the impacts of these collaborations?

- [Open text]

Monitoring and evaluation

13. Does your LA collect data on the implementation and/or effectiveness of Community Focused Schools?

- Yes
- No

14. How does your LA evaluate the implementation of and impact of Community Focused Schools on learners, families, and communities?

- Surveys
- Case studies

- c. Performance metrics
- d. Feedback sessions
- e. Other (please specify)

15. Do you have any other comments about monitoring and evaluating CFS, including any guidance or support that might improve processes?

- [Open text]

Enablers and barriers to CFS implementation

This section will ask about some factors that might act as either enablers or barriers to CFS implementation.

16. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure/ too soon to tell
I am clear about what CFS is and how to implement it	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other staff in the Local Authority are clear about what CFS is and how to implement it	-	-	-	-	-	-
I am clear on who is responsible for CFS implementation, and what everyone involved needs to do	-	-	-	-	-	-
My Local Authority receives enough funding to implement CFS effectively	-	-	-	-	-	-
Schools in my Local Authority have welcomed CFS	-	-	-	-	-	-

Outcomes of Community Focused Schools

This section will ask about what difference CFS is making to your local area.

17. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.
Implementing CFS has led to:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure/ too soon to tell
Enhanced partnerships and multi-agency working	-	-	-	-	-	-
Professional development of key roles	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capacity building in schools	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased family engagement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased community engagement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Social and personal development for learners, families, and communities	-	-	-	-	-	-
Promotion of the Welsh language	-	-	-	-	-	-

Further views on Community Focused Schools

18. If you have any other views you would like to share about CFS, please share these below:

- [Open text]

5.3. CFS Manager survey

About you

1. To confirm, are you currently a Community Focused School Manager in Wales?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No [DIVERT TO END OF FORM]
2. Please select your Local Authority from the list
 - [Full list of Local Authorities]
3. How long have you been in your position?
 - 0 3 months
 - 4-6 months
 - 7-11 months
 - 1-2 years
 - 2 years +
4. How many schools do you work with?
 - [box for primary / box for secondary]
5. Are you employed:
 - a. By a school(s)
 - b. By a Local Authority
 - c. Other (please specify)

About your role

Training, guidance, and professional development

6. What training, guidance, and professional development have you received to carry out your role?
 - [Open text]
7. How frequently do you receive training, guidance, and professional development to support your role?
 - a. At least once a month
 - b. Every few months

- c. A couple of times a year
- d. Once a year
- e. Less than once a year
- f. Never

8. Do you feel the amount of training, guidance, and professional development you have received is:

- Not enough
- About right
- Too much

9. Have you attended any CFSM network meetings?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

10. [If yes] How useful were these?

- a. Very useful
- b. Somewhat useful
- c. Not very useful
- d. Not useful at all
- e. Don't know

11. Do you have any other comments about training, guidance, and professional development as part of your role (including any suggestions for what would be useful for you)?

- [Open text]

Day-to-day activities

12. Please indicate how frequently you collaborate with the following individuals and groups, as part of your CFSM role:

	Daily	Weekly	A few times a month	Monthly	Every few months	Once a year or less	Never
Parents and families	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Community and voluntary sector organisations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Family Engagement Officers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Local businesses	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Statutory agencies and services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sports clubs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Youth services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religion and belief groups	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arts and creative organisations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Housing associations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Further or vocational educational institutions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Higher education institutions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other CFMSs across Wales	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

13. Do you collaborate with any other individuals or groups as part of your role? Please outline briefly below

- [Open text]

14. What have been the impacts of these collaborations?

- [Open text]

Perceptions of your role

15. Please indicate the extent that you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure/ too soon to tell
I have a good understanding of what I need to do in my role as CFS Manager	-	-	-	-	-	-
The schools I work with have a good understanding of the CFS strategy	-	-	-	-	-	-
My work reflects what was written in the job description	-	-	-	-	-	-
I am clear on who is responsible for CFS implementation within the LA	-	-	-	-	-	-
There is widespread shared commitment to implement CFS amongst key stakeholders	-	-	-	-	-	-
Learners and families have welcomed CFS	-	-	-	-	-	-

16. Other than anything indicated above, have you faced any barriers to carrying out your role?

- [Open text]

17. Other than anything indicated above, what has helped you to carry out your role?

- [Open text]

Outcomes of Community Focused Schools

This section will ask about what difference the CFS strategy is making in your area:

18. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.
Implementing CFS has led to:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure/ too soon to tell
Enhanced partnerships and multi-agency working	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved learner attainment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased family engagement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased community engagement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Social and personal development for learners, families, and communities	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved learner wellbeing	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved engagement in education (e.g. attendance)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased professional development	-	-	-	-	-	-
Promotion of the Welsh language	-	-	-	-	-	-

