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Evaluation of INSET (in-service education and training) days in Wales

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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Evaluation of INSET (in-service education and training) days in Wales

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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.

AoLE

Area of Learning and Experience within the Curriculum for Wales framework.

ASCL

Association of School and College Leaders

CfW

Curriculum for Wales, the national curriculum for learners aged 3–16 in Wales.

Cymraeg 2050

Welsh Government strategy to increase the number of Welsh speakers and use of the Welsh language by 2050

EpiPen

An adrenaline auto-injector used to treat severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis)

IDP

Individual development plan, a statutory plan outlining provision for learners with ALN

INSET

In-Service Education and Training; statutory non-pupil days for staff professional learning and development

NAHT

National Association of Head Teachers

NAPL

National Approach to Professional Learning, a Welsh Government framework for effective professional learning

NASUWT

National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers

NEU

National Education Union

PECS

Picture Exchange Communication System, a visual communication approach supporting learners with communication needs

PREVENT

The Prevent Duty. A statutory safeguarding duty under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, requiring schools in Wales to have due regard to preventing people from being drawn into terrorism

PRU

Pupil Referral Unit, provision for learners unable to attend mainstream school

SDP

School Development Plan outlining a school's improvement priorities and actions

SLO

Schools as Learning Organisations, a model promoting continuous learning and improvement across schools

SLT

Senior Leadership Team

TA

Teaching Assistant.

Team Teach

Training programme to support positive behaviour management and safe physical intervention

ToC

Theory of Change

UCAC

Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru

WJEC

Welsh Joint Education Committee, the awarding body for qualifications in Wales

1. Introduction

1.1. Policy context

In-service education and training (INSET) days form a core component of teachers' statutory working hours in Wales and provide protected time for professional learning. Through INSET, schools are expected to support practitioners to enhance their skills and practice, strengthen collective capacity, and improve school development and outcomes for learners. There are 5 INSET days for headteachers and teachers, which are set nationally each academic year through the [School Teachers' Pay and Conditions \(Wales\) Document \(STPC\(W\)D\)](#). Similar arrangements for support staff and supply teachers are not set in this way and are determined instead by individual local authorities. Schools have flexibility in how they organise and use INSET time, including through use of full closure days when schools are closed to learners, or equivalent time via twilight sessions, which follow a normal teaching day.

In 2019, the Welsh Government (WG) introduced an additional sixth INSET day, initially for 3 years, to provide schools and practitioners with more protected time to support preparation for the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales. Following the introduction of this additional INSET day, the education system experienced significant disruption because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which placed pressures on schools and the workforce, affected opportunities for professional learning, and altered the pace and nature of reform implementation. The sixth day was consequently continued through to the 2024 to 2025 academic year following [consultation on additional national professional learning INSET days](#).

The decision to continue the sixth day reflects the scale and complexity of ongoing reforms within the education system, including the phased implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system. The WG [provide guidance encouraging](#) its use in ways that support national reform priorities while allowing flexibility for schools to respond to local context.

The delivery and use of INSET days varies across Wales. Schools use INSET time for a wide range of purposes, including curriculum planning and development, professional learning linked to national priorities, and wider school improvement activity. It is important to note that whilst some local authorities will require this [training](#) for schools, WG does not mandate that any particular content is included in INSET at present. Special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) often face additional training requirements linked to supporting learners with complex needs. Access to INSET for different staff groups, particularly teaching assistants (TAs) and other support staff, also differs and is influenced by contractual arrangements and local practice.

A WG [consultation](#) in 2022, and other research ([e.g. Teachers' professional learning study: Diagnostic report for Wales](#)), have shown broad support for INSET, including the additional day. However, stakeholders raised concerns about variation in how INSET time is used, uneven access for different staff groups with a particular view to support staff, and the

[impact of school closure days on families](#). In addition, there has been limited recent national evidence on how existing and additional INSET days are planned and used in practice, and how effectively they support practitioner and school development and contribute to learner outcomes. These gaps in evidence are particularly important given the scale of current education reform in Wales and the central role of professional learning in delivering reforms successfully. This research was commissioned by the WG to address evidence gaps, with a particular focus on the sixth INSET day.

The research is situated within the broader Welsh policy context. It aligns with the ambitions set out in [Education in Wales: Our National Mission](#), which emphasises high-quality teaching and leadership supported by career-long professional learning. It also reflects the principles of the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL), which promotes professional learning that is collaborative, evidence-informed, reflective and aligned with school and system priorities. The research is further informed by the Schools as Learning Organisations model, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and WG priorities relating to the Curriculum for Wales, ALN reform, equity in education and Cymraeg 2050.

1.2. Research aims and questions

The overarching purpose of this research was to provide robust, up-to-date evidence on the use of INSET to inform WG policy on the provision and to support decisions about the future role, structure and value of INSET days in Wales.

Specifically, the research intended to:

- understand how INSET days are used in practice, including how they are timetabled and distributed, the range of professional learning content covered, the processes through which sessions are planned and delivered, and the role of collaboration within and across schools
- explore perceptions of the effectiveness of INSET days in supporting practitioners and learners, including views on the value, role and impact of the additional sixth INSET day
- identify factors that facilitate or act as barriers to the effective use of INSET days, and to gain insight into how these may be addressed.

A set of detailed research questions were developed to support these aims and to provide a structured framework for the analysis. These are included in Annex B.

1.3. Report structure

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 sets out the methods used in this research

- Section 3 covers the findings from the research
- Section 4 provides the conclusions to the research
- Section 5 sets out the recommendations from the research.

2. Methodology

This section of the report outlines the methodological approach used to evaluate the use of INSET in schools in Wales. The method was shaped by the requirements in the WG research specification and research aims, and followed the principles set out in HM Treasury Green Book, Magenta Book and Aqua Book.

2.1. Research Design

The research began with the development of a Theory of Change (ToC). This was informed through an initial review of important documents, including national guidance on INSET days and professional learning, Estyn publications, and earlier research into INSET and professional learning in Wales. The ToC was also shaped by a series of six scoping interviews held with WG officials, and other national stakeholders in July and August 2025.

The ToC set out how INSET time is intended to improve professional learning, strengthen school and cluster working, and ultimately support better outcomes for learners. It captured the assumed mechanisms of change linked to both the standard INSET days and the additional sixth day introduced from 2019. The ToC informed the research design, the sampling strategy and the development of topic guides for all fieldwork. It was revised across 2 workshops with WG officials and was illustrated as a logic model (included at Annex A)

The research design placed an emphasis on qualitative methods in order to develop a detailed understanding of how INSET days are planned, delivered and used in practice, and how they are experienced by practitioners across different school contexts.

A national practitioner survey was included to complement this qualitative work by broadening the evidence base and capturing a wider range of views across roles and settings. The survey was intended to support triangulation with qualitative findings and to identify patterns in experience and use of INSET.

2.2. Interviews and focus groups

Sampling strategy

Sampling for the qualitative aspect of study was designed to ensure representation across Wales for interviews with senior leaders. An initial sampling framework was developed to cover variation in school phase including primary, secondary middle/all through and special schools, language medium (English, Welsh and bilingual), region and socio-economic context.

Recruitment for interviews with senior leaders initially relied on publicly available school contact details. A total of 711 schools were contacted. To widen participation, the opportunity to take part was also promoted via Dysg (the WG's official education and training email newsletter). As the fieldwork progressed, the sampling frame was adapted to address gaps where responses were lower than anticipated.

In contrast, engagement with teachers and TAs did not follow a formal sampling framework. These participants were included to provide additional perspectives on the use and experience of INSET. Teachers and TAs were primarily recruited through senior leaders who had already taken part in the research.

Welsh medium and bilingual settings have been amalgamated in the analysis for this research, despite the fact that not all learners in bilingual settings will receive education through the medium of Welsh. This is in line with the approach used for school census data.

Fieldwork activities

Interviews and focus groups were undertaken with school leaders, teachers, local authorities, national education stakeholders and workforce unions. Topic guides were developed in line with the research framework and covered themes relating to the planning, delivery and impact of INSET days, including the additional sixth INSET day.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams between October and December 2025, with each session lasting approximately one hour. A detailed breakdown of participants engaged in this phase of the research is set out below.

- 34 senior leadership team (SLT) interviews, representing:
 - 7 English-medium primary schools
 - 2 Welsh-medium primary schools
 - 3 English-medium secondary schools
 - 6 Welsh-medium secondary schools
 - 4 English-medium middle/all through
 - 2 Welsh-medium middle/all through
 - 10 special schools
- 5 teachers engaged through mini- group or one-to-one interviews
- 10 interviews with Directors of Education or equivalent staff in separate local authorities.
- 8 interviews with stakeholder organisations including Education Workforce Council and workforce unions made up of the following:
 - Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
 - Community Trade Union
 - National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)
 - National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)
 - National Education Union (NEU)

- Unison Cymru
- Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

2.3. Survey

In addition to the qualitative fieldwork, a survey hosted on the online platform Microsoft Forms was shared with senior leaders, teachers, TAs and the broader education workforce to gather wider evidence on experiences of INSET days across Wales. The survey did not use a systematic or probabilistic sampling approach. Distribution was undertaken through Dysg, the WG's official e-newsletter for the education and training sectors in Wales. This approach meant that the survey could potentially reach all education professionals subscribed to the newsletter. However, as responses were self-selected, the resulting sample may not be fully representative of the wider population.

The survey comprised 26 questions in total (20 closed and 6 open) and was streamed so that respondents were only asked questions relevant to their role. Survey questions were developed to align with the research aims and research framework and to enable triangulation with findings from the qualitative fieldwork.

The survey received a total of 561 responses, comprising:

- 504 English responses
- 57 Welsh responses

The survey broadened coverage and included responses from a range of practitioners:

- teachers – 255 (45.7%)
- headteachers / senior leaders – 176 (31.5%)
- TAs – 78 (14%)
- wider education practitioners¹ – 49 (8.8%)

Additionally, a further 3 respondents did not indicate their role.

2.4. Case studies

In addition to the main methods discussed above, case studies were undertaken to gather rich qualitative data on the use of INSET days. The case study sample included 6 schools, chosen to reflect a range of school phases and types (including mainstream and special schools), language medium, geography, and levels of deprivation. Use of a standardised pro forma ensured consistency across case studies while allowing leaders to provide detailed, open-text responses grounded in their own school context. Case study findings were analysed thematically and presented in Annex C.

¹ Including administrative staff and other non-teaching professionals.

2.5. Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was adopted for interview and focus group data. Coding was informed by the research questions set out in the original research specification and summarised in the previous section of this report. An initial coding structure was developed and applied to early interview and focus group transcripts, with two researchers independently coding a sample of transcripts to support consistency.

Following this coding phase, analysis involved comparing emerging themes across stakeholder groups, regions, school types and language media. These themes were also examined through the lens of school characteristics, such as proportion of learners eligible for free school meals, rurality, and level of ALN prevalence, although the extent of disaggregation was limited by the relatively small sample sizes.

Responses to closed questions on the online survey were analysed in Excel, using pivot tables, where relevant. Textual data gathered through open survey questions were analysed descriptively to identify patterns that could be triangulated with or qualify qualitative themes identified in the first round of analysis. Quality assurance processes included peer review, team discussion of emerging findings, and systematic checking of evidence underpinning conclusions.

2.6. Limitations

While the research generated extensive and meaningful evidence, several limitations should be acknowledged. An original target of 55 SLT interviews was not fully reached (a total of 34 were interviewed, representing 62% of the original target), and the under-representation of some local authority areas (no schools in Torfaen, Merthyr Tydfil, Flintshire, Ceredigion took part) means the research did not achieve full geographical coverage.

Engagement with teachers and TAs through qualitative methods was also limited, with only 5 teachers engaged through mini group or one-to-one interviews, and no TAs were interviewed. However, the survey received 225 responses from teachers and 78 responses from TAs, which helped to mitigate the shortfall in qualitative engagement with these groups. Furthermore, the fact that there were fairly high levels of agreement amongst interviewees and survey respondents across school types, geographic location, and other variables, suggests that data saturation had been reached and that additional fieldwork might not have yielded substantially new insights.

As participation was voluntary, self-selection bias may be present, particularly within the survey. The research also faced constraints due to the absence of national data on how INSET is used, meaning that findings rely on self-reported accounts of practice.

Despite these challenges, the combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence, collected across a wide range of settings and roles, provides a strong and credible base from which to understand current use and perceived impact of INSET in Wales.

