An Exploration of All-Age Schools in Wales

FINAL Report 2022

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Contents

Executive Summary

- Community engagement is particularly strong in All-Age schools in Wales. This community-focused approach has been shown to be beneficial for learners, teachers, parents, carers, and stakeholders.

- Close working relationships with parents/carers, families, and support agencies (from early years/primary onwards) means that All-Age schools provide a continuity of pastoral care and academic support for learners throughout their schooling.

- All-Age schools routinely share information throughout a child's schooling, thus affording the opportunity for targeted professional support and specialist intervention at the point of need.

- All-Age schools tend to operate a distributed leadership model that spans the different stages and phases of schooling. This model of leadership is flexible and responsive to different organisational needs.

- Specific preparation and tailored development for those leading and teaching in an All-Age school in Wales remains relatively limited. This is an important area for future development and investment, particularly as the number of All-Age schools in Wales looks set to increase.

- A common ethos within an All-Age school provides a collective sense of purpose and direction for staff and pupils. A strong shared set of core values within an All-Age school offers a common pathway for the social, moral, and emotional development of pupils.

- All-Age schools offer a smooth transition between key phases or stages for learners who attend from Year 1 (or Nursery/Reception) through to Secondary. Familiarity with school, teachers, pedagogical practices, and other peers means that learners are less likely to feel the anxiety associated with a change in school setting and the presence of older children.

- The All-Age school model provides continuity of academic, social, and emotional support for learners that reduces the potential for performance dips at key transition points in schooling.

- All-Age schools are well placed to deliver the Curriculum for Wales as they already operate in a cross-phase way, integrating different pedagogical approaches and teaching across subject boundaries.

- Cross-phase teaching affords the sharing of facilities, resources, as well as teaching and learning strategies that directly benefit learners and learning. The regular co-planning and the sharing of good practice ensures that effective teaching practices are shared and deployed across key phases and stages of learning.

- The All-Age school model supports opportunities for innovation in pedagogical practices and in-house professional learning, drawing on the significant expertise available.

The findings from this study highlight that the All-Age school model in Wales has considerable advantages that extend far beyond cost-efficiencies. The empirical evidence suggests, that under the right conditions, the innovative use of cross-phase pedagogy can positively impact on learner outcomes.

There is also evidence to suggest that the continuity of advice, support and help for learners, made possible in an All-Age school setting, has a positive impact on learners' progression as well as their well-being and mental health. The fact that there is no transfer to a 'new school' means that learning is not disrupted, and learners can settle into daily patterns where both routines and staff are familiar.

Overall, the evidence suggests that All-Age schools in Wales offer learners and staff considerable advantages. The continuity of learning provided to learners is a considerable strength of All-Age schooling, along with the extensive subject and pedagogical expertise that exists within the school.

There is evidence of cross-phase teaching and innovation in pedagogical practice that directly emanates from the mix of subject and sector expertise in one school. For pupils, there are considerable benefits to being in an All-Age school in terms of their learning and the targeted provision of expertise across the ALN spectrum.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 All-Age schools were established in Wales in 2012 and currently, there are 25 All-Age schools currently in Wales. In addition, there are three new All-Age schools where Headteachers have been appointed, but the schools are yet to open. Each school has been established according to a unique set of drivers in response to the demographic, economic, linguistic, and geographical contexts in which they are located. All-Age schools reflect a range of structural and cultural features and influences; hence, All-Age schools vary across Wales.

1.2 All-Age schools in Wales provide a small yet significant proportion of the mainstream, statutory education for pupils from the age of 3 to 16 and, in some cases, 18 years of age. Around half of the All-Age schools in Wales are English medium schools, with the others being either Welsh-medium or bilingual. The number of All-Age Schools in Wales continues to rise, and there is a dedicated All-Age Forum that supports and connects these schools[1]. In their recent thematic review, Estyn note that this Forum brings-

'a worthwhile sense of belonging to a newly emerging, separate sector. Due to a lack of national guidance, this group has provided support for each other, brokered grants from external sources and worked to highlight the pitfalls and best practice'. (Estyn 2022:11)

1.3 The fact that the All-Age school model is relatively new to the education system in Wales, coupled with the growth of the sector, underlines the need for empirical investigation into the benefits, challenges, and effectiveness of All-Age schooling for key stakeholders. These stakeholders include the pupils, parents, and teachers, as well as the Welsh Government, the

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[1] https://allageschoolsforum.cymru/about-us/

inspectorate, local authorities, and the wider community within which these schools are placed.

1.4 In many countries, the idea of an All-Age school is unfamiliar, as schooling tends to follow the traditional division between primary/elementary schools and secondary/high schools. Yet, in some education systems, the notion of All-Age schooling is gaining momentum for a wide range of reasons, including greater cost efficiencies and the absence of distinct transition phases, which the evidence shows can be very disruptive for learners (Symonds 2015).

1.5 Being able to achieve greater cost effectiveness through the sharing of resources in a variety of ways is a perceived strength of an All-Age school. Undoubtedly, there are economies of scale that can be achieved through combining phases and resources, i.e. the provision of staff facilities, catering, repair and maintenance, health and safety. Much is dependent, however, on the number of sites across which the school is spread. In Wales, some All-Age schools have as many as six physical locations, all operating as one educational institution.

1.6 As noted already, All-Age or All-Through schools, as they are called in some education systems, combine primary and secondary stages of education and can also incorporate nursery and sixth forms within a single, overarching institution. In essence, this is one school comprising multiple phases of education overseen by one governing body and one leadership team.

1.7 An All-Age school often occupies a single site or will have joined its previously separate school campuses into one. An All-Age school can also provide opportunities to enhance all aspects of community development, both within and beyond the boundaries of the school. All-Age schooling is a model reflected most clearly in the international-schools sector, where combining phases is the established way of working.

1.8 The evidence on international schools concerns itself largely with describing and analysing the structures, processes and practices reflected within international schools. This research base, however, lacks a coherent, critical mass of robust empirical studies, which makes navigating the literature difficult. While some writers touch upon the leadership of international schools (Cravens 2018), the existing evidence base on this topic is neither extensive nor conclusive.

1.9 Outside the international-schools sector, this joined-up model of schooling has been adopted by many countries to different degrees. In Iceland, all schools operate on an All-Age basis, and in Spain, more All-Through schools are currently being established. An All-Age model of schooling is also reflected in England with All-Age Academies (Hodgson 2011), and increasingly, there are growing numbers of All-Age schools in Wales, which has prompted this research project.

1.10 The evidence about All-Age schools would suggest in such settings, teachers know pupils over a longer period, thus offering greater stability and more personalised learning opportunities. The evidence suggests that in All-Age schools, primary-age pupils have access to state-of-the-art specialist subject facilities used by secondary schools, e.g. science labs and sports halls. In addition, links with the community tend to be deeper because children stay in one school, so links with parents, families, carers and specialist agencies become very well established.