Further views on the Community Focused Schools Manager role

-	-	-	-	-	-
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19. If you have any other views you would like to share about your role as CFSM, please share these below:

- [Open text]

5.4. FEO survey

About you

1. To confirm, are you currently a Family Engagement Officer in Wales?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No [DIVERT TO END OF FORM]
2. Please select your Local Authority from the list
 - [Full list of Local Authorities]
3. How long have you been in your position?
 - c. 0-3 months
 - d. 4-6 months
 - e. 7-11 months
 - f. 1-2 years
 - g. 2 years +
4. How many schools do you work with?
 - [box for primary / box for secondary]
5. Are you employed:
 - a. By a school or schools
 - b. By a Local Authority
 - c. Other (please specify)

About your role

Training, guidance, and professional development

6. What training, guidance, and professional development have you received to carry out your role?
 - [Open text]
7. How frequently do you receive training, guidance, and professional development to support your role?
 - a. At least once a month

- b. Every few months
 - c. A couple of times a year
 - d. Once a year
 - e. Less than once a year
 - f. Never
8. Do you feel the amount of training, guidance, and professional development you have received is:
- a. Not enough
 - b. About right
 - c. Too much
9. Have you attended any meetings, events or conferences to connect with other FEOs?
10. [If yes] How useful were these?
- a. Very useful
 - b. Somewhat useful
 - c. Not very useful
 - d. Not useful at all
 - e. Don't know
11. Do you have any other comments about training, guidance, and professional development as part of your role (including any suggestions for what would be useful for you)?
- [Open text]

Day-to-day activities

12. Please indicate how frequently you carry out the following activities as part of your FEO role:

	Daily	Weekly	A few times a month	Monthly	Every few months	Once a year or less	Never

One-to-one support with learners	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
One-to-one support with parents / carers or families	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Home visits with families	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Practical support for families e.g. collecting learners from school	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Connecting learners with local activities e.g. volunteering	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Group support with parents / carers or families	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Accompanying parents/ carers to school meetings or activities	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

13. Are there any other key elements of your role, that are not listed above? If so, please outline briefly below:

- [Open text]

Perceptions of your role

14. Please indicate the extent that you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure/ too soon to tell
I have a good understanding of what I need to do in my role as FEO	-	-	-	-	-	-
The schools I work with have a good understanding of the CFS strategy	-	-	-	-	-	-
My work reflects what was written in the job description	-	-	-	-	-	-
I am clear on who is responsible for CFS implementation in the LA, and what everyone involved needs to do	-	-	-	-	-	-
There is widespread shared commitment to implement CFS amongst key stakeholders (e.g. schools, local authorities, community partners)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Learners and families have welcomed CFS	-	-	-	-	-	-

15. Other than anything indicated above, have you faced any barriers to carrying out your role?

- [Open text]

16. Other than anything indicated above, what has helped you to carry out your role?

- [Open text]

Outcomes of Community Focused Schools

This section will ask about what difference CFS is making in your area:

17. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements. Implementing CFS has led to:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not sure/ too soon to tell
Enhanced partnerships and multi-agency working	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved learner attainment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased family engagement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased community engagement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Social and personal development for learners, families, and communities	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved learner wellbeing	-	-	-	-	-	-
Improved learner engagement in education (e.g. attendance)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased capacity and resources in the school	-	-	-	-	-	-
Positive changes in school culture	-	-	-	-	-	-
Increased professional development	-	-	-	-	-	-
Promotion of the Welsh language	-	-	-	-	-	-

Further views on the Family Engagement Officer role

18. If you have any other views you would like to share about your role as FEO, please share these below:

- [Open text]

5.5. Parent survey

1. Please write the name of the school your child attends.

If you have children attending more than one school, please just write the name of **one school** that you would like to answer this survey about. If you want to answer about more than one school, you can re-start the survey after you finish.

2. How much do you agree with these statements?

	Agree a lot	Agree a little	Neither	Disagree a little	Disagree a lot	I don't know
My child's school makes a big effort to engage families.	-	-	-	-	-	-
My child's school is a central part of the community.	-	-	-	-	-	-
I know what a Community Focused School is.	-	-	-	-	-	-
I feel involved in my child's school.	-	-	-	-	-	-

3. Which, if any, of these activities have you taken part in, connected to your child's school? Choose all that apply.

- Coffee mornings with other parents and carers
- Stay-and-play events
- Working with a Family Engagement Officer
- Adult learning e.g. evening classes
- Family learning events
- Clothes or uniform swaps
- Visiting a food bank at the school
- School or community kitchen/ café
- Sports events

j. Other (please specify)

k. None of the above

4. For you, what are the most important ways to be involved in your child's education? This could be things like learning together, talking with teachers, going to school activities, or something else.

- [Open text]

5. What do you think schools could do better to work with families and communities?

- [Open text]