3. Findings

3.1. The use and planning of INSET days

The research explored how schools were timetabling their INSET days. Most schools included in the research (79% of survey respondents) use a combination of full INSET days and twilight sessions, which are shorter than full days, take place after the school day, and provide roughly the same amount of time as a full INSET day but delivered over multiple sessions. Evidence from the survey responses also suggest one in six (16%) schools deliver all their entitlement as full days while only 2% reported using only twilight sessions.

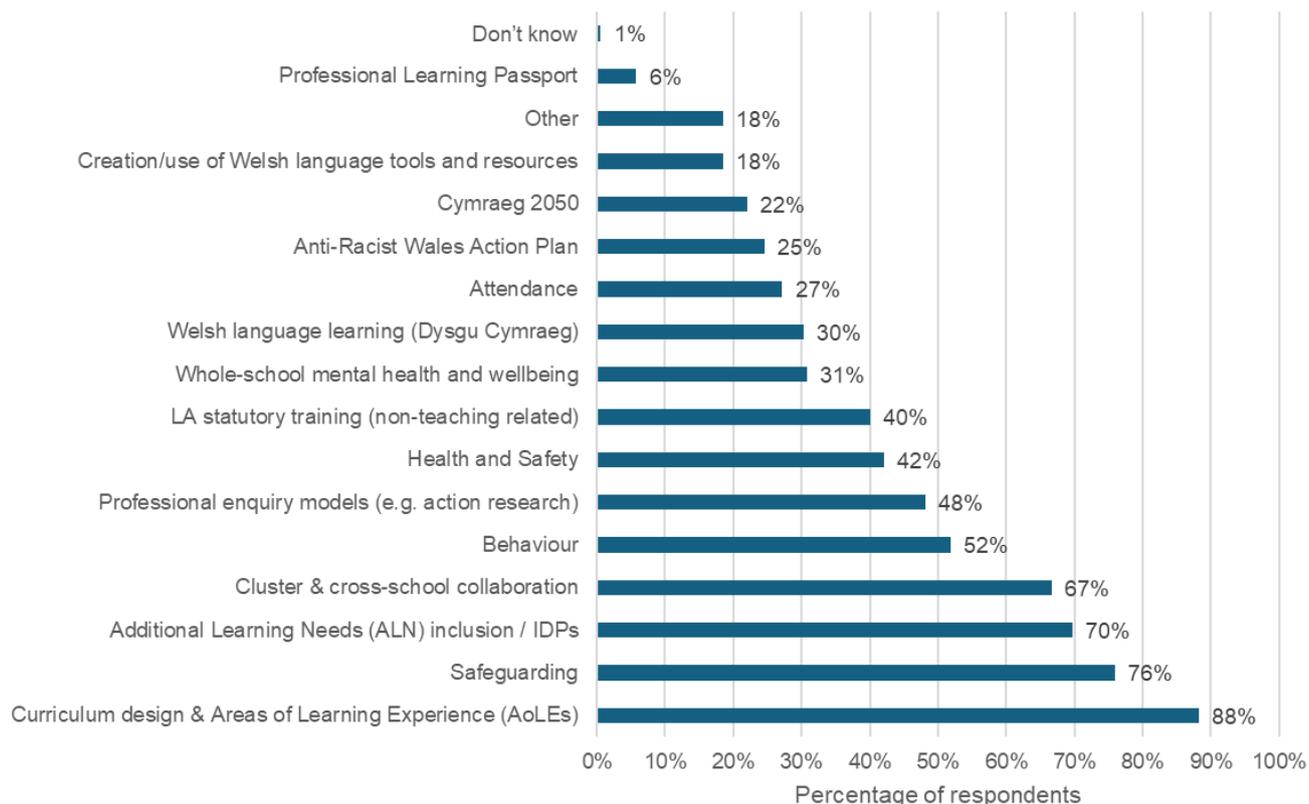
Schools most commonly used full days where whole-school coherence and sustained planning were priorities. Leaders reported that dedicated days support collaboration across departments and enable deeper planning linked to Curriculum for Wales and qualification reform. Full days were also seen as more effective for cluster-wide activity and for work that requires uninterrupted time. Senior leaders noted that staff generally prefer full days and that they avoid the fatigue associated with training after a full day of teaching. These considerations applied to both the five core INSET days and, in most cases, to the additional sixth day, which was often scheduled as a full day to preserve protected time for curriculum and reform-related work.

Twilight sessions were typically described as a pragmatic response to competing pressures. Schools used them to increase flexibility, distribute professional learning across the year, and avoid scheduling INSET at the end of the summer term, which was often viewed as less productive. Twilights were also used to accommodate part-time contracts, reduce budget pressures linked to paying additional hours for support staff, and create space around externally scheduled events such as WJEC qualification reform sessions. A small number of schools delivered the sixth INSET day through twilight sessions for similar reasons, particularly where wellbeing, staffing patterns or reactive scheduling were considerations.

Interviewees said that schools often place the first and last days of the school year in their INSET calendar, although the final 'day' often takes the form of multiple twilight sessions held before the end of term. Local authority staff said that the use of INSET days varied by school, and staff across all types of settings explained that INSET time is often spread across the year. Practitioners stated that this supports continual development throughout the academic year and ensures that each term includes dedicated INSET provision.

Figure 3.1. shows the responses that practitioners responsible for planning INSET gave when asked what content was planned for the 2025 to 2026 academic year. Curriculum design and AOLEs (Areas of Learning and Experience) was cited most frequently (88% of responses), followed by safeguarding (76%), and ALN inclusion, IDPs (individual development plans), and/or inter-agency working (in relation to supporting learners with ALN) (70%). Cluster and cross-school collaboration (67%) and behaviour (52%) were also mentioned in more than half the responses. During interviews, senior leaders in secondary settings additionally noted that INSET time has increasingly been used to prepare for the new GCSE qualifications.

Figure 3.1 When planning INSET for the 2025 to 2026 academic year, which of the following priorities will be addressed? Please select all that apply



Source: Online survey of professionals n=195

Description of Figure 3.1: A bar chart presenting the priorities that senior leaders say will be addressed by INSET for the 2025 to 2026 academic year. It shows curriculum design and Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) to be the most common response followed by safeguarding. A range of other less commonly priorities are also shown.

School leaders who were interviewed explained that the additional sixth INSET day is typically used to cover similar content to that covered in the main INSET allocation, but often with a stronger emphasis on national reform priorities. They described using the sixth day to progress curriculum design work, undertake ALN-related training, prepare for qualification reforms, or complete safeguarding and compliance updates. In some cases, the sixth day provides essential protected time for whole-school or cluster-wide planning activities that cannot easily be accommodated during the regular term.

Although the WG does not mandate specific INSET content, school leaders nonetheless described some training as mandatory because it stems from wider statutory duties, local authority requirements, health and safety obligations or professional standards. This creates a perception that it is non-negotiable and must be accommodated. Senior leaders interviewed commonly reported setting aside a considerable amount of time each year to cover what is considered to be mandatory training, with most saying it takes at least 6 hours or a full INSET day. In some cases, schools allocated 2 full INSET days to mandatory content, often due to the scale of required training in areas such as health and safety,

safeguarding, behaviour management, physical intervention, PREVENT, EpiPen use and other medical procedures.

Senior leaders in special schools described that their INSET included additional content and requirements beyond what is covered in mainstream settings and that this required more of their dedicated INSET time. Special school staff were required to participate in the additional training necessary to ensure they can address the needs of ALN learners. Such training included sessions on manual handling (people handling), [Picture Exchange Communication System](#) (PECS), positive behavioural support with [Team Teach](#) training to address this (including restrictive physical intervention, RPI), and support for learners with complex physical needs.

The research also asked about how INSET days are planned. School Development Plans (SDP) set out a school's overall needs and priorities, including attendance, safeguarding, literacy and numeracy needs, and other areas that require attention. They were commonly reported to be used to both decide what training to include in INSET sessions based on the priorities for the individual school, and also to ensure the content aligns with national, local authority and WG priorities. Some schools report that it can be difficult to give due attention to school-level priorities however, given the volume of what is perceived as mandatory training that must be covered in the available INSET allocation. During interviews, school leaders noted that they do not treat the sixth day differently from the rest of their INSET allocation and therefore also typically align it with existing SDP priorities and the wider national expectations for professional learning.

Some senior leaders use staff feedback on previous INSET days to identify perceived strengths and gaps in knowledge and to decide what topics and training to include in future INSET sessions. Gaps in learning identified through INSET, professional development reviews, or other processes are addressed in different ways, depending on the scale and nature of the gap. Where gaps affect a larger group of staff, schools use INSET time to revisit or reinforce these areas, providing a whole-school or group response. For gaps affecting smaller groups or individual practitioners, schools offer a more targeted approach through regular professional learning sessions, rather than INSET days.

Senior leaders in both mainstream and special schools indicated that as well as addressing school-specific gaps and priorities, they also utilised INSET days to cover updates on the health needs of learners, any particular training (e.g.: training around inhaler use) or adjustments covered in the IDPs of learners with ALN, as well as wider health needs. Practitioners use this information to plan sessions that help staff carry out their roles safely and confidently.

While schools did not refer directly to the [National Approach to Professional Learning](#) many of the professional learning practices described in the interviews do align with its design principles. In the survey, for instance, 82% of those responsible for planning INSET said they use internal staff expertise to lead sessions, which reflects the NAPL expectation that professionals should learn from one another and draw on in-house knowledge. The fact that many schools build INSET content from their SDP, and other feedback, mirrors the NAPL requirement that professional learning should connect to identified needs. Some schools

provide time for reflection through departmental work, coaching models, or weekly follow up sessions, which supports the NAPL emphasis on applying learning in practice. Cluster sessions also create structured opportunities for staff to learn with colleagues across phases (i.e.: primary, secondary etc). However, leaders across settings said that significant pressures related to what is perceived as mandatory training, new safeguarding requirements, and qualification changes, limit the time available for enquiry based learning, which means their INSET programmes cannot always reflect NAPL principles in full.

The research also considered the role of local authorities in INSET provision. A small number of practitioners said their schools hold full flexibility over both the timing and content of INSET days, with little to no local authority involvement. Several other leaders explained that local authorities provide oversight, reviewing how schools plan to use their INSET time and offering recommendations for content. In these cases, however, schools retain flexibility over how they set out their INSET days and some reported that they had rejected topics suggested by their local authority. The local authority intervenes only when training that is considered mandatory has not been undertaken, for example safeguarding training.

Some practitioners described more of a close collaborative relationship between local authorities and schools. In these examples, local authorities sometimes shape the timing of INSET days since this allows them to check activity across multiple schools more easily. Local authorities also share their priorities with schools and ensure that they are reflected in INSET content. Senior leaders in these settings said local authorities help them identify training needs and locate resources or external providers when gaps appear.

Overall, senior leaders viewed local authority support as useful, though some noted tension when school, local authority and WG priorities require attention at the same time.

3.2. Alignment with national priorities and policy goals

As the previous section showed, evidence across settings indicates that many schools take WG priorities into account when planning INSET days. Since most schools begin their planning by looking at their SDP, and many SDPs incorporate Curriculum for Wales (CfW), ALN and equity issues, WG priorities are often part of the planning process by default. However, the extent to which this happens varies between setting types and is shaped by competing demands such as safeguarding requirements, qualification updates, and medical or behaviour related training in special schools.

Curriculum for Wales

Responses from the survey showed at an overwhelming 88% of respondents identifying curriculum design and the AoLEs as important priorities within their INSET programmes. Senior leaders who participated in interviews also consistently reported that CfW remains a central focus of professional learning, particularly in secondary schools preparing for the new GCSE qualifications. For example, one Welsh medium secondary school leader described using a September INSET day to develop questioning strategies and deeper thinking, explicitly linking this to CfW and its emphasis on learner independence. Another

secondary school reported that recent INSET activity on literacy, reflective questioning and groupwork formed part of their ongoing work to strengthen CfW delivery. Commenting more specifically on the new GCSE qualifications, a senior leader noted that:

“The Curriculum for Wales is a main priority. This includes ensuring that staff have time to consider the new specifications and start preparing for those.”

The extent of schools’ emphasis on CfW was also recognised by local authorities, with one interviewee commenting that:

“[Curriculum for Wales] has received sustained attention since its launch ... schools [are] investing heavily in planning and delivery.”

CfW planning is also featured in special schools, but the total scale of other training requirements and needs means, in some cases, this work happens in short blocks rather than across full days. Leaders in these settings repeatedly described long lists of other required training, such as manual handling, epilepsy, buccal administration, gastrostomy feeding, behaviour support programmes, communication systems and medical care. These demands restrict the time available for CfW, though schools still include it where they can.