1.11 As already noted, the research base on All-Age schools is diverse and wide-ranging; hence evidence about the exact nature of the leadership practices within such schools remains patchy. There is quite literally an overwhelming number of research studies that focus on leaders either in primary or secondary schools, to various degrees, of varying quality, in different countries.

Yet studies of leadership in All-Age schools remain relatively sparse, and in general, contemporary research studies of All-Age schools remain relatively rare.

1.12 In England, for example, All-Age academies were researched more than a decade ago (Hodgson 2011). A study conducted in Bristol (Sutherland et al. 2010) involved six All-Age schools, and its sample investigated transition-related issues and the associated drop in academic performance. More recently, renewed interest in the All-Age model has led to more extensive research, including a focus on key aspects of All-Age work that relate to curriculum, pedagogy and practitioner liaison, deployment and development (Price 2020).

1.13 In Wales, as noted earlier, there are increasing numbers of All-Age schools being established and a national forum that helps schools that are starting this process. A recent thematic study by Estyn (2022:11) noted that:

'Despite support for the establishment of All-Age schools, there is no national guidance available for local authorities and school leaders. Therefore, local authorities have their own diverse plans to suit their unique circumstances. These are nearly always part of that authority's wider school organisation plans. Welsh Government guidance is usually separate for primary and secondary schools, which makes it difficult for All-Age schools to consider and navigate in order to establish their own position statements. As a result, the All-Age school sector is not currently recognised as a discrete sector well enough'.

1.14 In summary, the Estyn thematic study concluded that there is no common frame of reference to establish guidelines for leading and teaching in an All-Age school in Wales. This point underlines the importance of the existing collaborative school networks to assist institutions that aspire to become All-Age schools as well as to support those that have already achieved this status.

1.15 In their research work, Reynolds et al. (2018, 2) note that:

> "the increasing popularity of this approach to schooling in the Welsh context are manifold. A number of newly formed All-Age schools came into existence as a result of rationalisation, and as a by-product of the 21st century schools funding programme that has encouraged innovative approaches to schooling. However, it has soon become apparent that the consequences of joining traditionally separate phases of education reach way beyond an improved economic efficiency stemming from sharing of financial and human resources and may have numerous beneficial effects on various aspects of the school's day-to-day running, professional development of staff, and on the educational experience and outcomes of their pupils.'

1.16 Reynolds et al. (2018) concluded that the All-Age model of schooling in Wales required more research that could illuminate the opportunities, challenges and benefits of this form of schooling in Wales,

1.17 Given the increasing numbers of All-Age schools being established in Wales, it is, therefore, timely and important to look at this model of schooling, focusing specifically on leadership, teaching, learning and well-being along with the role of All-Age schools within the wider community and society.

1.18 Consequently, this report outlines the findings from a two-year development and research (D and R) study, funded by Welsh Government, that involved All-Age staff as key research partners in collaborative empirical enquiry.

2.0 The Project

2.1 The development and research project (D and R), funded by Welsh Government, was collaborative in design and initially involved staff from a cross-section of All-Age schools in Wales in joint enquiry and investigation. This project was planned to cover two years. Year 1 was intended to offer training to school staff to support their own enquires, and in Year 2, in-depth case-study work with schools was planned with researchers supporting the ongoing school-based development work. At the end of the first year (2019/2020), the training had been completed by the university staff[2] as planned, and the school-based enquiry projects were underway.

2.2 The emergence of COVID-19, however, meant that Year 2 was put on hold as schools and universities grappled with the net effects of the pandemic.

2.3.The school-based enquiry work in Year 1 of this project was also disrupted by COVID-19. The demands of the pandemic meant that teachers and senior leaders had to focus their time and energies elsewhere. Posters summarising the findings of the school-based work, however, were presented at the International Congress for School Effectiveness and School Improvement (ICSEI) in 2020 and at the National All Age Conference in May 2022.

2.4 At the outset, the D and R project was designed to focus on pedagogy, leadership, student learning and well-being. In 2021/22, empirical data collection with schools became possible

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[2] Ceryn Evans, Cathryn Knight, Helen Lewis, Geraint Rees and Janet Goodall.

once again, and this was collected. Later in this report, the methodologies employed, along with the data analyses and the findings from these investigations will be shared.

2.5 As there was no possibility of data collection with schools in Wales during the height of the pandemic, the University research team turned their attention to some comparative work on All-Age schools. Through ERASMUS+ funding, Swansea University engaged with Universities from Iceland and Spain to gain some comparative insights on All-Age or All-Through schools in other settings. This work was virtual, although some team visits to schools in Wales, Iceland and Spain were possible in the latter part of 2022. This research work offered a useful backdrop and point of comparison with the All-Age school sector in Wales. Throughout this report, therefore, where appropriate, occasional reference will be made to the findings from the ERASMUS+ project.

2.6 Returning to the D and R project, the focus was on three inter-related themes in relation to All-Age schools in Wales.

1. Pedagogical approaches and innovations in teaching and learning.
2. The effective leadership of All-Age schools, including the most effective leadership structures and practices.
3. The impact of All-Age settings on students' mental health and well-being.

2.7. This D and R project aimed to strengthen the knowledge base on pedagogy and leadership approaches in All-Age school settings. It also aimed to support teachers in All-Age settings to develop their own innovative teaching and leadership approaches.

2.8 The project adopted a mixed-method, progressively focused research design. It drew upon a range of evidence as it related to the key themes that comprised this collaborative empirical investigation. Initially, interviews were held with key stakeholders as part of the research design, but these face-to-face interviews ceased as the focus shifted to managing the response to the pandemic.

2.9 The University research team spent time during 2020/21 revisiting the evidence base on All-Age schools in anticipation that this would help frame the data analysis once data collection became possible once more.

2.10 The findings from the further analysis of the literature (see References) noted several strengths of the All-Age model of schooling. This included improved teaching and learning resulting from joint working and planning, sharing of good practice, and developing uniform standards for teaching, learning and assessment framework, and a common understanding of transition requirements.

2.11 The recent literature also highlights the importance of a smoother transition in All-Age schools, the prevalence of cross-phase pedagogical practices and clearer expectations as children progress through the key educational stages. Some researchers advocated that there were reduced performance dips in All-Age schools because of better coherence and continuity across the school, along with effective cross-phase teaching and learning.

2.12 Overall, the international literature on All-Age schooling is not extensive, and the body of evidence is variable in focus and quality, as well as contextual differences. Hence, the evidence relating to All-Age schools in Wales in this report draws specifically upon the Reynolds et al. (2018) review of evidence and the recent Estyn (2022) thematic review as key points of reference.

