

Foundation Phase Pilot - First Year Evaluation Report

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1. Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Foundation Phase (FP) is a Welsh Assembly Government, national reform covering the combined 3-5 Early Years and Key Stage 1 provision (children aged between three and seven). In September 2004, the first stage of the pilot commenced in 41 pilot settings across the 22 local authorities in Wales for 3-5 year olds only. The 41 pilot settings will continue in 2005-2006 with Year 1 children (and some Year 2 children where mixed classes are operating) coming on board in the maintained sector and similarly Year 2 in 2006-2007.

The Foundation Phase proposes a continuum of learning for children from the ages of 3 to 7. The new curriculum is based on the current Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning before Compulsory School Age (ACCAC 2000), and links in with the Programmes of Study and focus statements currently in the National Curriculum for KS1. It contains seven areas of learning (AOL), which are:

- personal and social development and well-being;
- language, literacy and communication;
- mathematical development;
- bilingualism and multicultural understanding;
- knowledge and understanding of the world;
- physical development
- creative development

The Foundation Phase advocates children learning through first hand experiential activities and play and places a child's personal and social development and well-being at the heart of the curriculum.

The Monitoring and Evaluation of the Effective Implementation of the Foundation Phase (MEEIFP) project is an evaluative study, commissioned and funded by the Welsh Assembly Government. This is the first year of a two-year evaluation, which is focused on implementation. Throughout the evaluation the MEEIFP team has worked closely with all the pilot settings and has consulted widely with all major stakeholders as well as some Welsh early years specialists.

1.1 The Evaluation Aims

To monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Foundation Phase in Wales through scrutinising:

- The implementation of the Foundation Phase; process, timing and content, support mechanisms.
- Transition issues for 3-5 year-olds and where possible, beyond this age.
- How appropriate and effective are the:
 - Curriculum, its planning and implementation.
 - Assessment strategies and record keeping.

- Qualifications and training of staff.
- Ratio of adults to children.
- Accommodation and resources.
- Organisation and management.
- Partnership with parents.
- Quality assurance, inspection.

The MEEIFP project has explored six questions:

1. What does research tell us about effective pedagogy and curriculum for children of ages 3-7, drawing on key documents from the Welsh Assembly Government, for the Foundation Phase and from recent research studies?
2. What is the quality of provision provided by the pilot settings, and is it the kind of quality that has been shown to promote children's learning and attainment and meet the needs of the individual?
3. How do the 7 areas of learning in the Foundation Phase curriculum contribute to children's all-round development and what are the transition issues?
4. How does implementation differ for the Foundation Phase in the maintained and non-maintained sectors? And, how might any problems identified be overcome?
5. What are the perceptions of local authority partnerships, staff, parents and governors on the impact of the Foundation Phase in the pilot settings and the issues surrounding their implementation e.g. space, adult:child ratios, 'play' and the 'learning continuum' 3-7?
6. What are the main strengths of the Foundation Phase and the effective practice associated with it, where are the gaps which would make the implementation more successful e.g. in management or identifying training needs?

This report is based only on the first year's evaluation during which time the MEEIFP Team visited the pilot settings twice during the academic year 2004-2005. During these visits we conducted observations and interviewed practitioners and parents. In addition the Team devised, piloted and conducted semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with quantitative and qualitative components to obtain the perceptions and opinions of all major stakeholders involved in the pilot. All these data have been analysed in detail to provide the evidential basis for this report. The Team has also provided a Literature Review focusing on the current situation in Wales together with robust national and international research evidence on education and care of children aged 3 - 7.

Unlike many other educational reforms around the UK, it is refreshing that Welsh Assembly Government has built in evaluation from the first year of the pilot and implementation process. The purpose of the evaluation is to identify at an early stage of the implementation the

strengths and limitations with the intention of informing and strengthening consequent years. As Jane Davidson the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning outlined:

“The pilots themselves will be carefully monitored and evaluated to ensure that standards are maintained and enhanced, and that all operational issues are identified and addressed”.

(<http://www.learning.wales.gov.uk>)

1.2 Summary of Main findings

1.2.1 - Current Quality and Standards

The MEEIFP Team visited all the pilot settings and rated each of them on three measures of quality: the ECERS-R (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale: Revised) which assesses the daily routines, social interactions and facilities, the ECERS-E (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale: Extension) which assesses the quality of the curriculum, and the CIS (Caregiver Interaction Scale) which assesses how responsive and sensitive the staff are as they interact with children. On most of these measures of quality, settings scored higher if they had qualified teachers on their staff.

