1. Introduction

1.1 In July 2018, Arad Research was appointed by the Welsh Government to evaluate the School Based Supply Cluster Model Project (the Project). The Welsh Government provided grant funding for two years for 18 pilot school cluster projects in 15 local authorities, to trial the employment of supernumerary teachers to manage absence cover (planned or unplanned). Each cluster comprised of a group of schools within a local authority with one school acting as the lead and main grant holder for the project. Clusters were provided with grant funding to cover 100 per cent of the Project’s costs for year 1 from September 2017; with clusters provided with grant funding for 75 per cent of costs for year 2 (from September 2018). The Project also intended to build workforce capacity by employing recently qualified teachers.

1.2 The pilot nature of the Project offers significant opportunity for learning both in terms of reforms to the current education system in Wales and impetus for regional working. This independent evaluation delivers an assessment of the design, implementation and outcomes of the Project and provides learning for future policy and practice in this area.

1.3 In recent years several key publications and developments have prioritised improving supply provision and teaching in Wales; including the trialling of a regional collaborative model for the delivery of supply teaching being recommended. From September 2019 the National Procurement Services Supply Teachers Framework for Wales will be active, and the work of the Managing Workload and Reducing Bureaucracy Group is also looking at managing workforce wellbeing and workload.

1.4 The Project’s intended outcomes were to:

- Implement alternative and innovative arrangements that address school absence cover (planned and unplanned absence);
- Support Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in short term supply roles in terms of professional development and retention;
- Aid efficiencies, evidence added value and potential cost savings against the school; and
- Promote best practice in collaboration and joint working across school clusters.

1.5 A mixed methods approach was undertaken for the evaluation, with opportunities provided for all pilot clusters and key stakeholders to contribute. This approach ensured opportunity for deeper analysis and the corroboration of findings. Representatives from all cluster lead schools, 25 supernumerary teachers and 24 other stakeholders were interviewed, and 34 other cluster schools completed an online survey during the course of the evaluation. This evaluation presents the findings of research conducted from September 2018 to July 2019 regarding the implementation and impact of the Project during years 1 and 2. A follow-up report will be published in September 2020, which will explore the longer term impact of the Project.

2. Key findings

Management and delivery

Engagement and recruitment

2.1 Local authorities informed clusters about the Project in July 2017, in some cases targeting schools that faced particular supply challenges (e.g. accessing Welsh-medium supply cover). Recruitment took place once the 2017-2018 academic year had started and due to this delayed start, some clusters were not able to access the full 100 per cent funding for the full first year of the Project. Recruitment took longer than anticipated for some clusters, with a few clusters receiving fewer applications than expected. Cluster lead schools reported that an increased project lead-in time would have been helpful, as well as the opportunity to recruit for the start of the academic year. A minority of clusters needed to recruit during the pilot period, as some supernumerary teachers secured permanent positions. Although this process has disrupted project delivery, schools recognised that providing a route into a full-time teaching post is a measure of the Project’s success.

Delivery models adopted by the clusters

2.2 There was variation in the structure of each cluster and the type of school that took on the role of cluster lead. The number of schools and supernumerary teachers in each cluster ranged from one to ten.
2.3 The evaluation identified four overarching delivery models adopted by clusters to timetable the supernumerary teacher/s. Table 2.1 shows the strengths and challenges of the four different delivery models clusters adopted.

Table 2.1. The strengths and challenges of the different delivery models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delivery model</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block timetable (half or whole term in each school)</td>
<td>Working relationships with staff and learners developed quickly.</td>
<td>Less opportunity to share ongoing practice between schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consistent procedures for supernumerary teacher.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed weekly/fortnightly timetable in several schools</td>
<td>Class teachers released regularly to focus on school priorities.</td>
<td>Less flexibility to respond to short-notice / emergency cover needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consistency for supernumerary teachers and learners.</td>
<td>Opportunity for NQT observation/assessment with regular classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible timetable according to demand</td>
<td>Cover could be provided at short notice.</td>
<td>Can be burdensome to administer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring of equitable share needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Difficult to ensure NQT induction requirements were met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of flexible and fixed</td>
<td>Regular PPA cover provided.</td>
<td>Ensuring opportunities for NQT observations were fulfilled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility for emergency cover available.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Monitoring and evaluation

2.4 Cluster lead schools were generally positive about the flexibility with which Welsh Government had approached the monitoring of the grant. On the whole, cluster lead schools found the monitoring requirements (in particular, claim forms) proportionate to the amount of financial support received as part of the Project. However, clusters faced some challenges in collating and submitting monitoring data on occasion, such as: ensuring data
was gathered consistently from all cluster schools and ensuring school-level data could be translated into claim form sections correctly. An end of year report was also required from clusters, but no specific template was provided and so the level of detail varied in the reports at the end of the first year. Arad Research provided a template for the second end-of-year report and supported clusters with this process.