2.13 To conclude, this D and R project aimed to address gaps in the evidence base by working with colleagues in All-Age schools in Wales to generate data around three specific aspects - leadership; pedagogy; and well-being with a particular focus on transition. The next section of this report focuses on the data collected and analysed. It also provides an overview of the emergent findings.

3. Data

3.1 Survey

3.1.1 A survey (in Welsh and English) designed by the All-Age Forum was circulated to all its members. There were 18 respondents out of a total of 24 school leaders who completed the survey, and permission was given to the Swansea University team to analyse the survey data for inclusion in this report.

3.1.2 After an initial review of responses to all 58 questions on the survey, the University team selected 17 for detailed content analysis. The selection was based on relevance to the three overarching research themes of leadership, pedagogy, and well-being, with a particular focus on transition. In addition, responses to questions relating to the physical structure of schools were included. Several questions were excluded from the analysis, as the framing and/or wording of the questions were considered to be leading.

3.1.3 The survey returns outline a broad rationale for the establishment of All-Age Schools in Wales. These included falling pupil numbers, school reorganisation, streamlining of resources, and incidence of school closures in the local area. Only four responses highlighted that the school was specifically established to realise the perceived benefits of the All-Age schooling model.

3.1.4 In all cases, the responses indicated that the decision to form an All-Age school was driven by the Local Authority and that the move was made possible by funding streams drawn down from Welsh Government. The rationale for establishing an All-Age school was viewed by respondents as primarily economic, however, modernisation and regeneration were key

themes that were highlighted, along with the need to ensure sustainable, efficient education that was fit for purpose. Two respondents stated that the need for Welsh medium education in the area was a significant factor in the formation of the school.

3.1.5 The survey evidence suggested that the physical organisation of the school was largely dependent on the availability of appropriate buildings/land and was centrally reliant on the availability of funding. Few All-Age schools in Wales are purpose-built; hence, in most cases, a combination of existing sites and buildings have been utilised to establish the new school. In the survey, respondents report that their schools are either split sites (n=10) or operate from a single campus or building (n=8). Three of the single-site schools have separate buildings, but these are located adjacent to each other.

3.1.6 In single-site schools, some spaces are shared, such as refectory or hall facilities. The aim is to ensure the younger pupils feel safe and secure while also maintaining opportunities for a shared sense of community and relationship-building between the age groups. The split-site schools are diverse in their organisation. For example, one of the schools has six buildings on six separate sites, whereas another has a 3-18 site and a separate 11-16 site some distance away. The establishment of All-Age schools in Wales is heavily influenced by geographical and demographic factors that shape their physical organisation.

3.1.7 The survey responses highlighted that the Senior Leadership team structures vary across schools and tends to reflect both the physical structure and the organisation according to phase. Most of the All-Age schools have opted either for a primary-secondary phase structure, or a lower-middle-upper phase organisation. All respondents were keen to emphasise that the

school is one whole school, and the organisation, according to 'traditional' phases, is rooted in practicality and/or a legacy of previous buildings and staffing structures.

3.1.8 Only a few schools were able to design their ideal infrastructure and staffing. Instead, many of the respondents noted that their school had developed its staffing structure based on the expertise they already had in-house, using the available skills and knowledge to create the best school possible. Over time, it was noted, however, that staffing patterns have changed because of additional pupil/school needs.

3.1.9 For those schools operating across split sites, there is movement between the physical buildings, so that staff and pupils feel connected to the whole school. During COVID-19 restrictions, however, respondents noted that there was a need to keep separate 'bubbles' of pupils, so staff and pupils could only move between sites to access specialist teaching or facilities (e.g. drama or science labs), and as part of the transition arrangements from Year 5 onwards.

3.1.20 Responses underlined a clear recognition of the benefits of cross-phase teaching to both teachers and pupils. The importance of specialisation and for teaching to meet the needs of the pupils was also highlighted.

3.1.21 In response to a question about creating an ethos across split sites, senior leaders emphasised several key strategies. It is important to note that the survey question implies the need to develop one ethos, and, in this respect, it could be construed as a leading question. Furthermore, it also assumes that a single-site school has an ethos that is shared and understood by all. It is clear from the line of questioning and the responses offered, however, that there is

a drive from senior leaders to impress a single identity. It is not clear from the survey data, however, whether this belief is held by all staff or if there is any positive impact on pupil experience or the community from establishing such a clear identity.

3.1.22 The survey data showed that developing a strong school ethos involved three strategies that are not mutually exclusive.

- Symbolic (e.g. uniform, mission statements, branding, external-facing marketing materials);

- Systemic (e.g. school improvement plan, pedagogical principles, professional learning, behaviour policies);

- Societal (e.g. assemblies, sports days, school productions, awards evenings)

3.1.23 In terms of teaching and learning, respondents highlighted the importance of collaboration to increase professional understanding across the school. One respondent stated that no changes in teaching and learning had resulted from the move to All-Age school status. Another respondent described the importance of consistent expectations and smooth transitions between the key stages as the central purpose of teaching and learning at the school.

3.1.24 In terms of the practical approaches to teaching and learning, the following examples were provided by respondents in the survey:

- Foundation Phase pedagogies developed across the whole curriculum

- CfW developments are taking place across ages 3-18

- Consistent assessment and monitoring cross school

- Agreed marking policy

- Sharing of subject and pedagogical expertise.

- Joint planning

- ALN support tends to be more effective, with younger children having access to specialist behaviour support staff

3.1.25 The following examples of cross-phase collaboration appeared in the survey data. These quotations illustrate the breadth and depth of collaboration.

'We have developed a climate of collaboration across phases. Staff from across the school work collaboratively in many ways. Some examples include AoLE groups, Strategic Groups (these include ALN, FACE, Learning and Teaching, Pastoral and Curriculum Joint Practice Development Groups) that focus on the personal development of staff. We currently have 6 JPD groups - 4 Purposes, 12 Pedagogical Principles, Literacy, Numeracy, DCF and DR ICE'

(Ref. School 3)

'Most recently, we succeeded in co-operating with the English department who read a novel which is a sequel to a novel presented to Yr 6 (*My Name is River* and *Top Dog*). The novel is also located locally, and this deepened the opportunities to empathise with the characters and to identify with the events of the novel. A series of 8 rich tasks were co-designed to target the development of number skills by the school's Mathematics teachers and the cluster's KS2 teachers. There were two rich tasks per year (yrs 5-8) targeting the Numeracy Framework / Mathematics and Numeracy Curriculum. This has been a valuable tool for ensuring continuity and consistency in learning and teaching, and assessment. Consistent joint planning for targeting Curriculum for Wales has been in place for some years now. A consistent template for presentations to all

TAs and secondary areas of learning is shared for whole staff CPD sessions to deliver expeditions (themes) and the related learning and teaching'.