There is a significantly higher proportion of qualified teachers working in maintained settings compared to either the private or the voluntary sectors. Thus the maintained sector in general had higher quality scores on the ECERS-E and the CIS. Settings with high scores on the curricular and pedagogical quality assessment (ECERS-E) tended to have high scores in the more general child centred assessment (ECERS-R). This shows that settings that nurtured children’s intellectual development tended to nurture social-emotional development as well. However, the reverse was not true; some settings had high quality for social-emotional development but did not have a high quality curriculum to promote children’s thinking and language. Surprisingly, settings with higher numbers of children for each staff member had higher quality scores; this was probably due to the fact that settings in the maintained sector which had more qualified teachers tended to have higher child: staff ratios as well.

In the first year of the pilot it was difficult to determine any change in standards in the absence of any measure of children’s baseline attainment (this is not a study of child outcomes). We relied on the perceptions of stakeholders which were largely in relation to classroom management and organisation, the learning environment and learning opportunities as identified below. It is therefore too early in the pilot phase to provide any fully reliable evidence on changes in standards.

Based on stakeholders perceptions there is overwhelming support from all stakeholders for a greater emphasis on active learning and play. Almost all practitioners reported that improved ratios of 1:8 in the maintained sector have made a positive difference to the following:

- classroom management and organisation;
- the learning environment;
- learning opportunities;

However the biggest impact was felt in organisation and management. More than two thirds of the non-maintained sector felt the introduction of the Foundation Phase had made a positive difference to educational experiences.

Practitioners identified the following:

The most prominent *strengths* of the first year of the Foundation Phase pilot implementation were identified as being:

- Curriculum based on play, active and experiential learning.
- Child centred curriculum.
- Broader/holistic/more relevant curriculum.

The key areas for *improvement* in the first year of the Foundation Phase pilot implementation were identified as being:

- The need for clear guidance materials on AOLs and associated pedagogy.
- Better planned and funded training.
- Increased funding to improve management and resources.

1.2.2 - Curriculum and Pedagogy

There is overwhelming support for the FP curriculum and widespread agreement that the seven AOL provide a broad and balanced basis for children's learning and development in addition to strong support for the increased emphasis on active learning and play. High numbers of all respondents felt that the new AOL - Bilingualism and Multicultural Understanding had been most difficult to introduce, which was to be expected as it had only just been introduced at the start of the Foundation Phase pilot. However it is interesting to note that the non-maintained sector reported less difficulty in introducing this AOL than the maintained sector. In respect of the work Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Aesu Cymru/Qualifications, Curriculum & Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) has undertaken there was a very mixed response to the degree in which participation in the working groups had benefited the settings involved. Despite the Draft Framework being a more comprehensive document and Early Years Advisors generally feeling positive about its content, practitioners felt that it contained little new information in respect of content but that it had impacted positively on practice in terms of approach and style. In addition the majority of the non-maintained sector Associations reported that in its current draft format the Draft Framework was not very user friendly for their memberships. However, according to the Welsh Assembly Government and ACCAC this is not surprising as the remit for the Draft Framework was to build on the existing Desirable Outcomes and Key Stage 1 programmes of study. There is general dissatisfaction in the pilot settings and at Local Authority level that the guidance materials were not produced/delivered during the first year of the pilot. This, coupled with a perceived lack of communication about the status of the guidance timetable, has caused considerable difficulty and created heightened apprehension and concern about next year's pilot rolling on into KS1.

1.2.3 - Assessment

All pilot settings have assessment strategies in place although the variation is considerable. We are aware that most Local Education Authorities (LEAs) have developed their own assessment strategies and that variation is to be expected. However, given that there will be a national Foundation Phase Curriculum which is consistent across the sector the variation across LEAs may cause problems when children move across LEAs and might not provide the consistency required from preschool to school. A number of settings in both sectors identified that they would like further guidance and support with assessment for the Foundation Phase. It would be important and advantageous for the assessment continuum currently being produced by ACCAC to be used in all Foundation Phase settings to aid and support issues of transition, especially as Welsh Assembly Government continues to support a diverse range of providers to implement the Foundation Phase within the under-fives sector.

