



Guidance for inspectors

How we inspect

Local government education services – for inspections from September 2024



This guidance is also available in Welsh.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Introduction

Purpose of this guidance

This guidance sets out the way we will conduct inspections of local government education services (LGES) from September 2024. Please read this in conjunction with our guidance on [LGES 2024 What We Inspect.docx](#) in LGES inspections.

Local government education services cover statutory education functions of the local authority for children and young people up to age 25. This includes education services provided on behalf of a local authority by:

- a school improvement service
- a partnership between two or more local authorities
- another organisation commissioned by the local authority (for example, a voluntary organisation or a private company)

These other providers or shared services may be inspected separately from a local authority, and are referred to in this guidance as 'other education services providers'. In such inspections, inspectors would only apply the sections of the framework that cover the relevant education services.

The guidance sets out how we will follow-up with local authorities, commissioned services or partnership services causing significant concern. Local authorities and their partners can use this guidance to understand how we will conduct inspections. It may also help them self-evaluate and plan for improvement.

You will find more information and guidance about inspections on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales.

Legal basis and policy background for the inspection of local government education services

Inspections of LGES are carried out under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997 which provides that His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales (HMCI) 'may, and, if requested to do so by the Secretary of State, shall, arrange for any local authority to be inspected'. Such an inspection 'shall consist of a review of the way in which the authority are performing any function which relates to the provision of education for (a) persons of compulsory school age (whether at school or otherwise) or (b) for persons of any age above or below that age who are registered as pupils at schools maintained by the authority'.

Other aspects of local government education services are subject to inspection under a range of legislation, including the functions conferred on them under sections 25 and 26 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 relating to education, training or youth support services (within the meaning of section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000). We will update this guidance as necessary to take account of the role of local

authorities in the implementation of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act, as well as the role of Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research and our relationship with Medr.

The Children Act 2004 introduces a duty on local authorities and their partners to co-operate to improve the well-being of children. As far as local authorities are concerned, the inspectorate is given the powers to review a local authority's functions relating to Section 51 of the Act, namely in co-operating to improve well-being and producing children and young people's plans where these functions relate to education, training or youth support services.

Section 51 of The Children Act 2004 changes the Education Act 1997 so that 'An inspection of a local education authority in Wales under this section shall consist of a review of the way in which the authority are performing:

- any function conferred on them in their capacity as a local education authority
- the functions conferred on them under sections 25 and 26 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 relating to education, training or youth support services'

The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 reinforces the powers of entry and right to documentation that is enshrined in previous legislation.

In response to the Children Act 2004 requiring inspectorates to work more closely together, HMI may be joined by inspectors from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Health Inspectorate Wales (HIW). HMI may also be joined on inspections by additional inspectors (AI) authorised under paragraph 2 of Schedule 1 of the School Inspections Act 1996. HMCI may, under Section 41 of the Education Act 1997, as amended by the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004, request Audit Wales to assist with any inspection under Section 38. HMCI and Audit Wales have agreed that:

- i Audit Wales will contribute to those inspections of local authorities in which their expertise will add to the rigour and effectiveness of the inspection
- ii Audit Wales will contribute to the regular collection and analysis of local authority performance data
- iii as partners in the inspection of local authorities, Audit Wales and the inspectorate may use local authority inspection reports to produce other reports, surveys and studies

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Local Government (Wales) Act 2015 support the approach and arrangements for the inspection of local authorities either by individual inspectorates or jointly between us, Audit Wales and CIW.

Estyn's remit includes the inspection of the partnership arrangements for youth support services (YSS). These partnership arrangements are those led by the local authority to plan, co-ordinate and oversee all youth support services in an area. These partnership arrangements are set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000, and the Welsh Government policy as described in Extending Entitlement and associated

guidance¹. Under the Children Act 2004², this statutory responsibility for partnership planning can be fulfilled through a young people's partnership, children and young people's partnership or a framework partnership.