CfW also features in cross-school collaboration, with cluster sessions being used to improve consistency in delivery of the new curriculum between primary and secondary phases. Some leaders said that they need more time to plan collaborative sessions thoroughly and review practice.

ALN reforms

Across both interviews and survey responses, schools reported that ALN reforms play a significant role in shaping their INSET planning. Interviewed leaders in mainstream schools explained that they allocate INSET time to develop staff understanding of new ALN processes, including work on Individual Development Plans (IDPs), assessment approaches, communication strategies and behaviour support linked to ALN needs.

Interviewed leaders from both Welsh-medium and English-medium mainstream schools also described how ALN changes have influenced their approaches to classroom differentiation, pastoral systems and support for learners with emerging or complex needs. One local authority interviewee commenting on mainstream schools suggested that the ALN reforms had “...driven significant training activity, particularly for support staff and those working with vulnerable learners.”

Special schools described even more intensive use of INSET time for ALN-related priorities, including behaviour planning, sensory regulation approaches and communication systems, all of which align closely with ALN reform requirements. Leaders in these settings noted that INSET is essential for building staff confidence in supporting learners with ALN.

However, both mainstream and special school leaders highlighted that the volume of what is considered mandatory or compliance training that is required each year reduces the time available to explore new ALN expectations in depth. Several schools also noted that clearer

national guidance on ALN needs and training expectations would support more coherent planning.

Equity

Equity also forms part of INSET planning in several schools. In interviews, school leaders described using INSET time to develop staff understanding of trauma-informed practice, positive behaviour approaches, attendance, wellbeing, and other equity-related themes. Cluster INSET days were said to be used to bring in external speakers to address issues such as adverse childhood experiences, trauma-informed pedagogy and communication needs, helping staff reflect on the wider experiences of learners and strengthen consistency across the cluster. Schools reported that these sessions enable teachers and support staff to better recognise barriers faced by learners and adjust their practice accordingly.

However, leaders also explained that equity-focused sessions often compete with urgent curriculum demands, other national priorities, and safeguarding updates leaving limited time for staff to apply, practise and embed these approaches. Several schools noted that because INSET time is tightly allocated, equity-related priorities are sometimes delivered in shorter sessions than they would prefer, reducing opportunities for follow-up or refinement in practice.

Cymraeg 2050

The extent to which INSET days support Welsh language development varies across settings. Welsh-medium schools are active in using INSET to improve oracy, widen the use of Welsh in classrooms and develop a shared cluster-wide understanding of Cymreictod (Welshness). Schools described workshops, language development sessions and external speakers from Welsh language organisations who help staff reflect on the role of language in learning. Some Welsh-medium schools explained that encouraging learners to speak Welsh confidently has become more challenging and that INSET time helps staff revisit expectations.

In English-medium schools, however, the use of INSET for Cymraeg 2050 is more limited. Some schools cover incidental Welsh use or language awareness through local authority modules, but leaders noted that these sessions do not always feel well-matched to their needs. Special schools also suggested that Cymraeg 2050 can be difficult to apply because learners can struggle with literacy and communication generally. Some are non-verbal or use highly individualised communication systems. In these settings, Welsh language work focuses mainly on cultural identity rather than linguistic development.

The sixth day and national priorities

Views about how the sixth INSET day is used vary across settings, but most schools say it plays a role in supporting national priorities. The sixth day was intended to provide protected, whole-school time for professional learning linked to CfW, ALN reforms, equity and Cymraeg 2050. However, many secondary schools reported that, since the 2024 to 2025 academic year, the day has been largely shaped by externally scheduled WJEC qualification-reform events. Because these sessions are subject-specific, only certain

departments attend. Several leaders noted that while the content covered does relate to CfW and qualification reform, the format does not allow for wider whole-school planning or strategic professional learning.

Other schools use the sixth INSET day more flexibly. For example, some schools plan cross-phase cluster work on CfW, progression steps and transition. Some Welsh-medium schools described how cluster-wide INSET days help staff reflect on Welsh language planning, oracy and cultural identity, which link closely to Cymraeg 2050.

Special schools often use the sixth day as the only space left for CfW after much of their available INSET time has been taken up with what are considered mandatory training requirements relating to health and safety requirements.

”the impact of significant additional requirements for mandatory training [sic]... negatively impacts the amount of INSET time for important priorities, meaning the sixth day becomes the only time available for curriculum work.”

Headteacher interview

3.3. Inclusion and access for all staff groups

INSET days have historically been associated with the professional development of qualified teachers. However, the research aimed to understand the extent to which others in support roles are included. Of the 78 survey respondents who said that they were teaching assistants (TAs) (encompassing school learning support workers, teaching assistants and Higher Level Teaching Assistants) 75 reported they attended INSET. Moreover, all of the schools whose leaders participated in interviews aimed to include TAs in INSET days, with many stating they have a strong commitment to ensuring that all teaching staff are involved. In most cases, TAs attend whole-school sessions, where TAs and teaching staff participate together in the same professional learning activities.

In interviews, school leaders reported that sessions may be tailored to reflect the relevant professional needs and responsibilities of TAs. Where this occurs, leaders commonly report higher levels of engagement and participation from TAs. However, several schools highlighted challenges in implementing tailored approaches where attendance at specific INSET sessions is compulsory, such as sessions linked to WJEC qualification reforms or curriculum updates geared towards teachers. In these circumstances, leaders reported that TAs may feel less engaged when content is not directly relevant to them.

Other schools also face administrative challenges related to the involvement of TAs. Contractual arrangements, including a lack of obligation to participate in INSET and part-time working can affect attendance at sessions. A primary school leader said they “tend to see lower attendance from part-time TAs because INSET often falls on their non-working day”.

Stakeholders from national organisations, unions and local authorities pointed to different patterns across Wales in term-time-only contracts noting that it was resulting in variation as to whether payment for INSET time is part of TAs' terms of employment. Several schools also noted the practical impacts of these contractual differences with senior leaders describing challenges in securing consistent TA attendance where staff are on 38- or 39-week contracts and therefore not paid for INSET time (i.e. an additional 6 days). Some interviewees reported addressing contractual gaps by paying TAs for additional hours and offering twilights or mop-up sessions, ensuring they could still participate in INSET despite not being contracted for those days. Special schools noted that all TAs attend but also highlighted that this is only possible because their local authorities contract TAs on 39-week+ arrangements.

Even with these measures in place, childcare responsibilities can remain a barrier to TA attendance, particularly as participation is voluntary and not contractually required. One interviewee noted that having to pay for childcare can make attendance "a prohibitive reason" even when flexible INSET arrangements are offered. As a result, in reality many will still not be able to participate in INSET sessions, despite an intention at a school level to make INSET inclusive to all staff.

There were some observations in relation to the extent to which the development and training needs of TAs are met. TAs were identified by some SLT interviewees as a group whose individual development priorities are less likely to inform INSET planning, partly because consistent professional development review processes are not in place for this group. Survey findings slightly contradict this however, with over 9 out of 10 TAs who responded to the survey reporting that INSET days make some or a large difference to their professional development. This suggests there could be a mismatch between leaders' perceptions of alignment of INSET with TA professional development needs and how much TAs themselves value INSET provision in relation to their individual professional development.

There is considerable variation in the extent to which teachers' development priorities are considered when planning INSET time, which has implications for engagement and inclusion. In some schools, senior leaders reported that practitioners' needs are identified through professional development reviews, reflection on professional standards, and staff surveys, but in other schools it is the SDP that is largely taken into consideration resulting in shared INSET, which focuses on school-level priorities. While some practitioners spoke positively of these sessions, others highlighted that a one-size-fits-all approach to INSET planning limited relevance and reduced inclusion where it is perceived as not reflecting individual professional development needs. It can also mean that limited time is available to address individual practitioner development needs, which are more often covered through professional learning that takes place outside of INSET time.

One teaching union interviewee suggested that just under a third of their members reported to them that INSET days were rarely or never used for professional development, indicating that it does not consistently support individual professional development across all practitioners. While issues were raised in this research, most respondents to the survey stated INSET days do make some or a large difference to their professional development.

3.4. Collaboration and cluster working

There is a varied approach in terms of how schools use INSET days to support collaboration and cluster working. Most senior leaders interviewed reported that INSET time is predominantly used to support collaboration within their own school setting. At secondary level, this typically involves sharing knowledge and expertise between staff, particularly within subject departments. Collaboration across departments occurs less frequently, but some schools reported cross-departmental planning and joint reviewing of teaching strategies. This form of internal collaboration also includes leveraging staff expertise to deliver training to colleagues, with some schools using a “quid pro quo” approach to exchange expertise across departments or with other schools. Other approaches include moderating work across classes and departments to achieve consistency in assessment, and joint planning on curriculum progression and pedagogy within departments.

A smaller proportion of senior leaders interviewed reported that external expertise is occasionally brought in to support collaborative professional learning. This tends to be targeted and focuses on areas where expertise among staff is limited, such as anti-racism, safeguarding, or ALN. Schools also take advantage of free or low-costing training provided by local authorities (or regional consortia prior to reform of the system), or other providers. Barriers such as cost, availability, and the specificity of the training required were mentioned as limiting wider use of external expertise.

Cluster working refers to structured collaboration between groups of schools, typically within a local geographic area or formal partnership network, to plan and deliver joint professional learning, share practice and coordinate activity around shared priorities. External collaboration refers to schools working with organisations or individuals outside their own setting or cluster, such as local authorities, regional consortia or specialist providers.

Interviews with senior leaders suggested that for a small number of schools, collaboration with other schools or external partners is a well-established feature of professional learning, supported by active cluster networks and regular joint activity. In schools with more active cluster networks, it is common for one INSET day to be reserved specifically for collaborative activities with other schools. These cluster days enable teachers to work with colleagues from other schools on common priorities such as curriculum design, assessment, and pedagogy. Examples include some schools hosting cluster maths twilight sessions twice a year, joint training across primary and secondary schools, and cluster events led by professional learning teams from local authorities. Sometimes activity is targeted at specific staff groups, with sessions focusing, for example, on TAs or ALN staff, enabling professional learning to be shared between practitioners with similar responsibilities and to allow for any cost for the trainer to be borne across more than one school.

Where cluster arrangements are less developed, collaborative activity tends to be more limited and shaped by practical constraints such as capacity, leadership stability, and the ability to align priorities across schools. In such cases, leaders reported collaboration as being more targeted or episodic, focusing on specific priorities, or opportunities where coordination across schools is feasible.

Some schools noted challenges in implementing cluster-based INSET. These include variation in cluster activity, difficulty in agreeing shared priorities for the day, and timing constraints that make scheduling joint INSET sessions challenging. In schools outside of more established cluster networks, there are additional barriers, such as limited knowledge of what other schools are doing well, difficulties releasing teachers to visit other schools, turnover of senior leaders, and administrative workload. These factors reduce the likelihood that INSET days are used collaboratively.

As with the original five INSET days, there is a varied approach to using the additional day for collaboration. Senior leaders interviewed highlighted that while the additional INSET day provides the potential to engage in collaborative professional learning, the extent to which this is realised depends on the strength and organisation of cluster networks, available capacity and coordination across schools.

For a minority of senior leaders interviewed whose schools are a part of an active cluster network, the additional day is reserved explicitly for joint working with partner schools and is valued as an opportunity to consolidate this approach. These sessions are used for sharing practice, moderation, and collaborative planning across curriculum and pedagogical areas. Examples include sessions that bring together primary and secondary partners, or multiple special schools, to work on shared priorities such as curriculum design, assessment approaches, and teaching strategies for learners with specific needs. The sessions are often structured to ensure meaningful participation across staff groups. Schools note that mutual understanding and coordination between cluster members are critical to ensuring the day is productive. In some clusters, schools also use the additional INSET day to align schedules, plan joint activities, and coordinate other INSET dates across settings, helping to save time, reduce duplication of training, and maximise the benefits of collaborative professional learning.

However, schools outside active cluster networks tend to use the additional day more flexibly, focusing on school-level priorities rather than cross-school collaboration. This may include targeted internal training, appraisal-related professional development, or curriculum planning tailored to the specific needs of the school's staff.

3.5. Governance and communication

Senior leaders described a range of approaches to communicating INSET activity to school governors, including formal mechanisms such as half termly reports, headteacher reports and annual reports, as well as the use of structured tools such as staff surveys to support transparency and accountability. However, views on the value of these approaches were mixed, with some senior leaders questioning the usefulness of standardised reporting, viewing it as largely procedural.