1.2.4 - Transition

Currently transition arrangements between the maintained and non-maintained sectors are inconsistent and arbitrary. Procedures exist for internal transition within the Foundation Phase in the majority of school settings and some head-teachers have already started to plan for transition from the Foundation Phase to KS2. Generally stakeholders are positive that the Foundation Phase will provide continuity for KS2. However a number are concerned that children will have difficulty in transferring from a largely skills and dispositions based FP curriculum to a content driven curriculum in KS2 and feel that KS2 staff will need training about the FP. However as ACCAC reports the current proposed changes to the curriculum at Key Stage 2 should support the transition from the Foundation Phase to KS2.

1.2.5 - Qualifications and Training

The range of qualifications held by staff working in the pilot settings varies greatly. A significantly higher proportion of staff are teachers with teacher qualifications in the maintained settings. The quality observations have shown that those settings with a higher proportion of qualified teachers score significantly higher on the ECERS-E (the curricular and pedagogical quality assessment) and the CIS (the 'emotional climate' assessment).

In respect of training there appears to be a large disparity in Foundation Phase training provided by each of the 22 LEAs across both sectors and at all levels - practitioner, head-teacher, governor and owner/manager. The Local Authorities reported difficulties in supporting Bilingualism without a stronger steer from either ACCAC or the Welsh Assembly Government and without further clarification on the meaning and expectations of Bilingualism. In addition a third of the LEAs reported difficulties for the non-maintained sector in attending local training largely due to a lack of available supply cover and the associated expenses. The Welsh Assembly Government did however finance the schools/settings to attend the Foundation Phase conferences which they provided in addition to some

training if it was available, through the £3,000 and £800 the schools and settings respectively received for management, training and resources.

When Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (MYM), National Childminders Association (NCMA), National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) Cymru and Wales Pre-school Playgroups Association (WPPA) senior representatives were interviewed about their role and responsibility for Foundation Phase training they reported that currently they did not have a specific role or remit but would welcome the opportunity to discuss a future role with the Welsh Assembly Government. MYM felt they had a crucial role in respect of their remit to train new staff to work in the Welsh medium sector in order to meet the future staffing needs for the Foundation Phase across Wales.

1.2.6 - Ratios

There is overwhelming support from both sectors for the 1:8 adult:child ratio for preschool, nursery and reception. All practitioners feel that the improved ratios in the maintained sector have made a positive difference to aspects of classroom management, environment and learning in their classrooms. In the non-maintained sector just over a quarter of practitioners felt that improving the ratios to 1:6 would be beneficial in terms of quality. There are very mixed feelings in the maintained sector in relation to the 1:13 ratio proposed for KS1 with 50% of respondents in agreement and 50% in disagreement feeling that lower ratios would be more appropriate. Around 60% of Early Years Advisors and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) reported that there had been difficulties in recruiting and then retaining suitably qualified staff in pilot settings. This was the case in both Welsh and English medium settings. Crucially it is important to reiterate that ratio benefits are confounded with qualifications and training. As highlighted in the findings on quality reported in Section 5 of the report those settings with a higher number of qualified teachers scored significantly higher on both the curricular quality and emotional climate assessments. In addition settings with high scores on curricular quality assessments tended to have high scores on the more general child centred assessments. Analysis showed that higher quality, especially on the curricular and pedagogical quality assessment ECERS-E, was associated with a higher ratio of children to staff. This finding is probably due to the fact that settings in the maintained sector which had more qualified teachers tended to have slightly higher adult:child ratios as well.

1.2.7 - Funding and Resources

The vast majority of maintained sector responses were very positive about the funding received for staffing the new improved ratios. Settings in both sectors felt that the funding for both resourcing and training was insufficient partly because it had to be shared out between resources, management and training. In addition there was concern that funding was not related to the number of Foundation Phase children in the particular pilot setting. In respect of training there was concern about the lack of sufficient availability of training from the LEAs. More than half the non-maintained settings experienced delays in receiving funding from their LEAs. Directors of

Education felt that more settings in the non-maintained sector rather than in the maintained sector do not currently have appropriate indoor accommodation for implementing the Foundation Phase. As for outdoor accommodation, the majority of Directors of Education felt that current outdoor accommodation in both sectors was generally not appropriate for implementing the Foundation Phase. Directors of Education felt they could not give specific details, as it was hard to generalise across all the maintained and non-maintained settings in each authority. They reported that there was a need for an in-depth audit of current accommodation provision in order to gain a clearer and more detailed picture of the current situation and future needs. One LEA has already begun this process with the maintained settings in their authority.