Youth support services are those services for young people aged between 11 and 25, which are provided, procured or facilitated by a local authority and identified in the partnership plan and/or self assessment report. They are those, which in the opinion of the Welsh Government will encourage, enable or assist young persons (directly or indirectly) to:

- participate effectively in education or training;
- take advantage of opportunities for employment; or
- participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.³

In addition to referring to those partnership arrangements for youth support services, the term partnership is used more generally throughout this guidance. National policy and the drive to improve services and be more cost effective means that local authorities are increasingly working in partnership and integrating services. In this guidance, 'partnership' is used to refer to any joint working arrangements where partners, who are otherwise independent, co-operate to achieve a common goal. The term will not be used to describe consultative arrangements, professional networks or contractual arrangements.

Youth work provided by a local authority are inspected separately.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 has various implications for how local authorities work. Part 6, 'Performance and governance of principal councils' in particular includes several duties that may affect how local authorities are inspected and how we work with other inspectorates and regulators. Our inspections will take account of any regulations or statutory guidance introduced in relation to the Act.

Welsh Government's '[School improvement guidance: framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability](#)' provides a new point of reference for schools, pupil referral units, local authorities, diocesan authorities, regional consortia and Estyn, which outlines the Welsh Government's expectations of them in contributing to school improvement, in the context of their wider legal duties'. We will take account of these expectations in our inspections.

Under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal [Wales] (ALNET) Act 2018, local authorities are responsible for learners with ALN from 0 to 25, ensuring that they can access suitable education or training, including compulsory education and specialist post-16 education or training where necessary. The Act and

¹ Extending Entitlement and the accompanying directions and guidance for its implementation extend the legal basis in Wales for the provision of youth support services. In these documents, the Welsh Government has set out frameworks within which local authorities in Wales will provide youth support services.

² Stronger Partnerships for Better Outcomes Guidance (2006) National Assembly for Wales Circular No: 35/2006.

³ Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales Report by the Policy Unit The National Assembly for Wales 2000, p83.

accompanying ALN Code introduce a range of new statutory duties for local authorities that were phased in over a three-year implementation period starting in 2021. The implementation of the ALNET Act will be considered in LGES inspections where relevant.

The Socio-economic Duty aims to deliver better outcomes for those who experience socio-economic disadvantage in Wales. The duty applies to a range of public bodies, including local authorities. Local authorities are expected to show how their decisions might help to reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage.

Cymraeg 2050 sets out the Welsh Government's ambition for one million Welsh speakers by 2050. Local government education services have a critical role in developing the use of Welsh, particularly through a local authority's statutory Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. Welsh immersion education provided by a local authority is inspected separately.

In all inspections, we take account of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the Welsh Government in 2004 as the basis for policy-making for children and young people.

Although older young people may access Adult Learning in the Community, the Adult Learning in the Community Partnerships are inspected separately.

Part 1: Inspection arrangements

Introduction

This section is set out in a way that reflects the sequence of work before, during and after an inspection.

The reporting inspector (RI) is responsible for the conduct and management of the inspection and for the inspection report. While this guidance focuses mainly on the role of the reporting inspector, all team members must comply with the same inspection requirements.

Context

This guidance relates to inspections of local government education services. We regularly evaluate aspects of local government education services through a variety of other activities. Some of these activities result in published evaluations, while others don't. The table below provides more detail.

Inspection activity	Frequency	Outcome
<p>Regular Local authority link inspector (LALI) work</p> <p>A team of LALIs works within a region, and each local authority has one LALI as a key link. LALIs meet senior officers and elected members in local authorities to challenge them about their work to improve education outcomes. LALIs may meet leaders of schools and other local education providers. Such LALI meetings may be in person or online. LALIs may directly observe council meetings or follow proceedings online. Through the year, we receive communication from learners, parents and other stakeholders about local government education services. LALIs will take this into account in their discussions with local authorities. LALIs may also meet with regional consortia for school improvement services and with other partnerships between local authorities that provide education services.</p>	At least termly	Oral feedback to relevant senior leaders. LALI work informs other inspection activity with the local authority and its education providers.
<p>Assurance and Risk Assessment</p> <p>In line with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, we work closely with Audit Wales and CIW to present an annual assessment of</p>	Annually	Oral feedback accompanied by bullet point slides to the corporate leadership team with Audit Wales and CIW. Following