3. Project outcomes

Teaching and learning

3.1 The Project has had a positive effect on teaching and learning, as supernumerary teachers have immersed themselves in school life, and over time their lesson planning and pedagogy improved. Cluster leads and other schools in the clusters reported that the quality of teaching had improved when compared with supply teachers sourced through traditional supply routes. The Project has been seen as an investment in the quality of supply teachers, as well as in capacity.

3.2 The Project helped alleviate pressure on other teachers, cluster leads commented that they felt teachers have benefitted from increased confidence in the cover available, knowing that they can take time away from their classroom without detriment to learners’ education.

3.3 Some clusters used supernumerary teachers’ subject specialisms effectively. This included in Welsh-medium secondary schools, where supernumerary teachers brought skills in specialist subject areas where there has traditionally been a shortage of teachers.

3.4 The quality and consistency of pupils’ learning experience improved when using supernumerary teachers, with the emotional well-being of learners addressed with a more stable learning experience.

3.5 Supernumerary teachers have helped support effective transition and progression of teaching and learning between key stages, with improved planning provision for year 7 enabling better progression.

3.6 Supernumerary teachers have made a positive difference to behaviour by becoming familiar with and applying schools’ behaviour management approaches.

3.7 Additional learning needs (ALN) provision has been supported by the Project, for some clusters this was their focus and the stability provided by supernumerary teachers was very beneficial to learners. There has also been an increase in capacity to deliver Welsh-medium ALN provision in mainstream schools as a result of the Project, with a specialist Welsh-medium teacher released to deliver support in Welsh-medium primary schools.
Wider school improvement

3.8 Using supernumerary teachers on a regular and planned basis has supported wider school priorities. Rather than using the teachers to cover short-notice sickness absence, many clusters have tried to make purposeful use of the teachers’ time to gain added value from the Project. As a result, staff have been released to work on more strategic, whole-school improvement activities.

3.9 Some of the school improvement priorities schools were able to work on as a result of being able to release staff included literacy provision, undertaking action research, improving moderation processes, evaluation and monitoring systems, transition planning and behaviour approaches. Without such supply cover, cluster schools reported that teachers would commonly complete school improvement activities in their own time.

3.10 Another important element teachers were able to undertake during their release time involved preparing the teachers and the school for the new curriculum and assessment arrangements, e.g. cross-curricular planning. Supernumerary teachers also released staff for professional development, with staff able to attend training, such as ALN.

3.11 Cluster schools, on occasion have been able to make best use of supernumerary teachers’ existing skillset and expertise to address particular improvement areas (such as supporting nurture activities), with others able to support extra-curricular activities, external supply agency teachers are usually unable to do this.

3.12 Supernumerary teachers have also been able to share learning with colleagues in different schools to support professional learning, having observed teaching and learning in different settings.

Cluster collaboration

3.13 For some clusters, the Project has been effective in strengthening collaboration between schools. Schools with strong collaborative cluster working before the project reported improved collaboration. However, some noted that the Project had limited impact on the already well-established collaborative working relationship. Having flexibility in the allocation of the supernumerary teachers was viewed positively. Cluster schools discussed the management and delivery of the Project regularly and communications were effective between the schools involved. The motivation to engage in future collaborative working between cluster schools has also increased.

3.14 Cluster schools shared effective management approaches and tools throughout the Project. For example, an online calendar was used to oversee the allocation of the supernumerary teachers. Having a single member of staff, usually at the cluster lead school, as the main point of contact for supernumerary teachers was also effective.
3.15 Supernumerary teachers shared teaching and learning approaches between cluster schools. The sharing of practices such as approaches to the new curriculum, behaviour management strategies, approaches to support learners or specific curriculum delivery ideas were reported as positive outcomes for the collaborative cluster working aspect of the Project.

3.16 Collaborative cluster school projects were successfully completed during the Project. Cluster projects have been directly supported by supernumerary teachers delivering activities across cluster schools, or providing the cover of lessons needed for other teachers to complete such activities, attend meetings or training in order to progress a cluster project.

