Investigating the procedures for target setting, progress tracking and intervention

Research to find patterns in how a representation of North Wales schools:

- ❖ **Set whole school / subject / individual pupil targets**
- ❖ **Ensure accuracy and consistency of interim assessments**
- ❖ **Track and Monitor pupils' progress**
- ❖ **Arrange successful interventions**
- ❖ **Ensure support and encouragements for FSM pupils**

How do schools set individual pupil targets?

It is the Headteacher or members of the SMT who set individual pupil targets in just under half of the schools visited. Most Headteachers defined the targets as challenging but attainable, with exceptions stating that the targets should be ambitious but not necessarily attainable. In the majority of these cases, some negotiation is allowed for on the basis of staff knowledge and the circumstances of specific pupils. In the majority of schools, previous performance and FFT are taken into account as a basis for target setting, with a minority of schools seeing value in the CATS test as an additional tool to identify factors that can have an impact on progress. Some schools consider FFT D individual targets to be too challenging, but the majority use FFT D as a baseline. Some schools noted there is flexibility to revise the targets as circumstances change as the year wears on. There are very few schools that do not challenge teachers on pupils' individual targets, and those that do not intend to do so in the future. A few schools noted that targets are discussed with pupils and that there is agreement with the pupil on the level of challenge. These schools are high performing schools.

Subject targets

A minority of schools use the total of the individual targets as a subject target. Taking into account that the majority of schools use FFT targets for individual pupils, departmental targets will therefore be extremely challenging and ambitious. This is especially true in cases where a school is reluctant to give a grade D target for fear of discouraging a pupil and so give a grade C target, even though it is highly unlikely that the pupil will achieve the grade. The majority of schools set targets for departments by using the FFT cohort for core subjects and adapting this, bearing in mind the current FSM group benchmarks. In instances where departments are given freedom to generate their targets, the SMT challenges the HoD on this percentage. Only one school allowed the department to determine a target and the department wasn't challenged on this. Many schools noted that the read across element when comparing a target across the range of subjects is an important part of the discussion, and barely any schools noted there was agreement with the department on a departmental target. These schools are also high performing schools.

Whole school targets

How schools determine whole school targets differed greatly. Some schools calculate targets in the main indicators using departmental target totals, which, in turn, arise from individual pupils' targets. This will of course give rise to very high targets. Some Headteachers noted that the targets are for the pupils and should not therefore be attainable. Several schools in the sample use a range of evidence, including the total of individual targets, departmental targets, FFT cohort targets, current FSM group benchmarks and then come to a professional judgement. A few also go a step further in that consideration also given to the likelihood of borderline pupils not

achieving their targets, and then consider carefully the impact of this on the whole school target. Then, there are less scientific methods, such as setting a target that would make the bottom of quartile 1 in the current FSM benchmarks, and others adopt FFT or FFT+ projections as their whole school targets.

Historically, the expectations of the different LAs within the GwE region have varied greatly. A minority of the region's schools were given a target from the LA; this caused frustration in those schools. Also, in most schools visited, Headteachers noted uncertainty regarding what is expected from GwE, and it was asked whether GwE actually requires targets or projections. It is felt there is criticism from GwE of those schools that do not meet their targets; but, again, if schools are to set challenging and ambitious targets it is unlikely that they will regularly meet their targets. Similarly, questions arise about the level of challenge provided in the few schools that exceed targets over a rolling period. Some Headteachers felt that schools are under pressure to set high targets e.g. to be in Quartile 1 and 2, although schools know through their tracking systems that this will not be attainable. Concern was expressed about GwE's expectation that targets should be above the median in the indicators without due consideration given to the nature of the cohort from one year to the next. This, naturally, is more of an issue in schools with small cohorts.

It is clear therefore there are significant differences in the way schools across the region set targets.

Factors to account for a difference between final projections and final results:

Mathematics was the most common reason, and specifically those schools that depended on the Y11 summer results. Some schools emphasised the impact of the results of a small group of borderline C/D pupils' in linear Mathematics on the Mathematics results profile, the TL2 and the CSI (especially with a small cohort). Other schools registered pupils in the summer of Year 10 and November of Year 11, with clear advantages. Most of those schools re-organised sets following the results, ensuring thorough intervention for borderline pupils who failed to achieve in the previous series. All schools noted intent to register current Year 11 pupils to sit Mathematics GCSE in November 2015.

The majority of schools state they have not been proactive enough in reducing the number of pupils who pass TL2+ in Language but not in Mathematics, and vice versa. Some schools have been proactive and reduced the number by means of thorough tracking and encouraging Language and Mathematics departments to discuss individual circumstances. In those schools where there is provision for Welsh First Language, more emphasis is given on passing in the strongest language.

In many schools where there is no provision for Welsh First Language, there is uncertainty with regard to tracking English and there is reference to the national uncertainty with regard to expectations and grade boundaries.

Some schools admitted that their tracking systems had not been incisive enough and, as a result, the appropriate pupils had not received intervention. There are other schools that have targeted too many pupils without the capacity to ensure that the intervention is effective with so many pupils.