<p>assurances and risks across service areas in each local authority. From our perspective, the assurances and risks we present are usually working hypotheses based on the evidence we have unless we happen to have inspected the local authority during the year concerned. In this work, we will consider the full range of Estyn's inspection activity, for example including matters arising from post-16 and independent sectors that are relevant to the local authority.</p>		<p>the meeting, we will send a letter to confirm our view on current assurances and risks.</p>
<p>Enhanced LALI Visits</p> <p>We will usually undertake an enhanced LALI visit twice in a six-year cycle to each LA (every two years but not in the year when the LGES inspection takes place). The visit will focus on a specific aspect/s of the LA's LGES which will be agreed prior to the visit through the LALI. A focus area could be one that the LA wishes us to consider, it could be a recommendation from a previous inspection, or it could be an area of Estyn's choice. This work will usually be carried out over two days and involve the LALI plus two other inspectors (one of these may be a peer inspector where appropriate). The work may involve online meetings as well as in person meetings and visits to providers.</p>	<p>Biennially</p>	<p>A published letter highlighting the strengths and considerations, including any concerns.</p>
<p>Thematic reports</p> <p>Each year, the Welsh Government asks us to produce national reports on a range of themes. We will often visit a sample of local authorities or other education services providers as part of this work.</p>	<p>Annually</p>	<p>Oral feedback during visits. National reports feature individual local authorities or regional consortia with good practice.</p>
<p>Topical reports</p> <p>We may choose to focus on a specific aspect of local government education services and will evaluate this topic across a sample of, or all, local authorities or other education services providers. We will share the focus area with LAs at the start of the academic year, with the proviso that in-year, new priorities may emerge which</p>	<p>Occasional</p>	<p>Oral or written feedback to each local authority or other education providers, as appropriate. May also contribute to national reports or our annual report. May also feed into unpublished advice to</p>

could result in changes to the focus areas for the topical work.		Ministers or Welsh Government.
<p>School organisation proposals</p> <p>We are required to evaluate all school organisation proposals submitted by local authorities.</p>	In line with submissions from local authorities	We produce a formal response which is included in the 'consultation report' published by the proposer and this is published on our website
<p>Inspections of schools and other education providers and related follow-up activity</p> <p>Reporting inspectors for school inspections share useful information with us about how well the local authority knows the school and the quality of challenge and support provided to school by the local authority or, where relevant, its school improvement service.</p>	Ongoing	Findings inform inspection activity and discussions that LALs have with the local authority.

During a local government education services inspection, we will take account of the inspection activity described above along with any other relevant inspection work we carry out that is not included above.

Principles of inspection

We expect our inspectors to work according to several key principles. They will:

- take a learner-centred approach with a strong focus on the impact that education services have on learner outcomes
- consider the specific context of the provider and adapt their approaches accordingly
- use a range of tailored methodologies and approaches to evaluate the breadth of the provider's work robustly and fairly
- adopt a constructive approach that makes the interaction with the provider a professional learning experience for their staff

During inspections, we expect inspectors to consider everything in the 'what' and 'how' we inspect guidance documents, but only report on the key strengths and areas for improvement alongside the reporting requirements noted in these documents.

In addition, our inspectors will:

- ensure that evaluations are secure, reliable and valid
- keep to a minimum any requirements for documentation and preparation by the provider
- gain the perspective of learners, headteachers and other stakeholders

- apply the principle of equality for Welsh and English to all our activity

In inspections, our inspectors will:

- involve the provider fully in the inspection process, including the opportunity for the provider to select a nominee (who should normally be the chief education officer or a senior officer who reports to the chief education officer)
- take suitable account of the provider's chosen improvement priorities, in addition to other key areas identified by the inspection team
- include peer inspectors in the inspection process

We will also contribute to joint assessments and reports with other inspection, audit and regulatory bodies as required by Welsh Government legislation.

Our mind-set

Our approach is:

- **Fair and impartial** – this means that we work to be independent, objective and balanced. We are robust and consistent in our work. We weigh the evidence and its significance to provide an honest, credible and accurate view of the provider's strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Supportive** – we work to guide providers to implement improvements that benefit learners. Wherever appropriate, we encourage innovation and recognise good intentions. We are friendly but always professional in our approach. We support educational reform. We work hard to develop meaningful relationships with providers and local and regional organisations.
- **Reflective** – we are open-minded. We listen to a wide range of stakeholders and reflect on their responses. We are thoughtful, measured and careful. We plan opportunities to think carefully about the inspection findings and to discuss them with others in the team.
- **Transparent** – we are well informed and communicate clearly, directly and succinctly. We use efficient and effective inspection methodologies to respond to the provider's unique situation. We plan inspection and other activity and report on strengths and areas for improvement in ways that reflect the particular circumstances of each individual provider. As a result, our actions promote trust and respect.