Challenges were also identified in engaging governors in INSET days, particularly where curriculum changes meant that some governors lacked the up-to-date knowledge to participate fully in discussions about INSET and professional learning priorities. While

governors are often invited to attend INSET days, most typically do not, reflecting the voluntary nature of the role and the practical constraints on the time that governors have available. When governors do attend INSET days, leaders reported that this is usually limited to specific sessions deemed relevant to their role, such as safeguarding and strategic priorities.

Senior leaders also described a range of challenges in communicating INSET arrangements more widely. Interviews with school leaders highlighted the pressures associated with informing parents about INSET scheduling. While INSET days are usually scheduled for the whole academic year before it starts, this can change, with dates sometimes changing at short notice. Such changes were described as provoking strong reactions from families because of the additional childcare burden created. One SLT interviewee commented:

“we’ve had some pushback in the past from parents questioning the purpose and timetabling of INSET days. It would be really beneficial if the Welsh Government increased awareness why we need INSET days.”

Several senior leaders reported that they had received queries from parents about why INSET days are not scheduled to take place outside of term time, reinforcing the need for greater messaging around how INSET fits into teachers’ contracts.

In other settings, leaders reported taking steps to ensure that the scheduling of INSET is predictable and held at times that may be more preferable. In these instances, no discord with parents has occurred. One senior leader noted:

“There has been no backlash from parents, likely because [we] schedule INSET days at predictable, family-friendly points – typically at term boundaries – and communicate them clearly.”

Communication with local authorities also varied widely across the schools included in the research sample. Three schools explicitly reported minimal or inconsistent engagement from their local authority regarding INSET planning or expectations, with one school stating that “there isn’t much engagement from the local authority around INSET provision”. Others noted that they did not routinely share their INSET plans with the local authority or were unsure whether any formal process existed, with only isolated examples from school leaders suggesting local authorities ask about timetabling or what are considered mandatory training requirements. In contrast, local authority stakeholders described more regular contact with schools with much of this reported engagement appearing to relate to individual professional learning priorities such as ALN reforms, safeguarding or curriculum development. This suggests a degree of misaligned perceptions in which local authorities perceive themselves as communicating consistently on professional learning, whilst schools do not necessarily experience this as direct engagement with their INSET planning.

3.6. Impact on practitioners and schools

Findings from SLT interviews and practitioner survey responses indicate that practitioners believe that professional learning undertaken during INSET days has a positive impact on their professional development (88%) and their classroom practice (87%).

During interviews, school leaders and teachers frequently reported that INSET days contribute to improved professional knowledge and development by providing valuable time to engage with new ideas, updated guidance and curriculum requirements. Several interviewees emphasised that INSET helps staff stay up to date with national developments and areas of policy reform. Others noted that INSET provides essential time to focus on pedagogy and they value exposure to new approaches and updated expectations, describing INSET as a necessary opportunity to consolidate understanding that would otherwise be difficult to achieve during a typical school week.

In the survey, practitioners described applying learning from INSET days to planning, teaching, assessment, and wider professional responsibilities. Open text comments highlighted how INSET days helped staff “learn strategies and ideas to try in the classroom” or prompted “small but significant changes” in how they responded to learners’ needs. INSET days were also perceived to support practitioners in reflecting on their teaching practice in class, identifying areas for improvement, and considering how their practice aligns with expected standards and priorities.

Both SLT interviewees and responses from the practitioner survey emphasised the value of internal collaboration opportunities during INSET days in contributing to improvements not only within their own schools but also across neighbouring schools and clusters, bringing back ideas that informed curriculum design, classroom environments, and approaches to supporting learners.

Despite these largely positive perceptions, survey responses indicate that the impact of INSET days on practitioners’ knowledge, skills, and practice is variable and often subjective. Whilst 48% of survey respondent felt that INSET had made a large positive impact on their practice, 41% reported some impact and 11% reported it having no impact. Amongst interviews, several practitioners noted that effectiveness “depends on the INSET being delivered” and whether the content is clearly relevant to their role. Senior leaders emphasised that INSET is most beneficial when its focus is explicit and linked to classroom practice, with generic or repetitive content described as having “no impact” or being “a tick-box exercise.” Others highlighted that without follow-up time to embed learning, ideas shared during INSET “cannot be implemented” or are quickly lost amid day-to-day pressures.

Analysis of the open text survey responses identified impacts relating to wellbeing. A total of 34 responses highlighted the collaborative benefits of INSET emphasising opportunities to connect with colleagues, share experiences and provide mutual support. Interview evidence reinforced this point. Leaders described INSET as one of the few occasions when all staff, including teachers, TAs, support staff and sometimes governors, could come

together. This was seen as particularly valuable in large or multi-site schools, where staff can otherwise feel isolated.

Some survey respondents (9) described INSET as providing valuable time for reflection. Practitioners described INSET as a pause from the immediate demands of the classroom, allowing them to reflect on their practice and “take a breath”. Interview data supports this finding from the survey. Staff in several schools described full day INSET as “quality time” that enables reflection, open discussion and reconnection with professional purpose, without the fatigue associated with twilight sessions after challenging school days. Some leaders also reported deliberately designing INSET to include reflective activities, shared discussion and consolidation, to support mental space and cognitive rest.

A further 7 responses described improvements in staff confidence. These were most often associated with INSET that provided clear guidance and practical support, which they could then adopt in the classroom. Professional learning that helped practitioners better understand expectations of them in terms of approaches to classroom/behaviour management or to develop strategies for managing workload was perceived to reduce stress and uncertainty.

These survey findings are consistent with interview evidence. Practitioners and leaders described how INSET can help staff feel more secure in their roles by offering reassurance, developing shared understanding and creating opportunities to review and refine practice over time. Senior leaders in special schools highlighted the importance of consistent and repeated training, for example in communication, sensory regulation or behaviour approaches. They noted that this reduces anxiety linked to feeling under-prepared to meet complex learner needs. While these views represent a limited proportion of the overall dataset, they formed a consistent pattern within responses that focused on wellbeing.

A handful of practitioners also reported increased motivation or enthusiasm following INSET, particularly when professional learning was relevant, engaging and closely aligned with their needs. Leaders echoed this view, noting that well-designed sessions can be uplifting and help renew staff commitment to improvement. However, respondents were clear that these positive effects depended on the quality and relevance of the training.

A few survey responses did, however, report some negative wellbeing impacts, including increased stress, added pressure and perceptions that INSET contributed to workload. Similar concerns were raised in interviews, where some practitioners described feeling overwhelmed when what is considered mandatory requirements dominate INSET, or when twilight sessions after a full day of teaching were used instead of full INSET days, leading to greater exhaustion rather than improved wellbeing.

SLT interviews and practitioner survey responses suggest that INSET days can contribute to school development within the context of schools as learning organisations. Senior leaders highlighted that it offers a structured opportunity to ensure a shared understanding of important priorities across the school. One interviewee described INSET days as “the only guaranteed opportunity to bring all staff together for professional learning, mandatory training [sic], and curriculum planning”.

During interviews practitioners also reported that INSET days contribute to improved awareness and understanding of the SDP with several noting that dedicated time helps them see how whole-school aims translate into classroom expectations. Leaders explained that INSET is often the only opportunity to “walk all staff through SDP priorities,” inspection recommendations and curriculum changes, ensuring that teachers, TAs and wider support staff receive consistent messages.

The extent to which INSET can support school development in these ways is strongly determined by the quality, relevance, and strategic alignment of INSET provision. Where INSET days are clearly linked to matters such as wider school and professional development priorities, they were perceived to support a consistent, school-wide approach to professional learning and contribute to the embedding of learning into practice.

Senior leader interviews noted that INSET days are most effective when used to address common gaps in knowledge or practice across a broad proportion of staff. Where professional development needs are more individualised, they were perceived as less effective than targeted professional development delivered throughout the year.

Within the context of schools as learning organisations, INSET days were perceived to support school development by creating space for shared thinking and collective learning. This supports important features, such as shared responsibility for improvement and the use of professional learning to inform change. However, respondents noted that this impact depends on INSET days being designed to encourage meaningful engagement and being linked to ongoing cycles of reflection and development, rather than standing alone.

Across both the survey and interview data, there was no evidence that the sixth INSET day generates substantially different impacts for practitioners compared with the standard five days. Instead, respondents consistently reported that the additional day strengthens the typical benefits associated with INSET rather than introducing new forms of impact.

3.7. Impact on learners and wider outcomes

Responses to the practitioners survey show that they believe INSET to have a positive impact on learner outcomes with 82% considering that it has made a large difference (42%) or some difference (40%) to learner outcomes. This perception is also reflected in evidence from interviews with school leaders, and with local authority representatives.

Interviewees explained that schools rarely measure learner impacts arising from INSET through any dedicated or standalone system. Instead, impacts are assessed indirectly through existing monitoring processes such as progress data, attendance, observations of engagement and practitioner reflection. In some cases leaders reported anecdotal evidence of tangible improvements against individual literacy and numeracy targets and reduced behavioural incidents requiring physical intervention.

Across all stakeholder groups participating in interviews, however, there was strong recognition of the difficulty in determining the direct impact of INSET on learners.

Participants noted that professional learning is only one factor that influences learner outcomes alongside others such as parental support, socio-economic status, peer influence and quality of learning materials. This challenge was evident in special schools, where progress and outcomes were described as highly individual and not easily captured through standard measures or at a cohort level. This complexity is reflected in the theory of change (Annex A), which recognises that learner outcomes and impacts are expected to occur indirectly and over time, following changes in practitioner knowledge and confidence leading to improvements in practice. In this model, improvements for learners are dependent on outcomes for practitioners first, rather than being attributable to INSET in isolation.

As discussed in the previous section, interviewees consistently described INSET as improving the quality of teaching by equipping staff with clearer pedagogical approaches, updated curriculum understanding and practical strategies. Leaders highlighted that incremental, well-sequenced INSET improved classroom delivery, with one headteacher noting that teachers returned to their classrooms “significantly upskilled and able to solve their own problems”. These improvements in practitioner capability were understood as the primary pathway through which INSET enhances learners’ classroom experiences.

INSET was also seen as essential for establishing consistency across teaching, support staff and wider roles, particularly in behaviour, communication and inclusion. Leaders stressed that inclusive INSET practices ensure shared understanding of expectations and approaches across the school. Practitioners described how INSET gave them time to “come back together to share our own learning journeys”, which helped align approaches and reduce variation between classes. This coherence was viewed as directly beneficial for learners, who experience more predictable routines, smoother transitions and consistent adult responses throughout the school day.

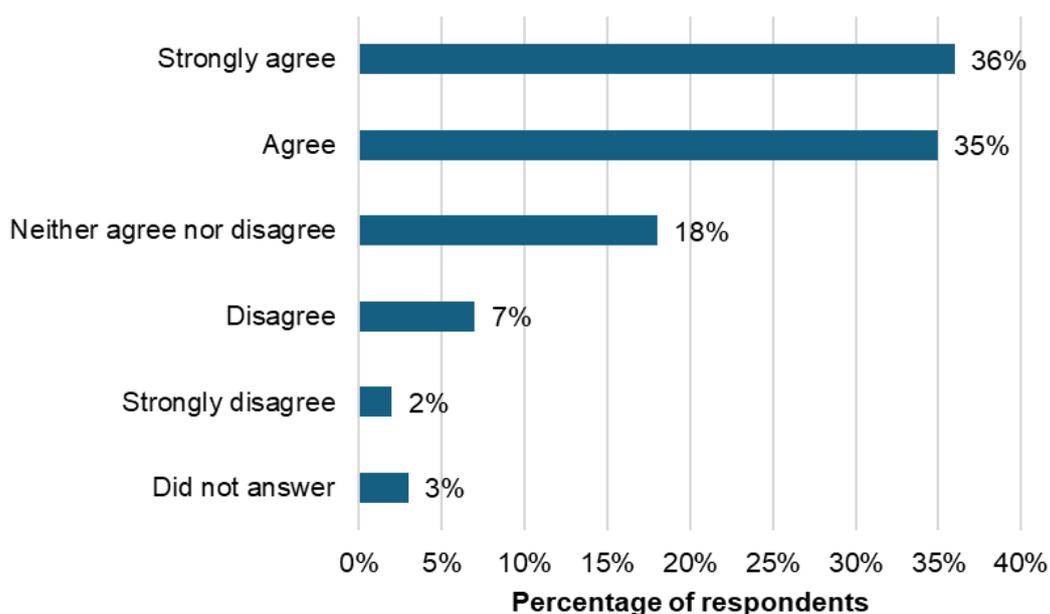
Finally, interviewees highlighted that learners benefit when staff feel confident, supported and less overwhelmed. Several leaders explained that INSET provided protected time for staff to focus, reflect and consolidate learning without fatigue. Others described how breaking up what was widely considered to be mandatory safeguarding or pastoral training makes it easier for staff who may have experienced challenging situations, avoiding cognitive overload and emotional strain. These improvements in practitioner wellbeing were seen as indirectly benefiting learners through calmer interactions, better decision-making and more emotionally regulated adults in the classroom.