(Ref. School 7)

'During year one, we set up the Peninsula Teacher Programme, which was a requirement for all staff to work in a professional learning network based on existing research such as that seen in the EEF around impact on teaching and learning. Staff completed twilights each half term to develop the work of the PLN and presented the impact of their work to their peers in the summer term. The school has one staff meeting per week, which is focussed on teaching and learning, with all staff coming together to share best practice'.

(Ref. School 11)

'Cross-phase collaboration is a strength within the school. The ethos of one school is now embedded across all aspects of school life: (i) Book monitoring cycle takes place across a period (ii) School Parliament and cross-phase committees (iii) INSET - sharing good practice across phases (iv) Curriculum years 5-8 has been developed and taught across a period (v) CS / KS2 / KS3 language drill training - use of primary sector strategies through to KS3. (vi) 21 whole school Voice and Listening Program (vii) Leadership Academy - cross-sector trials (viii) Whole school INSET - cross-sector groups on most foci (ix) Cross-sector PSE program and provision (x) Whole School Health and Well-being Days, e.g. Healthy Thursday, Caring Friday. (xi) Campaigns, e.g. Sport Wales / 2021 Election / School ethos - Cross Sector (xii) The whole school

provides appropriate intervention, tracking and signposting to the individual needs of pupils from 3-18.'

(Ref. School 14)

One of the many examples prior to lockdown was that LSA's shadowed each other across phases to focus on the different skills involved in both 1:1 specialist support, e.g. autism and the 'in-class' support for learning in Lower School. This has continued with many opportunities taken to upskill remotely during lockdown, and the portfolio of training/ upskilling that has taken place within our support team has been staggering. Many have developed specialisms that have allowed them to lead aspects of provision across phases, e.g. hard of hearing, supporting autistic children through the lunch hour, LGBT support etc.'

(Ref. School 15)

3.1.26 In terms of the curriculum, there was general agreement in the survey responses that this had changed because of becoming an All-Age school. All respondents referred to the new Curriculum for Wales and the potential for All-Age schools to naturally deliver all its aspects. Many of the responses also highlight the importance of cross-phase teaching and note how curriculum planning has benefited from specialisms available right across the school.

3.1.27 When asked whether their school had a cohesive curriculum across all phases, almost all respondents stated that this was a work in progress. However, one response pointed to the question of how a 'cohesive curriculum' would be defined. The majority of survey respondents, however, described how staff were teaching cross-phase as a matter of course, and one further

response described how this was achieved through collective project work. Most responses outlined traditional 'secondary' staff teaching their subject area to younger cohorts in the school.

3.1.28 It is clear from the survey evidence that cross-phase teaching is a strong component of All-Age schools, but further investigation is needed into the nature of the cross-phase pedagogy and its impact on learners in these settings.

3.1.29 Responses from the survey show that most of the senior leaders believe that All-Age schooling is improving pupil well-being (16/18). The responses also show a range of potential mechanisms and opportunities are available to staff in All-Age Schools to support and enhance pupil well-being that may not be possible in a single-phase setting.

3.1.30 It is clear from the survey findings that All-Age schools provide a smoother transition between the key phases of learning as well as consistent mechanisms of learning support for all pupils. The next two sections outline the findings from the focus groups and interviews, respectively.

3.2 Focus Groups

3.2.1 This section of the report outlines the findings based on the analysis of the qualitative focus group and interview data collected. In-depth qualitative data was collected from a series of focus groups held with a cross-section of staff from All-Age schools. The questions focused on pedagogy, the benefits and challenges of teaching and learning in an All-Age setting and exploration of the notion of an 'All-Age teacher'.

3.2.2 Ethical protocols were in place, and consent forms were completed by each member of the focus group. The participants in the first focus group were drawn from across the school in terms of curriculum specialism. Focus Group 1 (FG1) all taught in the secondary phase, though they all had experience of teaching cross-phase in the school. While cross-phase teaching was not their usual working practice, they were given opportunities for collaboration and teaching across phases. The second focus group took place immediately after Focus Group 1 and involved a cross-section of teachers within an All-Age school setting. One of the participants was described by the Senior Leadership Team as an 'All-Age Teacher' since her role encompassed teaching from Foundation through to Year 13.

3.2.3 When asked to consider the benefits of teaching in an All Through school, the availability of expertise, cross-phase professional learning opportunities, the possibilities for greater collaboration, and the potential positive impact on pupil learning experiences were all raised.

"When we did the last lesson observations, we could see that differentiation was

a huge strength in the primary, but that wasn't the same in the secondary. Also

use of the LSAs (Learning Support Assistants) in the classroom wasn't the same.

So in the next training session that we had, primary staff led the training session

for the whole staff – on using support in the classroom and also differentiation"

(AA3: FG2[3])

3.2.4 This example highlights the potential benefits of having a wide diversity of staff in the setting with a corresponding diversity of skills and expertise. It was noted, however, that identifying good practices, providing opportunities for professional learning and dialogue, and implementing change, were still heavily dependent on staff being supported by appropriate resourcing and leadership.

3.2.4 Staffing was identified in the focus group sessions as being a strong benefit of an All-Age school. Higher staff numbers translate into additional support staff, such as technicians in the cookery and science areas, who are available to the whole school. This is a significant benefit in the primary phase, as focus group members noted that they would not have access to this expertise or the associated specialist resources within a traditional primary setting. It was also highlighted that more staff within an All-Age setting meant that covering lessons and cross-phase working was easier to manage.

3.2.5 Collaboration across staff was also highlighted as one of the strengths of All-Age schooling, as this routinely takes place across the phases. One participant offered the example of two colleagues – one based in the primary and one in the secondary phase, who worked

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[3] AA3 FG2 –refers to All-age School 3, Focus Group 2

together to run a session on differentiation for the whole staff team, "that drew on the strengths of both settings" (AA3:FG1).

3.2.6 Another example was offered by a participant in FG2 who described how he involves secondary colleagues in the planning of lessons so that pupils are familiar with the processes and pedagogies that are then consistent throughout the school. It was noted that this collaborative approach also enabled secondary teachers to know what and how primary-stage pupils have been learning.

3.2.7 A consistency in pedagogical approaches was described by focus group members as "work in progress" (AA3: FG2), something that staff are building towards. Focus group participants noted that mechanisms are in place to create links between learning and teaching strategies that can be adapted and implemented all the way through and across the school. For example, it was noted that primary teachers have expertise in teaching oracy – in both English and Welsh – and the specific strategies for linguistic development are being shared with colleagues in the secondary phase. This was highlighted as particularly useful as a large proportion of the pupils are learning through their second language (Welsh) and are still acquiring and developing language skills as they learn in other subjects. Some of the Assessment for Learning techniques used in the secondary phase, for example, have been implemented in the primary phase to support pupil progress and familiarise pupils with these strategies to aid progression.

