Evaluating the Foundation Phase
Key Findings on Children and Families

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The Foundation Phase (introduced in 2008) provides a developmentally appropriate experiential curriculum for children aged 3-7 in Wales. The Welsh Government commissioned independent evaluation (led by WISERD) aims to evaluate how well it is being implemented, what impact it has had, and ways in which it can be improved. The three-year evaluation utilises a range of mixed methods at a national and local scale.

This is one of four papers focused on **implementation**. It draws on 239 classroom/setting observations, 341 practitioner interviews, 604 school/setting and 671 Year 2 survey responses, 1,008 parent/carer survey responses, 37 Local Authority interviews, four non-maintained organisation interviews and direct work with children.

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Key Findings

- The majority of **parents/carers agreed with the principles of the Foundation Phase**, and generally reported high levels of satisfaction with their child's education.
- On the whole, **parent/school relationships, although an aim of the Foundation Phase, do not appear to have changed** as a result of its introduction (the situation remains similar to that under Key Stage 1).
- However, **parents/carers did report being fairly knowledgeable** about the principles of the Foundation Phase (although 72% reported that they would like further information, mainly from their child's school/funded non-maintained setting).
- **Children were often found to be involved in the day-to-day running of the Foundation Phase** via daily roles/responsibilities and collaborative planning, but **adult-initiated learning was observed more often** than child-initiated learning.
- Observations, Year 1 classroom tours and Year 2 focus group discussions suggest there is a positive association between Foundation Phase pedagogies and children's **enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning**.

Further Key Findings

Parent/carer involvement and views

The national survey data indicates that head teachers and leaders of funded non-maintained settings do not generally perceive parents/carers to have been very **involved in the implementation** of the Foundation Phase.

Parents/carers were rarely observed or said to be involved in the **day-to-day running** of the Foundation Phase either.

Only in a minority of our case study schools were parents/carers said to be involved in **activity planning** sessions.

As reported in the *Key Findings on Reported Impacts*, 54% of parent/carer survey respondents reported being very **satisfied with their child's education** in the Foundation Phase, 35% reported being satisfied, 8% neutral and 3% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Parents/carers were most supportive of the Foundation Phase being **'varied and interesting', 'explorative and investigative'** and **'covering a broad range of skills'**.

There was less (although still substantial) support for **'children being given choice in their learning'** and being able to **'learn at their own pace'** (parents of children attending funded non-maintained settings were more supportive of these principles).

24% of head teachers thought that **parents/carers had been very welcoming of the Foundation Phase**, 56% thought that parents/carers had been fairly welcoming and 20% reported that parents/carers had expressed some resistance[1].

Parents/carers of children attending funded non-maintained settings were said to be **slightly more welcoming** of the Foundation Phase than parents/carers of children attending schools.

Child involvement and views

As reported in the *Key Findings on Pedagogy and Understanding*, 57% of the teachers we observed reported making considerable efforts to **involve children in their planning**.

64% of the children that took part in the Year 2 survey reported liking school 'a

[1] The funded non-maintained survey data was similar, although 10% fewer setting leaders thought that parents/carers had expressed some resistance.

lot', and between 55 and 58% reported liking reading, writing and number work 'a lot'. Children also generally reported liking to ask questions in class, behaving well and trying their best at school.

Year 2 Foundation Phase pupils surveyed in 2012/13 reported **liking school more** than Year 2 Key Stage 1 pupils surveyed in 2008 (also in Wales) as part of the Millennium Cohort Study[2].

Girls generally reported more positive attitudes towards learning than boys, and **children who frequently read at home with a grown-up** reported more positive attitudes towards learning than children who did not.

As also reported in the *Key Findings on Child Involvement and Wellbeing*, children were generally observed to **enjoy and engage in learning more when key Foundation Phase pedagogies were being used** (e.g. child choice and experiential learning).

When asked in the focus group discussions what was **best about being in Year 2**, the most common (ranked) responses were 'choice', 'creative opportunities' and 'maths'. When asked what was **hardest about being in Year 2**, the most common (ranked) responses were 'maths', 'spelling/writing' and 'concentrating for a long time'.

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[2] The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) is a research project following the lives of around 19,000 children born in the UK in 2000-01.