While interviewees did not identify any distinct impacts of the sixth INSET day on learners, they consistently emphasised that the additional time helps to strengthen the conditions for improving learner outcomes. Activities with clearer pedagogical or learner-centred benefits, such as curriculum development, behaviour and communication approaches, or inclusive classroom practice, are more feasible because of the sixth day. Similarly, leaders in special schools emphasised that the sixth day provides the space needed to embed consistent communication, behaviour and sensory-support approaches across large staff teams, which they saw as central to creating calmer, more predictable learning environments for learners.

3.8. Views on the need for the sixth INSET day

In addition to enquiring about the impacts of INSET, the research gathered views from participants on the value of and need for the additional sixth day. As part of the survey, practitioners were asked about their views on whether it enables professional learning to be better supported with most survey respondents (71%) suggesting that they either strongly agree (36%) or agree (35%) (Figure 3.8a).

Figure 3.8a Could you please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements? The additional sixth INSET day enables professional learning to be better supported.

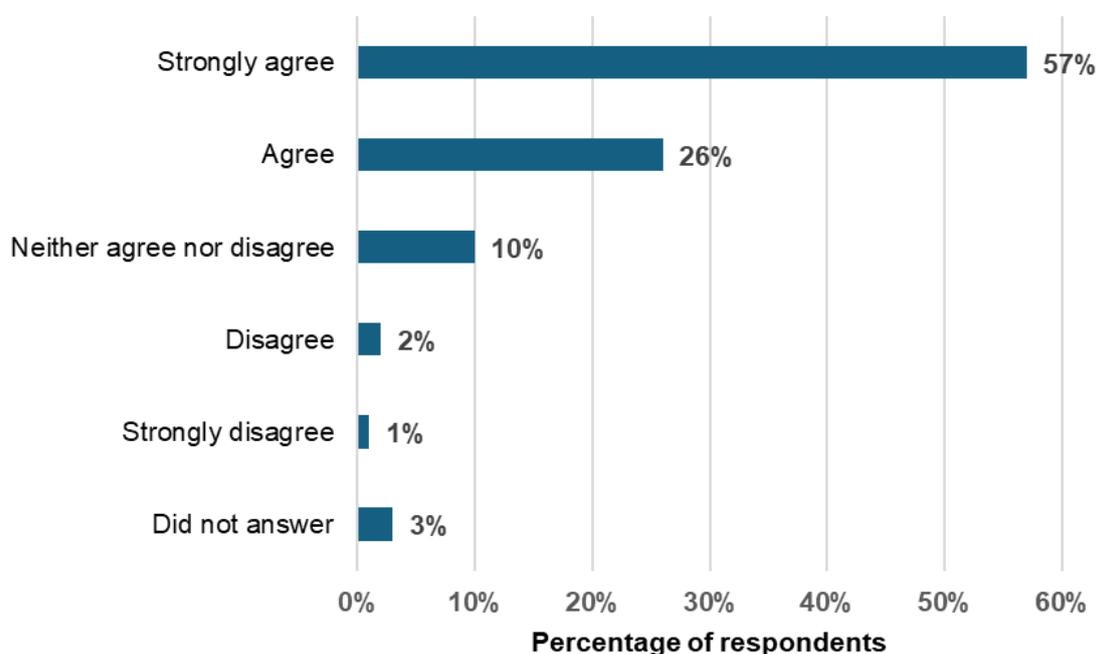


Source Online survey of professionals n=561

Description of Figure 3.8a: A bar chart showing the extent to which respondents agree with the statement that the additional sixth INSET day enables professional learning to be supported. The more common answer is strongly agree at 36% and agree at 35%.

The survey also explored views on the continuation of the sixth INSET day in future. Again, an overwhelming majority of responses (83%) express support for the sixth day, with 57% strongly agreeing and 26% agreeing that it should continue (see Figure 3.8b).

Figure 3.8b Could you please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements? I support the continued provision of the additional sixth day of INSET



Source Online survey of professionals n=561

Description of Figure 3.8b: A bar chart showing the extent to which respondents agree with the continued provision of the additional sixth INSET day. The more common answers are strongly agree at 57% and agree at 26%. Only 3% say they disagree or strongly disagree.

Evidence from interviews also shows near-unanimous support among practitioners for retaining the sixth INSET day. Leaders across all school types described it as essential for managing overall training requirements and enabling meaningful professional learning.

Special schools expressed the strongest need for the sixth day, emphasising that their additional training demands exceed what can reasonably be covered within 5 days. Leaders listed substantial areas of required training such as medical procedures, communication systems, behaviour support, and safeguarding that already take up most of their INSET time. Without the sixth day, they explained, little or no capacity would remain for curriculum planning, developmental learning, or work linked to ALN reforms and pupil wellbeing. Several felt that the additional training requirements on their school warrants more than 6 INSET days due to the breadth of essential training required to maintain safe and effective provision and the challenges in releasing staff for professional learning during school time.

Mainstream schools were also clear that the sixth INSET day is critical for enabling them to manage what is perceived as mandatory training requirements without displacing delivery of national government priorities that continue to grow. Leaders highlighted the need for ongoing curriculum development and iteration, noting that staff need the additional protected time to understand expectations, explore new specifications, interpret materials, align approaches within clusters, and plan for progression. They stressed that losing the

sixth INSET day would reduce the time available for meeting these priorities and would increase pressure on staff already operating within tight time constraints.

To inform a decision on whether the additional INSET day should continue, further evidence would be needed on its specific contribution to practitioner and learner outcomes. Interviews indicated that schools rarely measure the impacts of INSET, either in relation to the 5 days or the additional sixth day. Open text survey responses reinforce this, describing the impact of INSET as difficult to measure and often obscured by the complexity in attribution due to other relevant factors. More robust evidence could therefore include systematic evaluation of how the sixth day is used across different school types, and clearer tracking of changes in teaching practice or staff workload attributable to the extra time. Gathering comparative data from schools that use the sixth day in different ways, or from settings with varying training demands, would also help clarify whether, and under what conditions, the additional day provides benefits beyond those achieved through the standard 5 day INSET allocation.

3.9. Facilitators and barriers

Evidence from interviews, survey responses and case materials highlighted several facilitators and barriers to the effective use of INSET days.

In terms of facilitators, interviewees and survey respondents consistently described that INSET that is anchored in the SDP and informed by self-evaluation is more purposeful and coherent, with clear lines of sight to priorities. One respondent suggested “it’s important to link staff training with the priority areas of the school improvement plan [SDP],” while another spoke of the need for “strong self-evaluation processes, which ensure training is linked to important priorities of school and national priorities.” This is reflected in feedback from other leaders who reported using the SDP to select content and sequence activity over the year.

Where cluster arrangements are active and well organised, practitioners reported stronger consistency and more efficient use of time, including joint planning on shared priorities and moderation. Feedback from a senior leader interview also focused on the value of cluster INSET days to enable opportunities for “sharing resources and good practice” as well as “working collaboratively with colleagues.” Interviews with leaders similarly highlighted the value of work on progression and transition during cluster INSET days.

Schools that systematically use internal staff expertise described training as more relevant and sustainable, with cascade models and practitioner-led sessions helping to embed practice. One survey respondent suggested that “the most valuable INSET is usually researched, prepared and delivered by our own school staff,” and leaders described a deliberate “use [of] staff who’ve already accessed training to lead sessions themselves”. In several settings, internal leads in literacy, numeracy, ALN and behaviour develop tailored materials, exemplify strategies from recent classroom work and adapt content to the school’s phase, language medium and learner profile, which participants said strengthened practical application. Leaders linked staff-led models of training to higher engagement, explaining that credibility, contextual knowledge and the opportunity to see approaches

modelled by peers made participation feel purposeful and immediately transferable to classroom routines. Special schools also highlighted the value of accredited in-house trainers for behaviour support and clinical procedures, noting that consistent delivery by trusted staff increases confidence and ensures compliance at scale.

Forward planning was widely identified as a practical facilitator or enabler, with schools that set their INSET calendar for the forthcoming year in the previous summer term and coordinate cluster-wide dates with the local authority reporting fewer scheduling conflicts, easier booking of external providers and clearer expectations for staff. Leaders spoke of the benefit of planning to ensure predictable patterns across the year to support coherence, for example anchoring full days at the start of the autumn term for important updates and pedagogy, reserving a mid-term or pre-half term day for cluster work, and positioning another day later in the year for review and planning. It was also used effectively to align childcare and staffing logistics by synchronising dates with neighbouring schools, which reduced difficulties for staff with caring responsibilities.

The sixth day was also identified as an important facilitator for effective INSET. In amidst the range of other required training, it provides valuable protected time that would otherwise be displaced by required safeguarding, health and safety and clinical training, enabling schools to focus on CfW planning, GCSE specification preparation and cross-phase progression work. Schools also reported that the sixth day supports inclusion by enabling support staff to participate in core training and whole-school activity. Several clusters align the sixth day across phases to host joint moderation, agree common approaches and reduce duplication, which leaders said strengthens curriculum continuity.

In terms of barriers, leaders and practitioners reported that day to day workload restricts the time available to scope, sequence and resource INSET. Survey comments described “precious little time” to plan INSET and noted having to “do everything at home”, highlighting reliance on out of hours preparation. Respondents asked for protected planning windows and release time to “focus on the planning and resourcing of the [INSET] day” adding “you can’t answer the phones and plan INSET”. This constraint was presented as a recurring barrier to designing coherent agendas and building in implementation steps.

Another commonly highlighted barrier is the volume of required safeguarding, health and safety and other essential training that was said to lessen the time available for SDP priorities within INSET. This was reported across some mainstream and most special schools. Special schools described large commitments, with one head explaining that Team Teach alone accounts for “2 days” and that medical and manual handling requirements take “another 2 days.” Leaders in these contexts noted that the accumulation of behaviour, clinical and medical updates leave limited scope for curriculum or pedagogy.

Participation by TAs was reported to vary where attendance falls outside contracted hours or where payment cannot be guaranteed in advance, with leaders noting that part time working patterns and 38-week contracts make it more difficult for TAs to attend INSET scheduled on days not included within their contracted working pattern. A small number of leaders described financial mitigation measures, such as “offer[ing] to cover the cost so they can attend”. One school leader identified a factor that facilitates or enables effective planning and delivery of INSET as “knowing way in advance that we will have a budget to

pay TAs to come in” whilst a TA who responded to the survey requested early notice so childcare and other responsibilities can be arranged. Even where leaders offer mop-up or twilight alternatives, participation remains uneven when attendance is voluntary or unpaid, and schools reported challenges securing consistent coverage of INSET content for support staff whose contracted hours do not include these sessions.

Survey respondents pointed to constrained budgets and variable availability of external specialist input as barriers. Some typical survey feedback included that “underfunding has significant implications for resources” with there being a need for “time and the finance to engage relevant external expertise”. In interviews, school leaders reported that specialists can be expensive once travel and accommodation costs are included, with one special school explaining that suitable providers are often sourced in England and that costs are only partly offset when the local authority contributes, which also requires opening spaces to other centres. Several schools highlighted gaps in access to Welsh medium trainers and specialist ALN expertise. Where budgets were tight, schools relied more heavily on internal delivery or sharing costs through cluster commissioning, yet availability remained a constraint because “provider availability is extremely limited, they can’t be in every school at the same time”. Uncertainty about funding for cover and release time also limited the ability to plan or attend external INSET training within school clusters.