3.2.8 The opportunities for collaborative professional development were also viewed as a particular benefit of working in an All-Age school. The focus group participants highlighted the importance of 'collaborative learning, Assessment for Learning, higher order thinking

skills, and "grit and determination"' (AA3: FG2). All these professional learning topics were identified in response to pupils' needs. It was noted that shared professional learning approaches offer the potential for development and honing of expertise (AA3: FG2).

3.2.9 The focus group evidence highlights how the sharing of good practice is viewed as a distinct benefit of working in an All-Age setting. Professional dialogue is highly valued and is seen as a way of developing new pedagogies and practices. One participant described how he implemented teaching strategies learned from primary colleagues, such as Circle Time, which proved to be highly effective in the secondary classroom. Another explained how shared examples of Year 4 and 5 work could be aligned so that older learners benefitted.

3.2.10 Participants in the focus groups identified what they felt to be the biggest challenges in teaching and learning in an All-Age setting. One of the teachers explained that while opportunities to collaborate are valuable to both teachers and learners, this collaboration took considerable effort. It was considered difficult to find – or make – the time to build this collaboration into every aspect of practice. One participant described how it was easy to "fall back" (AA3: FG1) into a teacher's own specialist phase and not engage with cross-phase teaching or collaboration and, therefore, not fully realise the benefits of the All-Age setting.

3.2.11 When asked how staff maintain pedagogical lines across the phases, one focus group participant responded that while they are one school, there are still two phases which remain distinct for a number of reasons. He explained that while there are still children who join the school at Year 7, there will always be a distinction between primary and secondary. This is because the 'new' pupils will have had different prior experiences of school than the children who have been in the All-Age school from age three. With eight feeder schools, the All-Age

pupils are sometimes in the minority, and this complex mix of pupil demographics and prior learning experiences proves to be challenging for All-Age teachers. Mechanisms for tracking pupil progress and adapting the way the school collects and uses data was also identified as a challenge.

3.2.12 When asked about innovation in pedagogy, focus group participants highlighted that mainly this was derived from the School Development Plan (SDP) as the strategic document that connects all aspects of the school. The SDP and consequent actions are supported by evidence, which is analysed "often" (AA3: FG2). One example provided was data collected by a questionnaire that focused on "children's feelings towards their own learning ability" (AA3: FG2). From the data, the team recognised that pupils in Years 4 and 5 who were eligible for Free School Meals and who had Additional Learning Needs (ALN) held very low opinions of themselves, and this was negatively affecting their self-esteem. In response, the team brought in a colleague from the secondary phase who had previously been a Youth Worker to run confidence-building sessions with this group of children, which had significant benefits.

3.2.13 This data-informed approach suggests that All-Age teachers are continually striving to identify areas for improvement that are pupil-centred and that by having a wide staff base and expertise to draw upon, they can implement targeted support where needed, with relative ease and without the need to draw on external support.

3.2.14 In terms of innovation, focus group participants commented on how the Curriculum for Wales is now a core part of the teaching and learning vision within the school. Many staff are currently working on developing a coherent 3-19 curriculum. The aim is to have a whole school pedagogy and consistency of learning experiences from the Foundation Phase through to

graduation. One of the focus group participants described an innovative pedagogy that she has adopted in the secondary phase, based on independent learning strategies that were used in primary – "allowing them to spread their wings". She noted that she would not have been able to implement this particular approach with her secondary pupils without being in an All-Age school.

3.2.15 Another example of innovation from a focus group participant concerned the introduction of more outdoor learning in secondary teaching based upon the experience of engaging in primary phase teaching. Indeed, many of the examples of innovative pedagogies provided originated from shared professional learning and were refined through shared enquiry.

3.2.16 An enquiry-led approach, focusing on different pedagogical approaches, is common in All-Age schools. Groups of staff meet every 3-4 weeks to discuss the evidence and examples within the sphere of their chosen topic and to trial innovations in the classroom. A practical example given by focus group participants relates to the implementation of a new pupil self-assessment strategy – the 'yellow box', which required pupils to re-draft a small proportion of their written work, focusing on specific areas to improve. This was piloted in the classroom and, after teacher review and pupil feedback, is now commonly used across the school.

3.2.17 Focus group participants reinforced how the freedom to reflect and refine their pedagogical practice through actively trialling ideas in the classroom was a critical part of innovation and improvement.

"I feel quite privileged to be working here because I've never felt under pressure
to think that this has to be absolutely perfect. We've always been free to go off
and experiment." (AA3: FG1)

3.2.18 One participant described how the headteacher supports staff in developing their own
practice by allowing them the freedom to experiment. He explained how he had been working
on the Health and Well-being AoLE as part of the *Successful Futures* (Curriculum for Wales)
development and that,

"The Head had given us some sort of background reading, saying, this is what is
out there, off you go. And the same with this course, *Dysgu gorau, dysgu byw*,
we're in the second year of doing it now, and it's very much a case of, these are
the principles, this is what we'd like to implement, however, how you do that and
what it looks like is completely up to you. And although we are held accountable
by lesson observation or meetings, but to be fair, I don't feel under any pressure
… I think I speak on behalf of everybody to say that we've got that ownership
and that trust" (AA3: FG1)

Another participant identified the relationship between professional learning and the pupil
experience:

"If we want to instil a lifelong learning attitude, we need to have one ourselves,
and being in this type of school allows you to do that, because we're constantly
learning and adapting and strengthening our own professional development, the
school's development, everything, it does go hand in hand, but it does take time
to get there. I'm sure once we get there, we'll smash it!" (AA3: FG1)

3.2.19 A further example of innovation relates to change in leadership structure. Six teachers from within a school have recently been appointed as *AoLE Innovators*. Their role is to lead each of the Areas of Learning Experience (AoLE) from 3 to 19. These individuals are responsible for progression throughout the school to ensure a continuum of learning within each of the AoLEs. Two of the participants in the focus group have been appointed to these roles and described how they work together to bring consistent approaches and to share good practice. The All-Age setting enables clearer opportunities for collaboration and communication across the broad diversity of 3-19 expertise than is possible in separate schools.

> "What we see the strength is the subject expertise maybe in secondary, and
> there's a lot of pedagogical expertise in the primary. And it's really good to be
> able to share strengths" (AA3: FG1)

3.2.20 Participants were all able to give examples of how they adapted and implemented strategies brought from the primary and now used with secondary-age pupils. One example was the use of 'Show and Tell' with Year 8 students, which was particularly surprising for the teacher as he hadn't anticipated how well it would work and how much buy-in he would get from pupils to join in the activity. This is an example of how cross-phase knowledge and practice-sharing can enhance pedagogies.