Expectations of inspectors

Our expectations of inspectors make clear how we embody our mind-set through our actions. Inspectors should uphold the highest possible standards in their work. All inspectors have to meet the expected standards of behaviour and conduct.

When inspecting or otherwise engaging with a provider, inspectors will:

- be courteous and professional
- establish and maintain appropriate professional boundaries
- carry out their work with integrity, respect and due sensitivity

- take all reasonable steps to prevent undue anxiety and to minimise stress during inspection activity
- evaluate the work of the provider objectively using clear and robust evidence
- report honestly, fairly and impartially without fear or favour
- communicate clearly and openly
- act in the best interests of learners
- respect the confidentiality of all information received during the course of their work
- respond appropriately to reasonable requests

It is important that we evaluate the effectiveness of provision and leadership on their impact and not on the basis of any preferences for particular methods. The key to our evaluations is whether the methods and organisation are fit for the purpose in supporting all learners to achieve high standards and strong levels of well-being.

Inspectors should inform Estyn of any perceived or actual conflicts of interest whenever they receive notification of engagement, for example that they are part of a provider's inspection team.

Expectations of providers

In order that inspection is constructive and beneficial, it is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a professional working environment based on mutual courtesy, respect and professional behaviour. We have high expectations of the way inspectors carry out their work. This is what we expect providers to do in return:

- be courteous and professional, treating inspectors and inspection support staff with respect
- act in the best interests of learners
- provide evidence – or access to evidence - that enables inspectors to conduct the inspection in an open, honest and objective way
- recognise that inspectors need to talk to elected members, officers, learners, or other stakeholders without the presence of a manager or senior leader
- work with inspectors to take all reasonable steps to minimise disruption, stress and bureaucracy
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with our reporting inspector and other inspectors
- draw any concerns about the inspection to the attention of inspectors in a timely and suitable manner through the nominee
- give due regard to the health and safety, and well-being of inspectors while on the premises
- maintain the confidentiality of meetings and inspection findings until the final publication of the report
- ensure that inspection teams have access to a private area to discuss inspection evidence and hold confidential discussions
- refrain from taking photographs or videos during the inspection process, including of draft evaluations developed during the inspection

Any CCTV and recording equipment should be brought to the attention of the team during the initial team meeting.

At the point of the inspection notification, the local authority or other education services provider should review the composition of the inspection team. It is the provider's responsibility to highlight any perceived or actual conflicts of interest prior to the start any engagement, for example prior to their on-site inspection visit.

The Welsh language

We will carry out any engagement, including inspections, in line with our [Welsh Language Policy](#), available from our website.

Safeguarding, including health, safety and well-being issues

Inspectors will carry out inspections in accordance with our guidance on inspecting safeguarding. If they observe anything that they think constitutes, in their opinion, a danger to the safety of staff, visitors or learners, inspectors should alert the provider's senior leaders.

If an inspector becomes aware of a safeguarding allegation or suspicion in respect of a child, young person or vulnerable adult, they should follow the procedures as set out in the current version of 'Estyn's policy and procedures for safeguarding', which is available on our website.

In all cases, inspectors should record details of the concern. Inspectors should inform the Reporting Inspector (RI) who should then contact one of Estyn's safeguarding lead officers. The lead officer will advise the RI of the next steps to take including what to record in the evidence base for the appropriate inspection area. This includes any risks relating to learners' health, safety and well-being. The officer will also advise the RI whether or not to share the concern with the local authority or other education services provider.

Where these risks are a serious concern during inspection activity, inspectors should include a short comment in the report's text and a recommendation in the report.

We will send a well-being letter to the provider asking them to outline how they will address the shortcoming.

If an inspector identifies a site security concern, they should inform the RI. If the RI considers that the concern can be addressed quickly, they should inform the provider who will be expected to provide evidence of the concern being resolved during the inspection.