Schools reported clashes and reduced flexibility when schedules for some INSET days are determined externally (i.e.: by local authorities or qualification bodies to deliver specific training) or according to convention (e.g.: first and last day of the school year). One secondary head commenting on qualification reform activity noted that “the date is set and the content comes from WJEC, so we have no flexibility.” Leaders added that many providers are also sought on the same small number of nationally popular INSET dates such as the first and last days of the academic year, or just before or after term breaks, which concentrates demand and reduces choice, and that late confirmations or cancellations by partners can force the need for rapid replanning. Coordinating calendars for this activity across multiple schools and phases was also described as difficult, especially where clusters span several settings and where travel time or distance limits the feasibility of joint sessions on the same day. In response, some schools moved sessions into twilight blocks or late term days that staff regard as less productive, while others asked for earlier notice and clearer certainty about the timing of the sixth day to reduce clashes and improve provider availability.

The same barriers discussed above also apply to the additional day, particularly in cases when sixth day activity is tied to externally scheduled qualification reform sessions. Schools reported limited flexibility to deliver whole school professional learning linked to national priorities to all school staff given that only some departments attend these sessions and dates are fixed by WJEC.

3.10. Support from the Welsh Government

Senior leaders reported feeling pressure to cover numerous WG priorities within the current number of INSET days. Many suggested that the WG could help by clarifying in a more strategic and coherent manner which priorities are most important to cover, “recognising that schools are complex environments and cannot deliver everything at once”. It is felt that this would help schools to prioritise INSET content effectively and plan with greater confidence.

Schools also reported that earlier guidance around annual priority themes would help them align INSET with national aims while preserving local flexibility. Leaders asked for short, practical summaries of the year’s focus areas, issued far enough in advance to secure providers, coordinate clusters and map follow-up into SDPs. They linked early notice to better scheduling and fewer clashes, and to greater confidence that they are prioritising the right areas.

Senior leaders expressed a clear willingness to support national priorities but suggested that competing pressures on INSET time meant the sixth day was often absorbed by required activity or externally scheduled sessions, limiting space for whole-school development on national themes. Many schools also described uncertainty about what the sixth day should focus on in years when other demands increase and requested confirmation of its continuation to help secure providers and coordinate clusters. In interviews, school leaders asked for the WG to provide more deliberate guidance on the intended use of the sixth day, including clearer expectations about the balance between national and local priorities, example agendas that illustrate effective use, and clarity on whether the day should be delivered as a single day or as twilights.

Stakeholders also requested that the WG provide concise planning templates that help schools link the sixth day to their wider professional learning programme, with space to map purpose, intended outcomes, follow up and evidence of impact, without adding paperwork. Templates and short exemplars could model how the sixth day supports long-term work on curriculum, ALN or Welsh language development, including options for whole-school activity, differentiated sessions and phased implementation through twilights.

A couple of education unions suggested reviewing the training that schools are required to complete and adapting or reducing it where possible, while also urging the WG to protect schools’ freedom to tailor INSET to local needs. School leaders also suggested creating flexibility around where required content sits, for example modular safeguarding and e-learning blocks, or allocating a single local authority-wide day for essential updates so that the sixth day can retain a focus on development relating to curriculum, assessment, ALN and collaboration. It was suggested that the WG could support this by signalling that required updates can be scheduled outside the 6 days where appropriate and by separating compliance from developmental time, with local authorities coordinating shared modules to reduce duplication. Any changes should be framed as guidance – as is the case now – rather than prescription so that schools can align INSET with their SDPs and local context.

Workforce unions and school leaders emphasised a need for the WG to set clearer expectations that INSET should be inclusive of all staff groups, including TAs and other support staff, so that school-wide approaches can be embedded consistently. They highlighted the need for guidance that encourages employers (local authorities) to plan and fund participation for support staff, to budget early for paid attendance where required, and to adopt flexible delivery models such as differentiated sessions, mop-up options and accessible timings. Survey responses stressed the importance of “knowing way in advance that we will have a budget to pay TAs to come in.” It was suggested by one survey respondent that WG could promote inclusive design principles, encouraging reporting on participation by role in light touch self-evaluation, and providing ready to use materials tailored to support staff roles.

Collaboration also featured strongly in the interviews with senior leaders in relation to the role of the WG. Schools found it difficult to organise meaningful collaborative activity without external coordination, particularly where staffing or geography created barriers. Leaders noted that the WG could encourage alignment with national priorities by facilitating collaborative opportunities through shared materials or coordinated training windows. Other bodies such as local authorities could support through organising cluster-level sessions.

Stakeholders suggested that the WG could strengthen support by making it easier for schools to see what effective INSET in relation to much of the above looks like elsewhere and to learn from it. Practical steps included publishing concise case studies from different contexts, curating ready-to-use resources that exemplify effective approaches, and encouraging proportionate evaluation so impact insights can be captured and subsequently shared. Leaders also asked for clearer access points to existing networks and materials, including local authority hubs, subject networks and collaborative clusters, and bilingual content and specialist ALN resources. Interviewees noted that these centrally provided materials and shared models would help reduce duplication and aligning of practice while preserving tailoring to local context. .

Schools also explained that resource limitations hinder their ability to embed national priorities with difficulties in accessing external expertise, especially Welsh-medium training or specialist ALN provision, being common. In light of this, leaders suggested that the WG could play a supportive role by sharing high-quality, bilingual, ready-to-use training materials aligned to these national priorities. Although not mentioned in any interviews, this, and much of the provisions discussed in this section, could come under the remit of [Dysgu](#), the newly established national professional learning and leadership body for maintained schools and settings in Wales. Survey responses also cited Hwb as an important resource centre for professional learning, for example “Digital resources and Hwb... help bridge the gap.”

Finally, schools noted that embedding national priorities requires recognition of the distinct contexts in which they operate. Special schools and Welsh-medium schools expressed specific challenges, including the scale of training required, the complexity of learners' needs, and recruitment issues affecting access to Welsh language expertise. The WG could acknowledge these differences more explicitly and offer differentiated support that reflects the needs of differing school contexts. There is also a role for Estyn, which has insight into what effective professional learning looks like through its inspection activity. Stakeholders

suggested that Estyn could support suitable INSET provision by sharing evidence of effective INSET practice, setting clear expectations and contributing to greater consistency and quality assurance of INSET provision.

4. Conclusions

This chapter draws together the main findings from the research into the planning, use and perceived impact of INSET days in Wales. The study examined how INSET days were planned and used across different school settings, the extent to which they aligned with national priorities, and how they were perceived to support practitioners, schools and learners. It also explored factors that facilitated or constrained effective use of INSET, alongside views on the role and value of the sixth INSET day. The conclusions presented below reflect evidence gathered from qualitative fieldwork and a practitioner survey.

The use and planning of INSET days

The survey responses indicate that most schools reported using a combination of full INSET days and twilight sessions. A smaller proportion delivered their full entitlement as full days only, and very few relied exclusively on twilight sessions.

Full days were described as supporting intensive training, whole-school coherence, uninterrupted curriculum planning and collaborative activity. Twilight sessions were used to distribute professional learning across the year to maximise productive time and to accommodate part-time staff. Challenges associated with twilight use included variable attendance, fatigue at the end of the school day and reduced opportunities for sustained collaborative planning.

In the 2025 to 2026 academic year, INSET content was predominantly focused on curriculum design and AoLE, safeguarding, ALN and IDP inclusion and cluster collaboration.

The additional sixth INSET day was also used in similar ways to the core five days. In many schools, it was described as enabling curriculum reform work, ALN development or completion of perceived mandatory updates without displacing wider school level improvement priorities.

Many schools reported allocating at least the equivalent of one full day to what were widely perceived as mandatory training requirements. Although the WG does not mandate any specific INSET content, leaders frequently referred to safeguarding, health and safety and related compliance requirements as non-negotiable due to local authority expectations.

The evidence indicates that schools adopt a flexible and largely autonomous approach to using and planning their INSET days. Decisions about content were shaped primarily by priorities set out in SDPs, alongside consideration of WG priorities and local authority expectations, with special schools reporting that additional behaviour, medical and manual handling training requirements play a further role. Staff feedback, self-evaluation and professional review discussions are also used to identify strengths and gaps in practice.

While schools that participated in fieldwork did not reference the National Approach to Professional Learning (NAPL) directly, planning processes described by leaders reflected its principles, including use of internal expertise, collaborative enquiry and alignment with identified school needs.

Alignment with national priorities and policy goals

Evidence across settings shows that many schools take WG priorities into account when planning INSET days. Alignment was most commonly achieved through integration within SDPs rather than through standalone sessions explicitly labelled as national priorities.

CfW remains central to INSET planning with a majority suggesting it is an important priority. Senior leaders reported dedicating substantial time to curriculum design, pedagogy, progression and qualification reform while those in secondary schools in particular highlighted work linked to new GCSE specifications.

ALN reforms were also reported to influence INSET planning, especially in special schools. Schools described using INSET to develop understanding of IDPs, assessment approaches, communication strategies and differentiation.

Equity-related themes, including behaviour, wellbeing, attendance and trauma-informed practice, are incorporated into INSET provision in many schools. In some cases, schools report that they bring in external expert speakers, often during cluster days to better recognise barriers faced by learners and adjust their practice accordingly.

Support for Cymraeg 2050 through INSET varied between settings. Welsh-medium schools reported more structured use of INSET to strengthen language development and cultural identity, while English-medium schools described more limited coverage.

However, leaders across settings, and particularly in special schools, noted the breadth of national expectations, combined with the volume of perceived mandatory training, limited the extent to which these priorities could be addressed in-depth within the available INSET time.

The sixth INSET day was described as increasing capacity to address national reform priorities, though in some secondary settings its use was constrained by externally scheduled WJEC qualification reform training. Elsewhere, schools reported more flexible use of the sixth INSET day, including cluster collaboration on CfW. Special school leaders described the additional day as particularly important in maintaining time for curriculum and ALN work alongside higher volumes of required training.

Inclusion and access for all staff groups

All schools aimed to include TAs in INSET, with many stating they have a strong commitment to ensuring that all teaching staff are involved. Survey evidence also indicated high reported attendance among TAs with nearly all indicating that they attend INSET.

However, there is variation in how far INSET content was tailored to TA roles as well as challenges in ensuring this can be done. Where sessions were perceived as more teacher-focused, it was reported that TAs may feel less engaged. The participation of TAs can also be affected where INSET time is not included within TA contracts, or where childcare responsibilities make attendance more difficult.

There was also variation in the extent to which the development priorities of other individual practitioners' informed INSET planning. In some schools, professional development review processes and staff feedback shaped content. In others, planning was driven primarily by SDP priorities, with individual development needs addressed outside INSET time. Where training is not as relevant to their role and needs it was also linked to reduced engagement.

Collaboration and cluster working

INSET is predominantly used for the purpose of internal collaboration within school settings, including for moderation, departmental planning and joint curriculum development and this was commonly described as an integral part of INSET provision. Some drew on internal expertise to lead training, and a small number brought in targeted external input where specialist knowledge was required.

In areas with established cluster networks, it is common for one day to be reserved specifically for collaboration activities with other schools. In these instances, senior leaders reported using INSET days for cross-school curriculum planning and alignment, pedagogy and assessment through shared professional learning.

Where cluster working is less developed, collaboration tends to be more limited and shaped by practical constraints such as capacity, leadership stability, and the ability to align priorities across schools. The activity is often targeted or episodic, focusing on specific priorities, staff groups, or coordination where feasible.

Some schools noted challenges in implementing cluster based-INSET. which include difficulty in agreeing shared priorities for the day, timing constraints, limited knowledge of what other schools are doing well, difficulties releasing teachers to visit other schools, turnover of senior leaders, and administrative workload.

Use of the sixth INSET day for cluster collaboration was limited and mainly occurred where cluster networks were established. In these cases, it supported joint curriculum planning and progression work across phases. Elsewhere, it was used for school-level priorities.

Governance and communication

Senior leaders described a range of approaches to communicating INSET activity to governing bodies, including formal reporting mechanisms. Governors were often invited to attend relevant INSET sessions, particularly those linked to safeguarding or strategic priorities, though attendance was reported to be limited. Views on the effectiveness of communication with governors were mixed, with some leaders describing reporting processes as procedural. A small number also noted challenges in engaging governors in curriculum related discussions where up to date subject knowledge was required.

Communication beyond governing bodies also presents challenges. Schools reported pressures associated with communicating INSET arrangements to parents, particularly where the dates of INSET days changed after publication or at relatively short notice.

Engagement with local authorities was described as minimal or inconsistent, with some schools reporting limited or unclear communication regarding INSET planning. In contrast,

local authority representatives described more regular communication with schools on professional learning priorities, including safeguarding, ALN reform and curriculum development, suggesting some misalignment between local authority perceptions of involvement and schools' experience of INSET planning.