1.2.8 - Organisation and Management

Setting Level

All lead classroom practitioners have taken on more of a managerial role as a result of improved adult ratios and almost 70% felt they would benefit from training in people management. Roles have also changed for support staff in schools. In the non-maintained sector some lead practitioners feel they need support in planning and people management to contend with changes resulting from the Foundation Phase. Generally head-teachers are uncertain about how best to manage continuity across the primary school in respect of the seven AOLs. A large majority of owner-managers felt that the non-maintained sector continued to face existing difficulties in a number of areas: low staff wages; general lack of support/guidance; unavailable and inaccessible supply cover; insufficient training; nature of existing premises and outdoor facilities and delays in receipt of funding. The Welsh Assembly Government aims to establish a better partnership between the maintained and non-maintained sectors. The non-maintained sector Associations reported that given the Foundation Phase is still in its infancy a true partnership between both sectors has not yet been established and all stakeholders must remain committed to working towards this aim.

Local Authority/Non-maintained Sector Association Level

There are major inconsistencies between what strategies and developments are available to support the Foundation Phase, what each Local Authority is implementing and the level of involvement each pilot setting is receiving from their LEA. Early Years Advisors felt that they were actively involved with both sectors but these views contradict those of practitioners in terms of the support and training they feel they received. This may be explained by a mismatch in understanding and interpretation of what 'training' constitutes. However what is clear is that once again there seem to be inconsistencies between what each LEA is doing and the level of involvement the pilot settings receive. Around 60% of EYDCPs felt they were regularly informed of the progress of their pilot settings however a quarter of EYDCPs felt that they had no involvement with the pilot settings at all. The non-maintained sector Associations reported that they do not currently have the capacity to put in place additional strategies and

developments to support and train their pilot settings or memberships to help support the implementation of the Foundation Phase. However, they expressed a strong preference for discussing how this could be achieved with the Welsh Assembly Government if there is any expectation that they should shoulder some responsibility for supporting the implementation of the Foundation Phase in any practical way e.g. through providing training.

National Level

Although the sample of pilot settings includes all types of childcare and education providers, the settings were not randomly selected by LEAs and therefore cannot be considered *representative* of settings across Wales. Since the pilot settings were selected the Welsh Assembly Government has arranged meetings and conferences to enable the pilot settings to meet with them in order to share information and discuss how the pilot has been progressing (further details of this support structure can be found on page 68) General Local Authority opinion regarding the timescale of the national rollout is that it is realistic and achievable but only with the proviso of adequate resourcing, training and guidance in place. A number of aspects of Welsh Assembly Government communications systems regarding the FP are considered to be effective and efficient although there are areas requiring structural and communication improvements and development to aid the implementation process.

1.2.9 - Parents

Overall parents' responses were very positive to the key new components of the proposed Foundation Phase. There was most concern from a relatively low percentage of parents around the new AOL, Bilingualism and Multicultural Understanding, with parents needing further clarification as to what these terms mean and what will be covered in this new aspect of the curriculum. Worryingly, despite many pilot settings being proactive and using a range of strategies in an attempt to inform their parents, high numbers in both sectors had either not heard of the Foundation Phase or did not know what it was. Head-teachers and owner/managers feel strongly that a national advertising campaign is needed to raise awareness of parents and in the wider public domain.

1.3 Recommendations

1.3.1 - Curriculum, Pedagogy and Practice

- Pilot settings need ACCAC to deliver on outstanding curriculum guidance materials and associated guidance including assessment guidance as soon as possible.
- ACCAC and Welsh Assembly Government need to review and improve communication strategies with all stakeholders in respect of the status of the guidance materials.
- Welsh Assembly Government with ACCAC need to consider how the assessment continuum can aid and support implementing a national

assessment profile to be used in all Foundation Phase settings to aid and support issues of transition.

- Transition arrangements between the non-maintained sector and the maintained sector need to be improved and promoted by the EYDCPs with maintained settings taking more of a shared responsibility in order to best support children moving through the early stages of the Foundation Phase.
- Infant and Primary School head-teachers need to plan and train staff for more effective and improved transition procedures for children moving within the FP and from the FP into KS2.
- Further clarification is essential on the vision of Bilingualism in the FP. We understand from the Welsh Assembly Government that the Welsh Language Board is currently looking at the definition of Bilingualism (although this is not specifically in relation to the term Bilingualism in the FP).
- Head-teachers require LEA support and guidance to ensure effective continuity of the seven AOLs into KS2.
- School governing bodies need to take a more active role in decision making related to the Foundation Phase within their school.