If the concern is more serious and cannot be addressed quickly, the RI should inform the IC who will issue a site management letter to the local authority. If relevant, the school, PRU or other education services provider should also be informed of this. If a less significant issue is not addressed satisfactorily during the inspection, then this process will also apply.

Approach to inspection

This guidance sets out the procedures for inspections for local government education services. These procedures will be complemented by follow-up activity in local authorities and other education services providers that are identified as causing significant concern, and this is covered in Part 2.

The starting point for inspection is the local authority's or other education services provider's evaluation of its own performance, supported by relevant evidence. Local government education services should regularly evaluate their work as a natural process in their business improvement cycle. **We do not expect a local authority or other education services provider to prepare a self-evaluation report for an inspection and will be critical of leaders if such a report is created solely for this purpose.** Self-evaluation is a very important process for improvement. Candid and thorough self-evaluation, alongside diligent risk assessment, helps local authorities and other education services provider to sustain and further develop good services, plan for improvement where necessary and make informed decisions about the efficient use of resources.

Inspectors will sample evidence to test the local authority's or other education services provider's own evaluation. The progress learners make from their starting-points and the standards they achieve are key measures of the quality of the education they have received and of the effectiveness of the leadership and management. Inspection will also focus on the impact that education services have in meeting the individual needs of learners and supporting their well-being.

Inspectors will not necessarily inspect or evaluate all education services during an inspection. After reviewing key documentation from the local authority or other education services provider, such as performance reports and strategic plans, alongside information we hold, inspectors will identify specific aspects of education services to evaluate during the core inspection. Inspectors will do this by drafting 'local inspection questions. Inspectors will share these questions with the local authority or other education services provider and ask for their views on their suitability. Inspectors will take account of feedback in drafting the final wording of the questions.

The length of the inspection and size of the team may vary according to the size of the local authority or other education services provider and the scope of their services, and the number and nature of local inspection questions.

Core inspection activities such as interviews, focus groups and team meetings are usually carried out face-to-face. Some activities may suit a remote approach using secure virtual meeting software or a telephone call. Activities carried out remotely will be used with discretion, either where circumstances or rules require it, or where it is convenient and efficient to do so without impeding the effectiveness of the inspection process. For example, as part of the preliminary activities, we may set up an online meeting for a group of headteachers instead of requiring them to travel a significant distance to a central location.

As part of the inspection process, inspectors may carry out observations of education services as part of a LGES inspection where further evidence is needed to support

work on local inspection questions. We would usually do this as part of the preliminary activities if required.

We will usually discuss and agree with the local authority or other education services provider which activities may suit a remote approach as part of the inspection planning process.

The Virtual Inspection Room

We will use an electronic system, called the 'Virtual Inspection Room' (VIR), for managing many aspects of the inspection. It is a web-based system that allows local authorities to upload information before the inspection and to download guidance from us about the inspection process. The VIR is also the place where local authorities and other education services providers can access the nominee's guidance on preparing for the inspection and on completing post-inspection questionnaires (PIQs).

The inspection team

Our inspection teams will be led by a reporting inspector (RI). The reporting inspector manages the inspection team and is the first point of reference for everyone involved in the inspection. The RI will always be HMI, with other team members drawn from among HMI, additional inspectors (AIs) and peer inspectors. HMI (His Majesty's Inspector of Education and Training in Wales) – HMIs are appointed by the crown. They are civil servants employed directly by Estyn. AIs normally join Estyn temporarily, for example on secondment from a local authority, or they may be recently retired HMI.

The local authority or other education services provider will be invited to select a senior member of staff to take on the role of nominee, to work with the inspection team. The nominee should have sufficient seniority and knowledge of the local authority's work to act as a link between the local authority and the inspection team. We encourage the chief education officer to be the nominee where possible.

For standard inspections of local authorities

The local authority link inspector (LALI) will normally be part of the team and act as the deputy RI.

Each team will also have at least two peer inspectors. One peer inspector will usually be a senior leader from a local authority or regional service outside of their own local authority or region. Another peer inspector will usually be a leader of a service area in a local authority or other education services provider. The inspection team will always include at least one inspector from Audit Wales. Depending on the nature of issues identified in pre-inspection evidence, the team may request an inspector from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). If appropriate the reporting inspector will contact CIW before the inspection to come to a view whether or not it would be beneficial for CIW to have a representative join the inspection team. In practice, it is rare for CIW to be involved in-person in LGES inspections. If they are not taking part in the inspection, we will invite CIW to provide a pre-inspection briefing on recent and relevant work they have carried out in the local authority.