3.17 The Project has had a positive impact on transition processes for schools and learners, with supernumerary teachers who work across phases able to develop longer-term relationships with year 6 learners and act as a ‘familiar face’ during their transition. Consistency in the approach to behaviour management and learning also supported effective transition to the secondary phase.

**Supernumerary teachers**

3.18 Supernumerary teachers benefitted from the development of their skills, competence and confidence, particularly through the experience of teaching different age groups in a range of schools with different pedagogical approaches and increased teacher independence.

3.19 A range of professional development opportunities were delivered to supernumerary teachers, with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) provided within the lead school and also in other cluster schools. The range of training provided addressed individual teacher requirements and school development targets such as pedagogy / teaching approaches / implementation of the new curriculum.

3.20 Thirty-eight supernumerary teachers completed their NQT induction. Supernumerary teachers often received additional support from the school to provide them with opportunities to address the necessary elements to complete the induction. Teachers highlighted the challenge of access to CPD and NQT support when working as a daily supply teacher and the difficulty in addressing required elements of the practising teacher standards in contrast with the support received in their supernumerary role.

3.21 Supernumerary teachers benefitted from the consistent mentor support they received for their NQT induction, and the facilitated opportunities to complete the required lesson planning/ preparation /evaluation. However, a lack of consistent, regular teaching in classes to allow for the preparation/evaluation element required to complete their NQT induction was a barrier on occasion.
3.22 Twenty-seven teachers gained permanent employment while undertaking the supernumerary role. Some teachers wanted to continue working within their current/lead school or within the cluster and felt they were in a better position to apply for these jobs knowing the pedagogical approaches across the cluster as well as the experience and training gained to support their application.

3.23 Supernumerary teachers were positive about the pay and conditions associated with the role and welcomed the recognition of their professional status, with the consistency and stability of the role regarded better than day to day supply teaching.

3.24 The supernumerary contract was extended for 14 teachers and they will continue in the role until 2020, other teachers noted that they would have welcomed the opportunity to be able to continue in the role. On the other hand, some teachers reported that they would like to move on to experience teaching their own class and feel they have developed the skills to do so.

3.25 Development of positive relationships has been an additional outcome of the Project with supernumerary teachers building relationships with schools and being part of a school team; and the consistency of the role enabled them to feel part of a school community.

**Efficiencies and financial benefits**

3.26 There is some evidence that the Project has supported efficiency in supply management. Clusters who normally use external supply agencies to provide some of their supply cover were able to reflect on the time and resource benefits to using regular supernumerary teachers. Administratively, cluster schools reported that using supernumerary teachers placed fewer demands on colleagues’ time.

3.27 One approach to identifying the cost efficiency of the Project is to compare the total Welsh Government grant amount claimed by clusters to date, with estimates of the financial value of the number of supply days covered by supernumerary teachers. Although £2.7 million was available for this pilot Project; the actual total is likely to be lower than this by the end of the Project, partly due to the fact that the Project could only start in most clusters from the second term of the first year. In addition, some clusters faced challenges in recruiting the anticipated number of supernumerary teachers. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the comparison of cost to provide the supply cover, and suggests that the grant funding has been used fairly effectively, but that there will also be other overheads associated with the employment of a supernumerary teacher. These figures will be amended for the follow-up evaluation report (2020), with the grant fund claims from April – August 2019 included.
### Table 3.1. Overview of the cost comparison to provide supply cover

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total grant available</td>
<td>£2,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount claimed (Nov 2017-March 2019)</td>
<td>£1,296,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of absence days requiring cover</td>
<td>22,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days covered by supernumerary teachers</td>
<td>6,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated cost of covering the supernumerary days using external supply agencies</td>
<td>£902,382 – £1,078,935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.28 However, the above figures do not necessarily provide an accurate portrayal of the way in which supernumerary teachers have been allocated during the Project;

- There are some weaknesses and gaps in the data provided in cluster claim forms.
- Not all cluster schools would have been paying for external supply agency teachers to meet their cover needs, instead using internal supply options, such as Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs).
- The Project has provided added value to cluster schools by allowing them to release staff to work on school improvement priorities; there are challenges for schools to release staff regularly without funding for the staff cover.