1.3.2 - Staffing and Ratios

- Non-maintained settings would benefit from increased input from staff with teacher qualifications as proposed in the consultation document.
- Care should be taken to ensure that improving ratios does not take precedence over high quality training for staff working in schools and settings. Staff qualifications show a stronger relationship to quality of provision than ratios. This being the case the current policy on ratios further advantages the maintained sector when ratios are reduced to one adult to eight children. This will mean that the maintained sector will be operating with the same ratios as the non-maintained sector but with at least one member of staff in each school setting with teacher qualifications. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education research shows that provision which typically includes a ratio of one teacher to every nursery officer had higher quality and some higher child developmental outcomes. This means that ideally a greater input by teachers and qualified, NVQ level 3 staff is desirable to enhance quality and children's developmental outcomes.

1.3.3 - Training

- A national training policy for the Foundation Phase needs to be put in place based on existing good LEA practice to ensure parity, equity and high standards across Wales. Currently LEAs and local councils decide on the funding available for training. As a long term goal, we recommend aiming for greater consistency across local authorities.
- Increased LEA training and guidance are required to support practitioners in introducing the new AOL - Bilingualism and Multicultural Understanding to enable the vision to become a reality.

- Early Years Advisors and all non-maintained sector Associations should work more closely with pilot settings and all other LEA settings to discuss assessment arrangements and implement effective and relevant strategies.
- Welsh Assembly Government, LEAs, EYDCPs and non-maintained sector Associations (MYM, NCMA, NDNA Cymru and Wales PPA) need to begin a dialogue on how best to provide effective training and support for the non-maintained sector.
- LEAs and local councils need to ensure effective systems are in place to enable the non-maintained sector to access and attend LEA Foundation Phase training.
- Training in people management will be required for all lead practitioners in Foundation Phase settings especially where improved ratios are implemented as this increases the number of adults they work with.
- As the Foundation Phase rolls out there will need to be sufficient numbers of newly trained teachers specifically trained about the Foundation Phase. This will require a Foundation Phase strategy for training which incorporates continuing professional development of teachers and initial teacher education. Planning for this will need to commence almost immediately in order to meet the requirements of the planned roll-out.

1.3.4 - Funding and Resources

- Funding allocated to settings for resources, management and training should be considered per child head above an agreed initial amount for all settings regardless of type.
- Funding for staffing improved ratios needs to be considered in the light of evidence on quality in relation to staff qualifications. Higher ratios are desirable but not sufficient to raise quality in terms of children's learning, to do this training is necessary, particularly more specialist Foundation Phase trained teachers and NVQ 3 staff trained to the standards of the NNEB.
- Funding for training at LEA level needs to be planned, ring-fenced and allocated by Welsh Assembly Government in sufficient time for it to be utilised in the most effective way in each Authority.
- LEAs need to improve systems and infrastructure for allocating settings their funding on time particularly in the non-maintained sector.
- An audit of indoor and outdoor accommodation should be undertaken in each LEA to enable long term planning for improvements in order for settings to be able to develop the Foundation Phase effectively.

1.3.5 - Overall Implementation

- Effective and sustainable strategies are required to ensure adequate resourcing, training and guidance are available before national rollout commences without which quality and impact on children's learning may be compromised.

- The non-maintained sector may need more support and financing to ensure that the implementation is developed on a more level playing field.
- Local authorities and non-maintained Associations need a steer from Welsh Assembly Government in respect of their involvement with and training and support of both pilot settings and prospective FP settings to ensure greater parity across Wales.
- Effective communication systems established by Welsh Assembly Government need to be built on and developed to improve the implementation process. A review of whether current resources allocated at this level are sufficient needs to be undertaken.
- Prior to national rollout Welsh Assembly Government needs to plan for and implement an awareness raising campaign in the public domain so that parents are well informed about the FP.

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This Information Document focuses on the Executive Summary of the MEEIFP Report, the text of the full report which provides greater detail on the Project, its methodology, findings and evidence is available on the Foundation Phase website which can be accessed at www.learning.wales.gov.uk/foundationphase.

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