Considering a specific aspect of education services

A bespoke team will be set up to address the local inspection question for the education services we are focusing on. We will usually include at least one relevant peer inspector as part of the team. We may invite Audit Wales and CIW to contribute to the inspection, in-person or through a pre-inspection briefing.

For inspections of other education services providers

A bespoke team will be set up depending on the scope of the education services provider and the number of schools they provide a service too. We will usually include at least one relevant peer inspector as part of the team. Where relevant, we will invite Audit Wales and CIW to contribute to the inspection, in-person or through a pre-inspection briefing.

Inspection schedule

The programme of LGES inspection runs for six years from September 2024 to July 2031. We will inspect each local authority at least once during this cycle. We will inspect other education providers at the request of Welsh Government or as deemed necessary by HMCI.

The programme will be discussed with other inspection, audit and regulatory bodies to help avoid duplication, minimise disruption and take advantage of opportunities to work jointly with Audit Wales, CIW or HIW.

Contacting the local authority before the inspection

We will notify a local authority of a LGES inspection eight weeks in advance. At the same time, we will also notify the local authority that we will be carrying out a stand-alone inspection of their youth work which will take place usually three weeks after the notification. Scheduling the youth work inspection prior to the LGES inspection will allow the findings from that inspection to inform aspects of the LGES inspection.

Once the local authority has been formally notified, one of our inspection co-ordinators (IC) will contact the local authority by telephone to set up the arrangements for the inspection. During this discussion, the IC will:

- discuss an outline programme for the inspection including the process for discussing local inspection questions, the preliminary activities and the on-site inspection work
- share the draft local inspection questions
- discuss the specific information required before the inspection and make the arrangements for receiving it in electronic form through the VIR
- ask if there are any issues or risks the team should be aware of, and request a general health and safety briefing for the team at the start of the inspection
- establish whether the local authority wishes to have a nominee and, if it does, agree the role of the nominee and confirm that the nominated officer is of sufficient seniority and has completed the required training
- provide links and guidance for the completion of the suite of online pre-inspection questionnaires

- arrange the availability of supporting evidence
- discuss the timetable requirement for preliminary activities and main inspection activities
- organise any domestic arrangements such as a base room for the inspectors, parking and internet access
- ensure that there are agreed procedures for addressing any concerns or complaints that might arise during the course of the inspection
- set up the arrangements for feeding back the inspection findings
- agree the arrangements for completing the post-inspection questionnaire
- inform the local authority that the key arrangements will be confirmed in writing

The IC will request the following information from the local authority through the VIR as soon as possible after the formal notification of the inspection:

- key background information on the local authority
- internal documents that feature the local authority's views on aspects of education outcomes, the quality of education services or the quality of leadership and management of education services, such as reports to council, cabinet, scrutiny, the corporate management team, the Public Services Board or Welsh Government. The focus should be on documents produced within the last 12 months, but older documents may still be relevant and valid or provide useful context.
- current plans, including the highest-level corporate plan and partnership plan, as well as plans relating to education services

We will ask the local authority to inform other partners and stakeholders about the inspection, including its schools, PRUs and other education providers.

Surveys

For local authority inspections, we will open a survey for two weeks in advance of the core inspection week. This survey will be publicised widely through our communications channels, and we will ask the local authority to publicise it too. We are interested in the views of:

- parents and carers
- elected members and governors
- staff working in the local authority and its schools and PRUs
- staff working for a school improvement partnership education service
- local or national organisations with an interest in education services

The survey will have common questions for all LGES inspections.

The survey will automatically tailor questions depending on the person completing the survey so that they are relevant.

Our inspectors will consider the feedback from the survey alongside other evidence during the main inspection week. The IC will explain how the survey is conducted during their initial conversation with the local authority.

We will share quantitative findings from surveys with the local authority, but all comments are confidential and will not be available to the local authority. Inspectors

may summarise comments with the local authority where this is helpful to explore a theme further during the inspection.