3.29 There are limitations to any conclusions relating directly to the overall value of supply cover provided by the supernumerary teachers compared to Welsh Government and cluster financial input, and previous supply systems. Cluster schools have benefitted from additional supply cover which they would not necessarily have accessed without the Project; in many cases, their use of supernumerary teachers does not therefore reflect usual supply requirements. The Project has provided additional capacity for schools to undertake desired activities.

### Sustainability

3.30 Cluster lead schools reported that the management and administration of their project would have been sustainable in the long-term. Clusters did not find the administration of the project overly burdensome or time-consuming once they had established appropriate processes.

3.31 Around a third of clusters are either continuing or considering continuing some elements of their project into the third year, following the end of Welsh Government funding. The remaining clusters held discussions on the possibility of continuing and cluster lead schools reported a clear desire amongst almost all schools to continue if possible.
Considering the perceived benefits of the project cluster lead schools reported significant disappointment with their inability to continue their project. A few key barriers to sustainability were identified by cluster schools:

- Higher costs associated with employing salaried supernumerary teachers compared to the ad-hoc costs of agency-supply teachers.
- Higher costs associated with employing supernumerary teachers compared to the limited costs of internal supply cover (such as HLTAs, existing cover supervisors and supply insurance schemes).
- Inability to realise cost savings in a climate of financial deficit.

3.32 Cluster lead schools not continuing their projects are likely to return to their previous supply models in the short term; including reverting to using internal supply cover (such as HLTAs and cover supervisors who are already employed and able to provide cover) and external supply (such as reverting to the usual supply agencies).

3.33 In the long-term, clusters expressed some willingness to re-consider running a similar supply project within their cluster but only under certain circumstances; such as reduction in the financial deficit currently facing schools; changes to teacher pay and conditions to take into account the new supernumerary role; opportunities to establish paid-for supply cluster models similar to existing local authority-level supply pools.

4. Conclusions and future considerations

Conclusions

4.1 The evaluation of the School Based Supply Cluster Model Project has examined the benefits and challenges associated with the design, implementation and outcomes for the Project.

The implementation of alternative and innovative arrangements to address school absence cover

4.2 The clusters that participated in the pilot Project, designed and implemented a range of alternative and innovative arrangements to address their absence cover. Different approaches to managing and timetabling the supernumerary teachers were employed; ranging from specific blocks of time in each school (e.g. a half term or whole term) to an entirely flexible timetable according to the demand from schools for cover.

4.3 Teachers were deployed to address a range of tasks; including emergency supply cover, regular Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) cover; which could include the
delivery of consistent cluster-wide projects; set regular class/subject lessons and transition project work. The autonomy and flexibility the Project allowed meant clusters were able to assess the effectiveness of the design and delivery model they used, and a small number adapted their model for the second year.

The support for NQT teachers in short term supply roles in terms of professional development and retention

4.4 A range of professional development opportunities were delivered to supernumerary teachers, providing training to address individual teacher requirements and school development targets.

4.5 Many supernumerary teachers successfully completed their NQT induction. Some supernumerary teachers highlighted the challenge of access to CPD and NQT support they had experienced when working as a daily supply teacher previously. The availability of the consistent mentor support supernumerary teachers received also benefitted their progress. However, for some there was a lack of regular teaching in classes to allow for the preparation/evaluation element required to complete the NQT induction and this was a barrier on occasion.

4.6 Several teachers gained permanent employment while undertaking the supernumerary role, and some wanted to continue working in their current role or within one of their cluster schools. For other supernumerary teachers, their contract was being extended and they would continue in the role until 2020. Others noted that they would have welcomed the opportunity to be able to continue in the role. This demonstrates the potential for similar future projects to improve the retention of teaching staff in some clusters.

Efficiencies, evidence of added value and potential cost savings

4.7 There is some evidence that the pilot Project has supported efficiency in supply management. Administratively, cluster schools reported that using supernumerary teachers placed fewer demands on colleagues’ time.

4.8 Although £2.7 million was available for this Project; the actual total is likely to be lower than this by the end of the Project, partly due to the fact that the Project could only start in most clusters from the second term of the first year. The amount claimed (Nov 2017-March 2019) by clusters was £1,296,294; the total number of absence days requiring cover for this period was 22,242, with 6,539 of these covered by supernumerary teachers. The estimated cost of covering these supernumerary days using external supply agencies is between £902,382 – £1,078,935. This suggests that the grant funding has been used
fairly effectively, but that there will also be other overheads associated with the employment of a supernumerary teacher.