3.2.21 One participant noted that while teaching in the primary phase had been valuable, this had been on an ad hoc basis and with little formal or informal professional learning to support the shift. He explained that while he was comfortable with adapting his teaching to meet the needs of pupils in the primary phase, he would like more opportunities to observe primary colleagues. The group agreed this would be beneficial while also acknowledging that they felt

completely supported in their roles at present, but this would be a good way to develop their own practice. One of the teachers added that more time to meet and look over schemes of work together to ensure continuity across the school would be advantageous. She gave the example of wanting to be able to work with colleagues from primary to create a thematic scheme of work that would run through the school. The group agreed on the positive potential for this type of collaboration.

3.2.22 During the discussion of cross-phase teaching, one participant described how they had previously had opportunities for 'carousel' teaching, where they might be brought in to teach different classes within different phases. Through this carousel process, staff were tasked with teaching their subject areas to different age groups throughout the school on rotation. Through this exercise, they were able to discuss teaching strategies with colleagues and develop practices that were appropriate for a range of learners, as well as gain a more in-depth understanding of the teaching and learning requirements of different phases and ages through the school. This practice was stopped during COVID-19 restrictions when they were teaching in 'bubbles' to mitigate the spread of the virus, and with the need to focus on the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales.

3.2.23 The focus group participants gave many examples of cross-phase teaching. For example, in one school, the Health and Well-being AoLE (H&WB) is being taught across the school by teachers from the secondary phase. The rationale is partly due to the availability of expertise. H&WB includes PE, within which there are specialist teachers in the secondary, for example. It is also an opportunity for consistency of approach and for primary pupils to become more familiar with teachers from the secondary phase to support transitions. There is also the

practical, pragmatic reason for developing the AoLE consistently in line with the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales from September 2022.

3.2.24 It was agreed that there was a strong sense of community and a family approach within the All-Age school. Through positive relationships with pupils, this sense of belonging was extended to the wider community.

3.2.25 Overall, the focus group evidence highlighted the centrality of cross-phase teaching and professional learning in All-Age schools. In addition, there were many examples of staff working together, to innovate and change pedagogical practices.

3.3 Interviews

3.3.1 A series of interviews with senior leaders in All-Age schools were conducted online via Teams and recorded. Ethical protocols were in place, and consent forms were completed. The interviews were semi-structured, following a set of fourteen questions; however, respondents were free to elaborate on matters they considered important.

3.3.2 Interviews were carried out in English and in Welsh, and once recorded, all interviews were transcribed and thematically coded. In particular, the concept of an 'All-Age Leader' was explored during the one-to-one interviews. The Welsh medium data set (n=5) was analysed separately from the English data set (n=9), but a common pattern of analysis was followed.

3.3.2 The interviews highlighted how leadership in an All-Age school requires multi-agency working that extends far beyond the relationships built by leaders of single-phase schools. This is in part due to the wider range of external organisations and services that the school works with, e.g. from Flying Start to post-16 education institutions and employers.

3.3.3 The sheer size and scale of activity within an All-Age School requires leaders to understand and respond proactively to a broad community base. The increased catchment area, and for some, the combination of multiple catchment areas, demands attention to a wide range of issues facing families and carers within their community. The interview data underlined how the leadership of the school had to take account of the wider community influences, including levels of poverty, unemployment, social challenges, and other demographic factors such as ethnicity, home languages, care experience, and ALN.

3.3.4 All-Age schools require large-scale governance, and since many of the schools in Wales were established by combining or amalgamating former primary and secondary phase schools,

this also requires significant attention to negotiating positive relationships in bringing together a newly formed governing body. It also requires leaders to ensure that the voices of families and the wider community are heard and reflected in the school vision.

3.3.5 The relationship with families/carers was described by interviewees as being very important and very strong. While the term 'All-Age school' implies that pupils attend from 3-16 years of age, this is not always the case for every pupil. Some pupils still enter from feeder primary schools, which offer extra challenges in terms of relationship building and, inevitably, extra work for the staff. Yet, the evidence suggests that stronger community connectedness results from different pupils, parents and carers mixing together. It was also noted that All-Age schools could be a resource for the community by offering space and specialist facilities, hence consolidating, and enhancing community engagement.

3.3.6 Each of the interviewees described their own unique leadership structures. A typical set-up includes an Executive Head with the responsibility of the whole school and Assistant/Deputy Heads or Phase Leaders overseeing the day-to-day running of the school. Many leadership structures, though not all, rely on distributed leadership to manage the demands of the school. New roles have emerged, such as leaders of learning with cross-phase responsibilities. Strategic planning tends to be shared rather than separate, allowing for the collective development of a vision that is implemented on a school-wide basis.

3.3.7 Leadership structures and responsibilities were mainly dependent on the physical structure of the school as much as its demographic – for example, the number of sites and distance between them. Leadership structures also depend on the size of the school and the number of pupils on roll, which means that there is variation in the leadership structures across the All-Age sector in Wales.

3.3.8 Interviewees highlighted that leaders of All-Age schools needed to have a strategic overview of pedagogy, teaching and learning, progression, well-being, and standards for both primary and secondary phases. Leaders also have to have oversight of curriculum along with professional respect for the expertise of colleagues in specific phases/areas of the school and underpinned by proactive facilitation of collaborative working – making time and space for all colleagues to engage in professional dialogue and sharing of expertise.

3.3.9 All of the interviewees talked about striving for consistency and taking a strategic approach to driving the vision of 3-16 education. This was described by one interviewee as "the absolute clarity that we are committed to being 3-16 in every sense". The 3-16' vision' defines the role of leaders in All-Age Schools, and this vision is supported by whole school policies and strategies that pay explicit attention to the needs of pupils and staff in each area of the school.

One of the Senior Leaders interviewed emphasised the possibility for and value of this vision as, 'Consistency in approach for teaching and learning, with pedagogy, with standards, and most importantly flight path. You have that overview of you know, of incremental gains between nursery and Year 11' (AA1[4])

Another described it as follows,

'My role, my ultimate role really, is to bring that consistency. So that all the children across the community, whatever site, whatever age, is having that equitable, high quality teaching and learning. So that we've got something right the way through something progressive, that is tight

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[4] AA1 refers to the interview with Senior Leader from All-age School 1. The number was designated before data analysis to ensure anonymity, in line with ethical approval.

enough that it's real consistency and an equitable opportunity for children, but loose enough to live in' (Director of Learning, AA5)

3.3.10 The interviewees all reinforced a strong commitment to reflective and reflexive practice, and to maintaining a self-improving system through research and enquiry mechanisms such as action research, observations, learning walks, and professional dialogue. They placed emphasis on making time for professional collaboration to be fruitful and for any resulting plans to be enacted.

3.3.11 Interviewees highlighted the centrality of leaders at all levels, focusing on the pupil experience, i.e. well-being, teaching and learning, standards, and progression. The interviewees described this in terms of the active encouragement of cross-phase collaboration and consistency of approaches that form the pupil experience.