For further information and guidance about how we use surveys, please see our supplementary guidance.

For other inspections of local government education services, we may also use a survey. In these cases, we will only ask questions that are relevant to the service(s) being inspected.

Preparing local inspection questions

In preparing for the inspection, the reporting inspector will take account of the local authority's view of itself alongside information already held by us, including information shared by Audit Wales and CIW.

We will consider the education services provided by the local authority or other education services provider and will draft a set of local inspection questions covering specific and relevant aspects of inspection area 1.

For a local authority, there will normally be at least four questions and usually no more than six. These questions will focus on education services that relate to the local authority's strategic priorities or relate to information that we hold about education services in the local authority. For other education services providers, the local inspection questions will naturally focus on the services they provide and will be tailored to their context and specific priorities.

Our inspection coordinator (IC) will share the draft local inspection questions with the local authority or other education services provider as part of the notification process.

The local authority or other education services provider will have an opportunity to discuss the draft questions with the reporting inspector within 10 days of notification. This discussion will usually take place over the phone. As part of this discussion, the reporting inspector will explain the rationale for the draft question set and discuss the potential inspection activity required in to address each question. The local authority or other education services provider will be invited to share its own views as to the appropriateness and usefulness of the questions and the potential inspection activity. The reporting inspector will take these views into account in finalising the local inspection questions. The final decision about the wording and focus of the local inspection questions will be made by our inspectors. We aim to confirm the final set of local inspection questions no later than six weeks before the inspection week.

Planning the inspection and preparing the team

Once the local inspection questions have been finalised, which will usually be within 10 days of notification, the reporting inspector will draft a plan for the preliminary activities and core inspection week and work with the nominee to develop a detailed timetable of activities.

The reporting inspector will allocate responsibilities to members of the inspection team. This will include assigning a lead inspector for each local inspection question.

Preliminary inspection activities

Usually, a week or two before the inspection week, we will carry out preliminary activities to support the inspection. These activities are designed to gather the views of key stakeholders in the work of the local authority or other education services provider. The activity will be carried out by the reporting inspector and another inspector from the inspection team.

The reporting inspector will discuss with the local authority who inspectors will meet during the preliminary activities, though the final decision about who to interview rests with us.

The preliminary activities may take place online or in person, and the reporting inspector will discuss the most appropriate approach for each meeting with the nominee.

At the end of the activities, the reporting inspectors will brief the local authority or other education services provider about any significant matters arising from the preliminary activities.

The findings from the preliminary activities will be shared with the inspection team and taken into account during the inspection week.

Local authorities

During preliminary activities, inspectors will usually meet with a sample of:

- headteachers
- chairs of governing bodies
- leaders or managers from other education providers where relevant (for example, non-maintained settings or FE institutions)
- children and young people's representative groups
- representatives from other statutory sectors, the voluntary sector, the private sector and other groups where there is a strong link to the local inspection questions

Inspectors will also seek to meet with parents and carers who may be able to provide useful evidence in relation to any of the local inspection questions. For example, if the local authority has a parent carer forum for children with a disability, and a local inspection question covers education provision for these children, then inspectors would seek to meet the forum to explore their experiences and views.

Other education services providers

The preliminary activities for other education services providers will be tailored appropriately, but broadly follow a similar approach to those for local authorities where relevant.

Observations of education services

Inspectors may observe specific aspects of education services as part of a LGES inspection where first-hand evidence will support our work on a local inspection question.

In such cases, Estyn will usually arrange to observe the relevant services either as part of the preliminary visit or at some other convenient time prior to the main inspection week. The reporting inspector may take responsibility for these arrangements or may delegate them to a member of the team who is involved in working on a particular local inspection question. We may also use additional inspectors or peer inspectors to support observations where they have experience in the relevant service area.

During the inspection week

Senior leaders' presentation

At the start of the inspection, the inspection team should meet senior leaders from the local authority or other education services provider. For example, in a local authority, this would usually involve the chief executive and chief education officer, other members of the education senior leadership team and key elected members, including the leader, cabinet lead member and chair of scrutiny. The nominee should also be part of this meeting. The reporting inspector will agree attendees with the nominee.