It was surprising how many examples of staffing problems were noted, with many schools having to revamp due to staff absences so as to ensure appropriate staff for the more key sets and safeguard the school's percentages in the main indicators. Lack of availability of supply staff in Mathematics and English was noted to be very problematic, which has a direct impact on performance in some schools.

In schools where there was no significant gap, the following features were prominent:

❖ Effective tracking and monitoring of pupils on a regular basis throughout KS4

It is clear overall that the baseline has risen with regard to the types of tracking systems that are operational in schools. Even in those schools that have not been able to track thoroughly enough in recent years, there are either plans in place or about to start in order to ensure this. Use of data is also a strength in schools where there is no significant gap. Many schools invested in regular meetings between key staff and the school's focus, including the SMT, was on individual pupils rather than on percentages. Many of the other schools noted intent to do this during this academic year. The focus of most schools intensified as the cohort progressed to Year 11. The best examples of using data were in those schools where all staff were included, with the contribution of individual staff to the bigger picture evident. SMT members' thorough knowledge and understanding of the individual circumstances of key individuals in Year 11 was a common feature in schools performing close to their final projection. This knowledge and understanding was very impressive in schools with a big cohort of pupils. The majority of schools placed more emphasis on borderline C/D and A*/A, with a few schools placing a lot of emphasis on meeting targets whatever the grades. Many schools had plans to move more towards this direction in order to respond to the new indicators in 2018.

❖ Registering Maths and Language before the summer of Year 11

For obvious reasons, in those schools that registered Mathematics in the summer of Year 10 and November of Year 11, less of a gap between the result and final projection was an emerging pattern. But this was not always the case, as a few schools had not been proactive to seek to close the gap between the number of pupils who achieved C+ in Language but not in Mathematics, and vice versa. Overall, those schools with a high percentage of pupils sitting the Welsh First Language examination were more confident when predicting the final percentages, whilst some schools experienced difficulties due to the national uncertainty about the English GCSE expectations.

❖ Investing early so as to reap the benefits later

A few schools were of the opinion that pupils who had followed a curriculum based on skills development were better equipped to adjust and respond in an examination situation. A minority of schools noted a huge emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning, as the biggest difference can be made in the classroom, rather than being too dependent on additional sessions and various additions. Many of these schools have progressive plans in place to develop the resilience of pupils in the hope that it will give pupils a few extra percentages in examinations, aside from the fact that it will, of course, develop a very important characteristic for beyond their years in school.

Accuracy of assessments in individual subjects that inform schools' tracking systems

Headteachers were confident overall that departments use a full range of appropriate evidence to determine grades. Schools differed in how they did this, with around half the schools determining a likely grade and comparing this to a target, and others comparing current attainment and / or progress against a target. The majority of schools had increased the number of assessment points in KS4, some schools specifically in Year 11. Many schools stated they seek to encourage more ownership of the data amongst middle managers and teaching staff, and steer

departmental and whole school discussions towards pupils rather than figures. Amongst the problems noted were the fact that some teachers use assessments in order to convey a hard message to some pupils and also that some teachers confuse a likely grade and present attainment. It is a constant battle for SMT members in these schools to regularly reinforce the expectations. In those few schools that were concerned about the accuracy of assessments, it is not surprising that there was a significant gap between the final projection and the result.

Other findings about schools' tracking systems:

- Some schools acknowledged that their systems have not identified the appropriate pupils in the past and that they have been too ambitious with pupils who are not borderline C/D.
- Many schools have, or are about to, move from individual grades to using sub-grades so as to better target intervention. Many of the schools have started to plan for tracking the new indicators, but there is frustration and uncertainty as it is not possible to do this entirely through SIMS.
- Many schools are investing in commercial systems such as SISRA / 4MATRIX, which are based on the education system in England, but are useful to compare and ensure accountability of departments' interim assessments. One school is moving towards making more use of SIMS Discover after using 4Matrix for some years.
- Lack of capacity means that intervention needs to be prioritised; as a result, intervention occurs too late in some pupils' career in school.
- Occasionally, pupils who do not achieve TL2+ have not shown any signs of failing to achieve it.

Strategies that make a difference:

- All those schools with high results agree that the culture fostered is the key to high standards and a truly pupil-centred approach.
- Create a culture of high expectations – an expectation to succeed, high expectations from staff and a good knowledge and understanding of pupils.
- Increase staffing so as to give more attention to target groups in Mathematics and Language. Many schools use a member of the SMT as the additional member.
- Invest time for a timetabled weekly meeting between heads of departments / extended management team - a successful method of consistently driving the agenda forward across the school.
- Use staffing resources creatively to seek to ensure the best outcomes, including re-grouping Mathematics sets after the November results. Pupils who have achieved the target then concentrate on the L2 Personal Finance course (accredited course).
- Tailor lessons specifically for the areas that create difficulties for pupils – especially during the period leading up to the examinations
- Increase the number of Mathematics lessons on the timetable
- Headteacher insists on a list of target groups in every subject
- A number of schools have increased the capacity of the management team by co-opting additional members on a temporary basis - increasing capacity for monitoring and working with pupils.
- House system successful in some schools – fewer Year 11 pupils for the Head of House to concentrate on.