3.3.12 Many of the interviewees noted the importance of accountability through the direct responsibility for the whole pupil experience – academic, well-being, social etc. Interviewees highlighted how they felt directly responsible for ensuring that each child's needs were met across the full breadth of the curriculum from the start of their school journey to the moment they left and beyond into adulthood.

'It's relationships isn't it? Because as primary head teachers they're with you from three, they're babies, and by the time they're in Year 6, you know them and you've got that, a bit you know, the most devastating thing you can say to a child is "I'm disappointed" You know when their Head teacher's disappointed in them, they just, they regress to being three. And to be able to actually, and I can say that to 16 year olds here you know like I can say, "Now … I remember you when you were 9" And they do, they regress to that little child again, and they thrive on it they really do thrive on it, because they're known. They're not numbers. They're individual

people and you know having that confidence and having that relationship with staff, you know senior staff, it has a huge impact on them' (Deputy Head, AA5)

The interviewees described various mechanisms and structures that were in place to ensure that every child's needs were recognised, supported, and monitored. The interviewees also referred to their own in-house research and the commitment to the effective use of pupil data to maintain consistency, ensure progression, and support pupil well-being. The value of consistency was felt particularly keenly in supporting pupils with Additional Learning Needs.

'There are other examples of those of those children with ALN needs who've come through. They are, the parents, there is one ALNCo who is known to them, from the beginning, so there's no, you know, you change ALNCo, you go to a comprehensive school and you have to fight again for what those children need. None of that is here. They all go straight through' (AA7)

3.3.15 Interviewees noted that leaders within an All-Age school require a strength of character to navigate their way through the various pressures exerted by internal and external agencies. It was suggested that leaders often need to deal with conflicting demands and different interests that are particular to the All-Age school context. Interviewees also felt strongly that the funding model for All-Age schools is not yet fit for purpose, as it assumes that combining the budgets from the previous school structures is sufficient to cover costs. They noted that many All-Age schools are running at significant budget deficits because the scale of operation goes far beyond the previous school structures. For example, an All-Age School with four campuses will still need four caretakers, teams of cleaners, reception staff etc., regardless of whether the schools themselves are viewed as one institution. Financial support is also required for new roles appropriate to an All-Age setting, but this is not necessarily reflected in Local Authority budgets. For example, a Director of Learning at Senior Leadership level will have oversight of

learning and teaching from 3-16 (or 19), which is a markedly different role to a Deputy or Assistant Headteacher employed in a single-phase school.

3.3.19 The following list outlines the All-Age leadership dispositions that were raised in the interviews:

- Interpersonal skills that encourage mutual professional respect
- Capacity to respond to the "steep learning curve" that many Senior Leaders experience when taking up post. The majority of the Headteachers in All-Age Schools in Wales come from secondary backgrounds, and of those, all referenced their own unfamiliarity with teaching and learning in the primary phase. This was viewed as a considerable challenge that the interviewees all found rewarding.
- Ability to encourage loyalty to a long-term strategic vision that has a limited evidence base in the education sector in Wales
- Resolute in driving the project forward and planning under pressure, particularly during the schools' establishment and initial stages
- A coaching approach is required at times – particularly regarding moving teachers around the school to teach outside of their 'usual' or comfort zone.
- Open-minded and flexible

3.3.20 As part of the overall sample two interviews were conducted in Welsh. Given that this is a small but important part of the overall data set, it warrants separate attention and more detailed exposition.

3.3.21 The two headteachers had been in post for a relatively short time but shared similar views on the leadership of their school. They had been instrumental in the setting up phase and therefore had influenced the leadership structure. The headteachers had very different

background experiences (1 primary & 1 secondary) and brought with them many years of prior experience in headship from other schools.

3.3.22 In S1, the head was supported by a Deputy from the other phase, and it was believed that this was essential to provide leadership expertise across the whole school. However, it was clear that the vision was one of a *single* school, not two phases joined together. To that effect, many of the leadership roles spanned the full age range across the school, including pastoral roles and curriculum. Similarly, in S2, the head had strived to ensure that staff and parents saw the school as one institution, not an amalgamation of several schools. Both heads explained that they were fortunate to be on a single site, one a new build and the other a refurbishment of an existing secondary site.

3.3.23 Both heads felt that in terms of their own leadership practice, the skills required to lead in All-Age schools were similar to effective leadership skills in any setting; however, the breadth of experience and range of challenges had increased. This included dealing with staff from differing backgrounds and cultures to meet the expectations of parents of pupils, from early years to final years of schooling.

3.3.24 Neither headteacher had received any bespoke professional learning or induction to being a new All-Age school head. However, each had been given time during the setup phase of the school to visit other All-Age schools and learn from their experience. Both had been supported by the Local Authority (LA) and Regional officers, with regular meetings and curriculum support. Both valued the support of the All-Age Schools Forum, and one head expressed disappointment that it didn't meet more often. One head also believed that the LA and Region did not consider All-Age schools when setting up meetings, and they often were expected to attend both primary and secondary meetings.

3.3.25 In S1, the decision to create an All-Age school was made by the LA in order to maintain viable school numbers and invest effectively in school building infrastructure. This meant the closure of several schools, and there had been a certain amount of protest against forming a new All-Age school on an existing secondary site. This came from a number of parents and several existing staff. However, after initial resentment, structured staff team building days prior to opening, has ensured that staff grew to know each other well and soon came to work together and learn from each other. Also, initially, a few families withdrew their pupils from the school, but more recently, these have mostly returned and new families have been attracted to the school. Communication was deemed to be vital to inform the community of the purpose and vision of the new education system, as generations of families had a historical attachment to what existed and were reluctant to change.

3.3.26 In S2, however, the rationale was more about increasing existing capacity within the LA and alleviating pressure on the existing Welsh medium secondary school whilst reducing transport costs. This school is being expanded in yearly phases and started with provision up to year 7. This phased introduction meant that parents chose to send their children to a new build school which was closer to their homes. Fear around the impact of younger children sharing a site with older children was not there due to the phased opening. Projected numbers for the school once fully open are very positive and in line with LA predictions.

3.3,27 Both schools were working hard to adopt the new Curriculum for Wales (CfW) 2022 and stated that this was a massive help in bringing both original primary and secondary staffs together. Each had much to learn from the other, but in particular, the approach often used in primary was being modelled for secondary colleagues as they planned for CfW 2022. On the other hand, primary staff benefitted from specialist teachers to develop their own skills in areas such as music, PE and art. One head also felt that the primary pupils were more independent in

their work which came as an eye-opener to secondary colleagues. This has led to a significant reduction in worksheets and more project-led work for secondary-age pupils in the school. Both heads said that staff used age/subject appropriate pedagogy, but all had become familiar with the bigger picture around prior learning and future needs of the pupils

3.3.28 The culture of both schools was very much pupil and community centred. The obvious advantage of pupils attending the same school from a very early age was that the relationships usually developed with parents early on could be maintained. Staff knew families well, which allowed for early intervention if any issues arose. A major challenge for both schools, however, was the transition of pupils from schools other than those already in the primary phase of the All-Age school.