Impact on practitioners and schools

INSET days were generally perceived to have a positive impact on practitioners. The survey indicated that a clear majority of practitioners believe that INSET has had a positive impact to both their professional knowledge and development and their classroom practice.

Impacts were reported to be strongest where sessions are clearly linked to practice and reinforced through follow-up activity. Where INSET was perceived as overly generic or insufficiently relevant, respondents described more limited impact.

Survey findings also indicate wellbeing-related impacts for some practitioners. Some reported increased confidence and reduced stress where INSET provided clear guidance and practical support, while others valued full-day sessions for reflection and discussion.

The findings show that INSET activity can also contribute to school development by providing vital structured opportunities to ensure shared understanding of school priorities among staff and staff groups. They improve awareness and understanding of the SDP helping staff to see how it translates to the classroom and ensuring all staff receive consistent messages about inspection recommendations.

INSET was described as most effective in supporting school development where it was high quality, clearly linked to school priorities and reinforced through follow-up activity.

The sixth INSET day was not associated with distinctly different impacts but was widely described as strengthening schools' capacity to realise the benefits typically associated with INSET by providing additional protected time for professional development.

Impact on learners and wider outcomes

Overall, survey responses and evidence from interviews indicated that INSET is perceived by leaders and practitioners to contribute positively to learner outcomes. Schools reported assessing and observing impact through monitoring processes such as progress data, behaviour logs, attendance, observations of engagement and practitioner reflection rather than dedicated evaluation systems. However, these impacts were described as indirect and difficult to isolate from the influence of other relevant factors.

Impacts on learners are expected to occur following changes in practitioners' knowledge and practice. The findings show that there is evidence of improved quality of teaching, strengthened curriculum coherence, consistency across staff roles, and increased staff confidence all of which were considered as important pathways through which INSET supports learners and can help to improve their outcomes.

The sixth INSET day was not linked to any additional impacts with senior leaders also highlighting the challenge of evidencing its contribution. However, it was described as enabling schools to sustain improvements in learner-focused professional learning.

Views on the need for the sixth INSET day

There was strong support for the continuation of the sixth INSET day. A majority believe that it enables better support for professional learning and say that they support its retention.

Leaders across settings described the sixth day as essential in managing perceived mandatory training requirements while preserving time for curriculum planning and other priorities.

Respondents indicated that removal of the sixth day would reduce capacity to address WG priorities within protected professional learning time and would constrain planning for ongoing curriculum reform, increasing pressure on staff operating with tight time constraints.

Facilitators and barriers

Facilitators for the effective use of INSET include alignment with SDPs and quality assurance cycles, opportunities for collaboration within clusters and across phases, effective use of internal expertise, early preparation and strategic planning and sequencing across the year, and the additional protected time created by the sixth day.

Barriers to effective use included workload pressures and limited planning time, the volume of perceived mandatory training, lack of funding and access to external expertise, uneven inclusion of support staff due to contractual arrangements, and scheduling or coordination challenges linked to national events and provider availability.

Support from the Welsh Government

There was feedback from participants in relation to support that the WG could provide ranging from clearer articulation of intended purpose of the sixth day and national priorities and earlier communication of expectations, to the promotion of inclusive design principles and provision of guidance and high-quality training materials that enable more effective use of INSET time particularly where specialist expertise is limited.

There was also recognition of a role for Estyn by sharing evidence of effective professional learning practice and supporting greater consistency in expectations.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations draw on evidence gathered through this research and are intended to inform future policy and practice relating to INSET provision.

There remains strong support for the continuation of the sixth INSET day.

1. WG should retain the sixth INSET day as protected professional learning time

The research highlights variation in how the sixth INSET day is used, shaped by local circumstances, training demands and external factors. While schools value the additional time, uncertainty about its intended focus can limit its potential impact.

2. WG should provide greater clarity about the intended purpose of the sixth day, alongside illustrative examples of effective use to support more consistent and effective use across settings while allowing flexibility in delivery.

Evidence from across settings indicates that schools face significant pressure in balancing what they consider to be mandatory training requirements with time for developmental professional learning. This has implications for the extent to which national priorities can be addressed in depth through the current number of INSET days.

3. WG should provide clearer national expectations for INSET, with earlier communication of priority themes within the annual planning cycle.

Variation was observed in access to INSET for different staff groups, particularly support staff. While many schools aim to include all staff, engagement is shaped by local employment arrangements and delivery models.

4. Local authorities and schools could review how INSET planning and delivery can support inclusive participation, particularly for support staff, taking account of contractual arrangements and local workforce contexts.

Collaboration across schools was widely viewed as beneficial, but difficult to sustain without coordination and practical support. Evidence in this research suggests that where cluster-based activity is well organised, it supports shared learning and alignment with national priorities.

5. WG, working with local authorities, should support the conditions that enable cluster-level collaboration, including through coordinated training windows, sharing resources or regional activity.
6. Local authorities could play a stronger coordinating role in supporting collaboration and helping schools to interpret and apply national expectations within local contexts.

Insufficient access to high-quality professional learning resources was identified as a constraint, particularly where specialist or Welsh-medium provision is required. Schools reported challenges in sourcing suitable external expertise and materials aligned to national priorities.

7. Dysgu could curate and signpost high-quality, bilingual, ready-to-use professional learning materials linked to national priorities for use across different school contexts and staff roles and could include structured activities, case studies, videos and facilitation guidance to support flexible use within schools.

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of INSET is closely linked to quality of planning, relevance to practitioner roles and opportunities for follow-up.

8. WG could support schools to strengthen alignment between INSET, SDPs and ongoing professional learning cycles, for example through light-touch planning templates or illustrative examples.

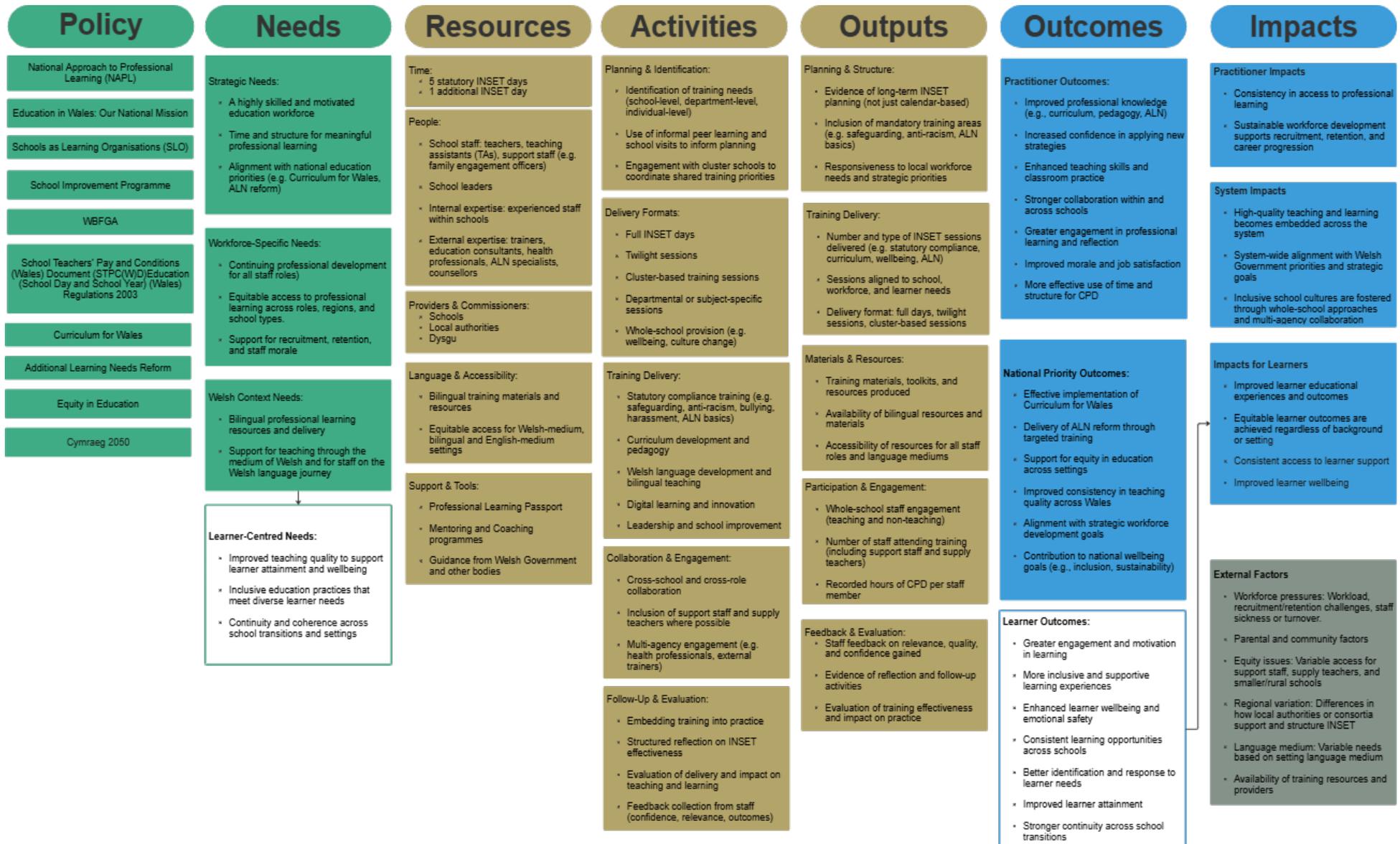
There is also scope for WG to support schools in articulating and demonstrating the impact of INSET more clearly, particularly in relation to the sixth INSET day.

9. WG could develop or commission proportionate, light-touch approaches to support schools to articulate and demonstrate the impact of INSET on professional practice and school development.

Finally, the research highlights the value of greater system-level transparency and shared learning about effective INSET practice.

10. Estyn, alongside WG and other system partners, could support system wide learning by sharing evidence of effective professional learning approaches identified through inspection and engagement activity.

Annex A: INSET days Logic Model



Annex B: Research questions

How do schools timetable their INSET entitlement?

How are INSET days used by schools and what content is covered?

How many INSET days are used by schools to cover mandatory training?

How is content of INSET days planned? Does the professional learning delivered align with the design principles of the National approach to professional learning?

Are Welsh Government priorities taken into consideration when planning content?

Are there any requirements on the use of INSET days set by local authorities?

Are INSET days effective in supporting practitioners to deliver the important Welsh Government priorities (Curriculum for Wales, ALN reforms, equity etc)?

Do schools use INSET time to support the aims of Cymraeg 2050 and/or to develop a vision for the language within their school and how effective has this been?

Do schools include teaching assistants in INSET days? If so, how?

Are schools using INSET days to work collaboratively?

How are INSET days used by schools to support collaboration and cluster working?

How is INSET activity reported to governing bodies and are they able to attend?

What impacts do INSET days have on practitioners' knowledge and practice?

What impacts do INSET days have on practitioner wellbeing?

Are there any other impacts of INSET days on education practitioners?

What impacts do INSET days have on school development?

What is the impact of INSET days on learner outcomes?

What views do practitioners have on the continuation of the additional INSET day?

If the additional INSET day were to cease, what would be the effect upon practitioners and their support ability to deliver the important Welsh Government priorities?

Are there any facilitating factors / barriers to the effective use of INSET days?

Are there any facilitating factors / barriers to the effective use of sixth INSET day?

In what ways could Welsh Government provide guidance and support to help schools ensure that INSET provision is made more suitable, sufficient and effective?

How could Welsh Government encourage schools to embed priorities?

Annex C: INSET day use – school case studies

Ysgol Y Deri

School type: Special school

Local authority: Vale of Glamorgan

Language medium: English

Number of learners: approximately 600

FSM eligibility: 38%

Ysgol Y Deri is a large special school in the Vale of Glamorgan, supporting learners with a wide range of additional learning needs. The scale and complexity of the school require INSET provision that meets the professional learning needs of staff across all levels.

INSET days are scheduled across the academic year using a mix of full days, cluster INSET days and twilight sessions. One INSET day at the end of the summer term supports pupil transition, classroom moves and preparation for the next academic year, reflecting the high level of annual pupil movement and the need to match classes to specialist spaces.

The content of INSET days strikes a balance between school priorities and national policy. Core themes include Curriculum for Wales and pedagogy, safeguarding, positive behaviour management, staff wellbeing, and mandatory training linked to pupils' medical and physical needs, such as manual handling, feeding, medication and epilepsy awareness. INSET time is also used to support appraisals and role-specific professional learning for support staff.