4.9 However, these figures do not necessarily provide an accurate portrayal of the way in which supernumerary teachers have been allocated. Firstly, there were some weaknesses and gaps in the data provided within cluster claim forms. Secondly, not all clusters schools paid for external supply agency teachers to meet their cover needs, but instead used internal supply options. Thirdly, the Project has provided added value to cluster schools by allowing them to release staff to work on school improvement priorities; releasing these staff so regularly would have otherwise been difficult or impossible, without the funding for cover.

4.10 Consequently, it is not truly possible to draw conclusions relating directly to the overall value of supply cover provided by the supernumerary teachers compared to Welsh Government and cluster financial input, and previous supply systems. The Project has allowed cluster schools to benefit from additional supply cover which they would not necessarily have accessed without the Project; in many cases, their use of supernumerary teachers does not therefore reflect usual supply requirements. The supernumerary teachers have, in other words, provided additional capacity for schools to undertake desired activities.

4.11 Clusters did not find the administration of the project overly burdensome or time-consuming once they had established appropriate processes. Around a third of clusters are either continuing or considering continuing some elements of their project into the third year. The remaining clusters held discussions on the possibility of continuing and cluster lead schools reported a clear desire amongst almost all schools to continue if possible. Cluster lead schools reported significant disappointment with their inability to continue their project. A number of financial barriers to sustainability for the Project were identified by cluster leads.

The promotion of best practice in collaboration and joint working across school clusters

4.12 Cluster collaboration has generally been strengthened and promoted across clusters, for some clusters they were already working well prior to the Project and this continued. Effective management approaches were shared and built upon during the Project.

4.13 The promotion of best practice was evident as supernumerary teachers shared teaching and learning approaches between cluster schools.

4.14 Successful collaborative cluster school projects were also completed during the pilot Project with supernumerary teachers delivering activities across cluster schools, or
supernumerary teachers providing cover for lessons for other teachers to complete such activities, attend meetings or training in order to progress a cluster project. This links closely to the intentions for the Welsh Government’s priority to manage workforce well-being and workload for the sector. Joint working towards effective transition processes was also positive, with supernumerary teachers working across phases providing consistency in approach to behaviour and learning to support effective transition to the secondary phase.

5. Future considerations

5.1 Drawing on the conclusions of the evaluation, it is unlikely that any other school clusters would initiate joint approaches to addressing the issue of supply cover without there being grant funding in place.

5.2 There is sufficient evidence of successful outcomes for the Welsh Government to consider supporting a second phase of the School Based Supply Cluster Project. There are clear learning points to consider in planning and designing a second phase:

i. Ensure sufficient lead-in time to allow for widespread advertising of posts and recruitment of suitable candidates to start at the time most appropriate for each school. There is potential to target NQTs, from a central register; working with EWC (Education Workforce Council) and universities.

ii. Aim to ensure that clusters are operational from the beginning of an academic year.

iii. Consider alternative options for the provision of grant funding in a tapered way over a three-year period, allowing clusters to embed the process effectively.

iv. Continue to take a flexible approach, encouraging clusters to devise and implement models of working that work best for them (in terms of numbers of schools, numbers of supernumerary teachers and how the supernumerary teachers are deployed).

v. Invite applications from clusters to participate in the Project, requiring clusters to specify how the Project would be used to support wider school improvement priorities; how CPD will be delivered to NQTs; how the Project links to wider activities to support the new curriculum.

vi. Conditions should be attached to the funding to ensure that the Project is not used for long-term supply cover in a single school, ensuring that supernumerary teachers are given experience of teaching in a range of schools and Key Stages, where possible.
vii. Clusters should commit to making use of supernumerary teachers’ specialist skills.

viii. The line management system and accountability needs to be clear; including who has responsibility for organising NQT support and training. Completion of the NQT induction requires teachers to plan a sequence of lessons and future similar projects could ensure that opportunities for this are established with set classes on the timetable for some of the time.

ix. If a similar initiative is delivered in future and continues to target NQTs, there is potential to establish and facilitate a network to provide those in the role with peer support.

x. For similar future projects, clusters could be provided with examples and guidance regarding advertising for posts, and the allocation of the supernumerary teacher/s within their cluster e.g. the different possible timetabling approaches and ensure there is a balance between the needs of the cluster and the expectation for professional development for the supernumerary teacher.

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Available at: [https://gov.wales/evaluation-school-based-supply-clusters](https://gov.wales/evaluation-school-based-supply-clusters)

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Mae’r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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