- 'Intervention Team' – varies considerably from school to school - learning coaches / senior class assistants. The effectiveness of support roles depends entirely on getting the right people to have an influence on pupils.
- Many schools have seen the value of increasing the time of the Head of Year / Progress Manager
- Using Year 11 BAC lessons (after February accreditation) – planned the timetable to ensure that target group teachers in Mathematics and Language are available during these periods.
- Controlled Assessment days in English – preparation in the morning and writing in the afternoon. Some schools set different (and higher) targets for controlled assessments in English.
- Extra sessions after school
- Revision Skills sessions - some schools pay external companies, but internal sessions led by influential staff and Year 12/13 pupils have proved successful.
- An additional weekly Mathematics lesson after school from January Year 11 onwards
- Release Heads of Mathematics and Language from registration duties – interview borderline pupils daily
- Staff a mock Mathematics examination with Mathematics teachers who have knowledge and understanding of the pupils - are able to boost them to battle on and to persevere - part of the school's strategy to develop pupils' resilience - not allowed to leave until they have attempted every question!
- In some schools, there is comprehensive provision (up to 4 evenings a week) in a range of subjects and free transport to take pupils home.
- Revision workshops during school holidays
- Sunday workshops before a Monday examination
- Use external companies – motivation workshops and so forth - a different and independent voice. Some schools invest significant money and see value and impact, even though it is difficult to quantify this.
- Some school moving away from providing more sessions during school holidays - placing more focus on the effectiveness of lessons during term time
- School climate and culture varies greatly - in some schools, staff are proactive and arrange sessions with no pay. In others, the school has arranged a programme and staff are paid. Some schools' sessions are optional, and key pupils choose not to be present.
- Some schools target specific pupils for extra sessions - rather than providing for all pupils.
- Using registration periods for Literacy and Number work and Language / Mathematics
- Some schools develop mindfulness principles to control stress
- Target group pupils carry a mentoring book with them to all lessons - teachers record so as to enrich discussion with the mentor. Other schools use 'Enter Comments' within SIMS to share messages between subject teachers and the mentor.

Provision and Support for FSM pupils

- ❖ Most school provide resources e.g. free educational visits, free revision guidelines, free educational resources from the school shop and so forth
- ❖ Many schools state they have now raised awareness of who the FSM pupils are, and that subject teachers, heads of subjects and heads of year are expected to mentor and support FSM pupils.
- ❖ Many schools state that each FSM pupil has access to a mentor. A minority of schools have appointed an FSM Champion. Others use learning coaches to support them and regularly meet with pupils.

- ❖ Many schools intentionally include FSM pupils when monitoring books in the expectation that subject teachers will give them specific attention if they know that their books will be monitored. Also, FSM pupil participation and support for FSM pupils is a focus during lesson observations.
- ❖ One school priorities phoning the homes of Year 11 FSM pupils on the first day of absence.
- ❖ Ensure that experienced staff teach C/D sets and sets with FSM pupils.

Recommendations for GwE/LAs:

- ➢ Ensure that all of the region's schools are clear about the purpose of targets and projections and that there is consistency in the way they are set.
- ➢ Ensure that those schools with less developed procedures receive support and guidance.
- ➢ Establish a working group of school leaders and technical experts in order to set up a generic system to track the new indicators, which can be adapted to the needs of individual schools.
- ➢ Acknowledge that some cohorts will not perform as well as previous cohorts due to the nature and innate ability of the pupils, and that this should not necessarily be considered a weakness or a step backwards. This is especially true of smaller schools.
- ➢ Convey to Welsh Government officials that recruitment problems in key subjects (especially so in the short/medium term) have a direct impact on standards in schools.

Recommendations for schools:

- ➢ Ensure that a range of robust and accurate evidence forms the basis for school targets and projections.
- ➢ Include pupils, parents and teachers in the discussion on setting targets for individual pupils; in so doing, they have ownership.
- ➢ Ensure the accountability of the school's middle managers through questioning and challenging when targets are not challenging enough or when interventions do not have an appropriate impact on underperformance.
- ➢ Prepare for any changes to tracking and intervention procedures in the wake of the new indicators from 2018 onwards (first cohort - Year 10 September 2016).
- ➢ Continue to develop the effective use of data

Schools visited:

Ysgol Eirias	Elfed High School
Ysgol Castell Alun	Flint High School
Ysgol Brynhyfryd	Ysgol Botwnnog
Ysgol St Blessed Edwards	Ysgol yr Alun
Ysgol Aberconwy	Ysgol y Moelwyn
Ysgol y Creuddyn	Ysgol Brynrefail
Hawarden High School	Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones
Ysgol David Hughes	Ysgol Ardudwy