3.3.29 It was important for equity that these pupils were not made to feel any different or disadvantaged to those already in the school. To support this, one school had appointed two transition teachers and a transition assistant to work with feeder schools in the months leading up to transition. On the other hand, one of the heads felt that there were some disadvantages to staying in the same school at transition, not least, the "right of passage" pupils enjoy when moving to high school from primary. One of the schools had a comprehensive well-being facility for pupils to cater for many emotional and behavioural needs, which was praised by Estyn as highly effective.

3.3.30 Both heads commented on the impact that Covid had had on their development plans as new schools. Focus had moved to survival rather than development, and each head was looking forward to getting back on track. One head felt that there needed to be increased resource/capacity for peer observation and learning to make the most of the opportunities an

All-Age school provided for improvement. One head suggested further research on the impact of the use of the Welsh language outside of the classroom.

3.3.31 Overall, the interviews with all senior leaders within All-Age schools revealed that they face particular challenges that are associated with the nature of their setting. Primary and secondary schools are often located on different sites, which makes the enactment of leadership sometimes difficult, so building a common team can prove to be a challenge for senior leaders. Also, the setting up of an All-Age school can be fraught as it necessitates bringing together very different groups, communities, staff and pupils into one setting.

3.3.32 It is assumed that the leadership of an All-Age school is no different to the leadership of any other school, yet the structural and cultural challenges, as the interviews highlighted, can be significant. Finally, there is little explicit training or preparation to teach or lead an All-Age school which is an issue, as the contextual challenges are viewed as very different and more demanding.

4.0 Discussion

4.1 This section of the report discusses the main findings and the implications arising from this D and R work. It is recognised that there are limitations to the findings because COVID-19 significantly disrupted the data collection process, by a year, and prevented the grounded, school-based, case-study accounts that were part of the original research design. It is also acknowledged that there is ongoing research being undertaken by school colleagues through the All-Age Forum in Wales. As this work has a longer lifespan than this report, this school-based evidence is not included in this report[5].

4.2 As highlighted at the outset of this report, the international literature on All-Age schools is sparse and the literature on All-Age schools in Wales is even thinner. Hence, while this research was interrupted by COVID-19, the data collected offers a new, contemporary set of lenses on the All-Age sector in Wales. Also, the initial year of this project focused on upskilling practitioners in All-Age schools to undertake their own research; hence there is now additional research capacity within the system to capture more insights and views about this model of schooling in Wales.

4.3 This report does not offer recommendations but, instead, highlights the implications for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, based on the findings from this study. The core findings from this study are summarised next.

4.4 From the evidence collected in this project, it is suggested that there are clear benefits from the All-Age model of schooling. A common ethos within an All-Age school provides a

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[5] https://allageschoolsforum.cymru/live-research/

collective purpose and a shared direction for staff and pupils. A shared set of core values within an All-Age school offers a common pathway for the social, moral, and emotional development of pupils. Also, All-Age schools tend to have a close working relationship with parents/carers, families, and support agencies (from the early primary stage onwards), which has been shown to build strong and lasting community engagement. With the policy emphasis in Wales currently on 'Community Focused Schools'[6], there is much to be learned from the All-Age sector and the way that different parts of the community are brought together to support the school.

4.5 In terms of progression, coherence, pedagogy and well-being, the evidence suggests that there are significant benefits to learners from being in an All-Age school. All-Age schools routinely share information throughout a child's schooling, thus allowing the opportunity for targeted professional support and specialist intervention at the point of need. Consequently, young people are less likely to 'fall through the cracks' because of consistent support throughout schooling. In addition, there are opportunities for contributing to curriculum development and cross-phased teaching, allowing the sharing of good practice and teaching and learning strategies for the benefit of pupils as well as staff.

4.6 All-Age schools tend to offer a smoother transition between key phases or stages for learners. Familiarity with school, teachers, pedagogical practices, and other peers means that learners are less likely to feel the anxiety associated with a change in the school setting and the presence of older children. A culture of inclusion and older pupils offering mentoring and peer mediation is another benefit which has the potential to reduce poor behaviour and to reduce exclusions. The All-Age school model provides continuity of academic, social, and emotional

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[6] https://www.gov.wales/community-focused-schools-html#:~:text=A%20Community%20Focused%20School%20places,2020.

support for learners that reduces the potential for performance dips at key transition points in schooling.

4.7 Focusing upon leadership, many All-Age schools tend to operate a distributed model of leadership that spans the different stages and phases of schooling. This model of leadership is flexible and responsive to different organisational needs. Specific preparation and development for those leading an All-Age school are currently unavailable. This is an important area for future development and investment, as the number of All-Age schools in Wales looks likely to increase.

4.8 The implications arising from this research are wide-ranging, and while more research needs to focus on this important sector, there are several important messages that have emerged from this study. Firstly, for policymakers, it is important to recognise the distinctiveness of this sector and the key challenges that those working in such settings face. The complexity of delivering both primary and secondary provision cannot be underestimated, and funding arrangements should reflect the magnitude of the task of setting up and running an All-Age school.

4.9 In terms of practice, the implications for practitioners largely centre around the new Curriculum for Wales and the fact that All-Age schools are well-placed to model and share approaches to pedagogy that cross discrete subject areas and reflect the aspirations of the new curriculum. Hence, opportunities to connect with and to learn from All-Age schools should be a priority for all schools as they move forward to curriculum implementation.

4.10 For researchers, the implications are also clear; more research into this growing sector of schooling is both important and imperative. As this study has shown, there is much to be learned from the collaborative practices within All-Age school settings and the cross-phase

work that offers the opportunity for more pedagogical innovation and creativity that, ultimately benefits all learners.

4.11 To conclude, COVID-19 was a great disrupter but also an important illuminator. It reinforced the importance of learner well-being and staff well-being as critical components of effective learning. It highlighted why being in a community and being seen and heard was so important for the mental health of all young people during the pandemic.

4.12 The All-Age model of schooling, in many ways, demonstrates what can be achieved when there is collective responsibility and collective action for learners right through their education. In many respects, this is a transformation within Welsh education that has the potential for new thinking, creative solutions, and bold pedagogy. New ways of understanding education are rare, and new actions that respond to new ways of understanding education are even rarer.

4.12 All-Age schools are a relatively new model of schooling in Wales, but as this sector expands, the emerging evidence would suggest that they have the potential to lead transformation in ways that will benefit all Welsh learners in the future.

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