

Introduction

This thematic survey is expected to support the Welsh Government by achieving the following objectives:

- To focus on the challenges and successes of the all-age model
- To provide a state of the nation report on all-age schools

The all-age schools sector is a growing sector, with more than double the number of schools open in 2020 compared with 2017. This report is focused on three broad areas:

- The rationale for establishing an all-age school
- Setting up all-age schools
- The impact of an all-age school model

An all age school can be defined as a school that combines at least two stages of a child's education (typically primary and secondary). In Wales, all-age schools are classified as middle schools and defined according to the age range of pupils that they provide for. This could be either from age 3 or 4 to ages 16 or 19. Most of the all-age schools in Wales provide education for pupils aged 3 to 16 years old and therefore include nursery provision. About half also include a sixth form that extends the age range up to 19 years old. Around a half of all-age schools are English medium schools with the others being either Welsh medium or bilingual. In 2021, six all-age schools have resource base provision.

A team of 12 HMI and two peer inspectors gathered evidence through visits to all the all-age schools that are open in Wales. Local authorities were contacted for their views through a combination of phone calls and visits.

Prior to the start of the pandemic in March 2020, during visits to providers, the team interviewed leaders and teachers. They met with governors and carried out learning walks. Pupils' views were gathered through interviews during these visits. The pupils were in small groups with their work to exemplify and evidence what they were saying. This thematic work was paused because of the pandemic and activity resumed in April 2021. At this time, the team were unable to observe lessons or partake learning walks. Interviews with staff and pupils were limited due to COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, instead, inspectors analysed existing information about all-age schools to establish the context and background. They also considered inspection evidence for the 12 all-age schools inspected. Since the all-age schools sector is still in its infancy, this can be considered as an initial report on the state of the sector.