The whole-school "Sensory Smart day" was highlighted as a particularly effective example of INSET provision. This training refreshed existing knowledge for experienced staff and introduced new approaches for others, equipping teachers with practical tools to assess sensory needs and plan appropriate support. Leaders reported that this supported more consistent classroom practice and contributed positively to pupil engagement and readiness for learning.

INSET provision typically combines whole-staff sessions with targeted training for specific staff groups, for example, teaching assistants or subject departments. Leaders noted the challenge of ensuring meaningful professional learning for a workforce of over 400 staff, particularly in the context of ongoing expansion. INSET days are complemented by regular micro-training sessions, weekly teacher INSET and structured induction programmes.

The school's approach to balancing whole-school training with targeted professional development was identified as an important strength. Planned improvements include strengthening processes for capturing staff feedback following INSET activities and continuing to refine planning to maximise the impact of available INSET time.

Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi

School type: Secondary school

Local authority: Ynys Môn

Language medium: Bilingual

Number of learners: approximately 850

FSM eligibility: 24%

Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi is a secondary school on Anglesey serving around 850 learners. The focus, timing and purpose of its INSET provision have been shaped by a strong focus on responding to Estyn recommendations following inspection, with an emphasis on embedding the SDP consistently across the school.

INSET days are scheduled across the academic year using a combination of full days and twilight sessions. Two INSET days at the start of the autumn term are used to set expectations and deliver initial training to support improvement priorities. Spring term sessions support collaboration with primary and secondary schools across the local authority, particularly around shared priorities such as reading skills and phonics, and provide time for departments to respond to evaluative feedback. A further INSET day in the summer term is used to review progress and shape priorities for the following academic year.

INSET provision has focused primarily on teaching and learning, literacy and numeracy, and improving reading skills, with particular attention to progression from Years 5 and 6 into Years 7 and 8. Themes covered in 2024 to 2025 included safeguarding, higher-order reading skills, pedagogy and effective questioning, assessment for learning, wellbeing and trauma-informed practice, evaluation and accountability, and oracy development. These priorities were determined through Estyn recommendations, national policy expectations and internal self-evaluation processes.

The “Success Criteria to Impact” programme was highlighted as a particularly effective INSET activity. Delivered through a menu-based approach co-designed with Heads of Department, staff selected sessions most relevant to their role and departmental priorities. Dedicated time enabled departments to apply learning immediately and share materials, supporting greater consistency in expectations, clearer learning goals and more purposeful feedback linked to pupil progress.

An important strength of the school’s INSET approach is its culture of cross-school collaboration across Anglesey secondary schools. Trusted relationships support joint professional development, shared evaluation and peer challenge. Planned developments include extending Estyn-style evaluation and feedback training for middle leaders and creating further opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration to strengthen leadership capacity and support sustainable improvement.

Glyncollen Primary School

School type: Primary school

Local authority: City and County of Swansea

Language medium: English

Number of learners: approximately 180

FSM eligibility: 11%

Glyncollen Primary School is a small English-medium primary school in Swansea serving around 180 learners. INSET provision is closely aligned with the school's SDP and has been shaped by self-evaluation and recommendations following an Estyn inspection in June 2024.

INSET days are delivered through a flexible combination of full days and twilight sessions across the academic year. Three full days are scheduled at the start or end of term, with one additional full day during term time. Twilight sessions are used to provide the equivalent of two further INSET days. Decisions about timing and format are influenced by staff workload considerations, school improvement priorities and the availability of external providers.

Curriculum for Wales underpins all INSET provision, with a strong focus on pedagogy and assessment. Important themes in 2024 to 2025 included outdoor learning, developing learner independence, maths pedagogy, principles of progression and assessment, digital learning, and the sharing of effective classroom practice. These priorities were informed by internal self-evaluation, Estyn recommendations, participation in Welsh Government national network conversations, and cluster-level discussions led by senior and ALN staff.

Utilising twilight sessions on a series of maths pedagogy provision was noted as a particularly effective example of INSET provision. Delivered over two sessions, this approach enabled staff to trial strategies in their classrooms between sessions, reflect on practice and return with further questions. Staff worked collaboratively to develop maths working walls, share resources and support one another in implementing changes. It was reported that this resulted in greater consistency across the school and improved pupil attitudes towards maths, with learners able to articulate how classroom resources and adult support helped their learning.

INSET provision includes all staff groups, with teachers, teaching assistants, administrative staff and senior leaders participating together in most sessions. Staff are encouraged to lead and share learning, with opportunities for role-specific or targeted sessions where appropriate. Leaders identified flexibility, attention to staff wellbeing and the use of twilight sessions to support implementation and reflection as important strengths. Planned developments include continuing to balance full days and twilights, enabling staff to visit other settings as part of their professional learning, and maintaining access to external expertise without additional supply costs.

Ysgol John Bright

School type: Secondary school

Local authority: Conwy

Language medium: Bilingual

Number of learners: approximately 1,100

FSM eligibility: 18%

Ysgol John Bright is a large secondary school in Conwy serving around 1,100 learners. INSET provision is aligned with the school development plan and shaped by internal quality assurance processes, feedback from middle leaders and staff, and national priorities, including Estyn recommendations.

INSET days are scheduled flexibly across the academic year using a combination of full days and twilight sessions. Timing is aligned with the rhythm of the secondary school year, with early autumn sessions used to establish priorities and embed important training, and later days supporting curriculum evaluation and planning. Twilight INSET time is distributed by faculties to respond to subject-specific needs.

INSET provision in 2024 to 2025 focused on Curriculum for Wales, ALN reform, health and wellbeing (including the [KiVa](#) whole school approach to bullying prevention), behaviour management, literacy-focused marking and effective questioning. Priorities were identified through school development planning, quality assurance findings and middle leader feedback.

A menu-based INSET model, in which staff select from a range of targeted sessions, was highlighted as a particularly effective approach. Staff could select from a range of sessions focused on ALN, assessment, curriculum planning and teaching and learning strategies, enabling provision to be tailored to staff roles and needs. Leaders reported strong engagement, supported by the school's emphasis on sharing established effective practice based on internal expertise.

INSET provision includes teaching and support staff where relevant, with training aligned to roles and responsibilities. Important strengths included clarity around whole-school priorities and a move away from a one-size-fits-all model, with planned provision focused on strengthening cross-faculty working and targeted session choice.

Ysgol Heol Goffa

School type: Special school

Local authority: Carmarthenshire

Language medium: English

Number of learners: approximately 132

FSM eligibility: 48.5%

Ysgol Heol Goffa is a special school in Carmarthenshire supporting 132 learners with a wide range of additional learning needs. INSET provision is shaped by national and local priorities, alongside areas for development identified through the school's self-evaluation processes and school development plan.

INSET days are organised across the academic year using a combination of full days and twilight sessions. Three full INSET days are scheduled at the start or end of term, with two further days during term time. One INSET day is delivered through twilight sessions, used in place of a full day at the end of the summer term. Decisions about timing and format are influenced by local authority requirements, the availability of external trainers (including for Team Teach training), and the need to balance training intensity with staff workload. Twilight sessions are used to deliver shorter, focused training that can be consolidated within the working week.

The focus of INSET provision in 2024 to 25 included curriculum and pedagogy, assessment, ALN strategies, IDP writing, communication, and a range of mandatory training linked to pupils' health, medical and behavioural needs. This included positive handling, manual handling, Team Teach training, and health and medical procedures. Wellbeing was also a core theme, both in relation to staff and pupils. These priorities reflect both mandatory requirements alongside the specific demands of working in a special school context.

INSET provision includes teachers, teaching assistants, support staff and senior leaders, with training sometimes delivered jointly across the whole school and sometimes targeted to specific staff groups, such as new starters. The school also participates in joint INSET with other special schools in the region and occasionally includes staff from local mainstream schools where training content is relevant. This collaborative approach enables staff to benefit from a wider pool of expertise and experience across different specialist settings.

Two aspects of INSET provision were highlighted as particular strengths. Joint INSET with other special schools allows strengths and areas for development to be shared and enables staff to access specialist training hosted across different settings. In addition, a wellbeing-focused INSET day provided staff with practical strategies to support self-care and regulation, including approaches such as breathwork, yoga, mindful art and physical activity. This was intended to support staff wellbeing, attendance and resilience, with potential benefits for how staff engage with and support pupils.

Looking ahead, the school identified the challenge of accommodating the breadth of training requirements associated with special school provision, alongside curriculum and pedagogical development. There is a view that additional INSET time would better support the volume and complexity of required training.

Tonyrefail Community School

School type: All-through school

Local authority: Rhondda Cynon Taf

Language medium: English

Number of learners: approximately 1,800

FSM eligibility: 19%

Tonyrefail Community School is an all-through school in Rhondda Cynon Taf serving approximately 1,800 learners. INSET provision supports teaching and learning priorities across a large and diverse workforce and is planned around an annual professional learning cycle, alongside mandatory training requirements set by the local authority.

INSET days are delivered through a combination of full days and twilight sessions across the academic year. While most INSET days are positioned to support a coherent cycle of professional development, two are mandatory: one set by the local authority and one national qualifications training day led by WJEC. Twilight sessions are used to support performance development reviews and structured reflection points.

The focus of INSET provision in 2024 to 2025 centred on teaching and learning, pedagogy, curriculum development, assessment, behaviour and ALN. INSET days also supported planning and preparation for the academic year, safeguarding, and role-specific professional learning for non-classroom-based support staff. Priorities were determined through consultation between senior and middle leaders and in response to emerging staff and school-level development needs.

A particularly effective aspect of INSET provision was the use of collaborative visits to other schools and institutions, including further and higher education and industry settings. These visits supported professional learning and wellbeing by enabling staff to focus on personal, team and whole-school priorities while learning from practice beyond their own setting. Impact was reflected on through structured review questions focused on changes to practice and wider benefits to colleagues.

INSET provision is informed by a schools-as-learning-organisations (SLO) approach, supporting collaboration, professional reflection and continuous improvement. Teaching and learning workshops bring child-facing staff together in collaborative groups aligned to priority areas, with sessions delivered primarily by internal practitioners.

Important strengths of the school's INSET approach include its emphasis on collaboration, purposeful professional learning and inclusive participation across staff groups. It was noted that school-level decisions to introduce additional full-day safeguarding and attendance training may have implications for the time available for wider teaching and learning development, including opportunities for collaborative INSET visits with other institutions.

Buttington Trewern Community Primary School

School type: Primary school

Local authority: Powys

Language medium: English

Number of learners: approximately 135

FSM eligibility: 4%

Buttington Trewern Community Primary School is a small English-medium primary school in Powys serving around 135 learners, where INSET days are used to support professional learning and school improvement priorities.

All 6 INSET days are delivered as full days and are distributed across the academic year with a combination of school-based and cluster-level provision. One senior leader described a preference for full-day INSET, citing staff wellbeing, workload and effectiveness as important considerations. It was noted that twilight sessions following a full day of teaching were not felt to support high-quality professional learning and placed additional strain on staff, particularly those with caring responsibilities.

Cluster INSET days form an important part of the school's professional learning model and are typically followed by a school-based INSET day to enable staff to contextualise and embed learning. Leaders highlighted the value of aligning INSET days with half-term, allowing improvement priorities to be planned, implemented and reviewed in a structured way across the year.

The focus of recent INSET provision centred on the Curriculum for Wales, particularly curriculum design, progression and pedagogy within Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs). A number of INSET days focused on shared school development plan priorities, while cluster INSET supported collaborative working with neighbouring schools, including joint planning activities and the sharing of practice. Decisions about priorities were largely informed through cluster-level discussions in collaboration with the local authority professional learning team.

A particularly effective example of INSET provision was a jointly commissioned session on planning for progression, delivered by an external consultant and undertaken collaboratively with 2 other local schools. Leaders reported that this supported clearer shared understanding of progression and strengthened curriculum planning across settings. The school also noted the positive impact of the Curriculum Design Course undertaken by 2 teachers, which was viewed as having made a meaningful contribution to practice.

INSET provision includes teachers, teaching assistants and senior leaders, with the school using available budgets and professional learning funding to support teaching assistant attendance where possible. Inclusive INSET involving both teachers and teaching assistants was identified as a strength, supporting shared understanding and consistency of practice.

Looking ahead, the school identified wider challenges to the effective use of INSET days including competing statutory training demands, the volume of required e-learning, and

staffing capacity, with a view that greater Welsh Government coordination of CPD would support more effective use of INSET time.