The local authority or other education services provider will be given the opportunity give a presentation to the whole inspection team, lasting no longer than 30 minutes. The presentation should be used to emphasise the local context and strategic priorities, and highlight the main strengths and areas for improvement in education.

Local inspection questions presentations

Following the main presentation, the local authority or other education services provider will be given the opportunity for key staff to meet with the lead inspector for each local inspection question. Where appropriate, the local authority may wish to include school improvement officers or other partners in these meetings. The staff involved will be invited to share their perspective on the local inspection question, provide helpful context for the lead inspector, highlight strengths and areas for improvement, and direct the lead inspector to the most useful evidence. Usually no more than three officers should be involved in this initial meeting and it should last no longer than 30 minutes. It may not be necessary to hold separate local inspection questions presentations if there are only one or two questions that can be covered in the presentation by senior leaders.

While inspectors may ask questions following the main presentation or a local inspection question presentation, they will usually reserve questions for a separate interview with those involved.

Gathering and reviewing inspection evidence

Inspections start by considering the local authority's or other education services provider's own self-evaluation and plans for improvement, which will be accompanied by a wide range of supporting evidence. Inspectors will sample, test and validate the evaluations offered to form their own judgements.

The team will plan the inspection so that they can cover the reporting requirements and answer the local inspection questions.

The team will ensure that they have enough time to review the key evidence that is needed to make judgements and address the local inspection questions. The team will need to ensure that it is focused on the key evidence that can be used to substantiate its judgements. The main forms of evidence are:

- self-evaluation documents (may be captured in a variety of documents, both paper and online, and should not be a report produced specifically for the inspection team)
- data on education outcomes, including local data provided by the local authority or other education services provider
- briefings from our link inspectors
- briefings from Audit Wales, CIW, and other inspectorates where relevant
- documentary evidence, such as reports to senior managers, council, cabinet and scrutiny
- the views of children, young people and parents (including the findings of any of our relevant surveys and questionnaires)
- the views of other stakeholders such as schools, and statutory and voluntary partner organisations
- interviews with senior leaders, staff and elected members
- interviews with senior leaders from the relevant regional consortium and other relevant partnerships
- interviews with officers and other stakeholders who can help inspectors to address the local inspection questions

The schedule for inspection interviews will need to be flexible to meet the needs of the inspection team.

Recording inspection evidence

Inspectors will complete their forms electronically as part of our electronic system for collecting, collating and recording inspection findings.

Team meetings

The main purpose of team meetings is to agree accurate, reliable, valid and corporate views about the quality of education services and their impact, and the quality of leadership. Meetings will provide opportunities for inspectors to:

- test the validity of the provider's self-evaluation processes and priorities for improvement
- discuss emerging issues
- identify any gaps in the evidence base
- consider main inspection findings and any recommendations
- Towards the end of the inspection, the team will formally moderate and agree all judgements together. Inspectors will not make summative judgements for each inspection area. The team will make a summative judgement about whether the local authority or other education services provider is causing significant concern.

Professional dialogue

At the end of every day, the reporting inspector should, as far as practicable, offer to have a professional dialogue with the chief executive or another senior officer to discuss the progress of the inspection. This meeting should include the chief education officer too if they are not the nominee. This is an opportunity to share emerging, interim findings including provisional strengths and areas for improvement, as well as the need for further evidence. It also provides an important opportunity to discuss any potential issues with the way the inspection is being carried out. Any findings discussed in these meetings may be amended, on reflection, after scrutiny of further evidence or after further interviews have taken place, or as the result of moderation within the team.

Causing significant concern

During all inspections, the inspection team will consider the local authority or other education services provider is causing significant concern and requires follow-up activity.

The potential reasons for identifying that a local authority or other education services provider is causing significant concern are:

- a high proportion of learners underachieving over time or a considerable decline in achievement over time
- a high proportion of schools, PRUs or other education providers placed in statutory categories
- serious safeguarding concerns
- failure to address shortcomings identified during previous inspections or through other internal or external activity
- important weaknesses in education services
- important weaknesses in senior leadership
- any other concern that presents a significant risk to the well-being or achievement of children and young people

The inspection team must report as they find and be able to substantiate their judgements on the basis of sound evidence. If the evidence points to the conclusion that the authority or other education services provider is causing significant concern, inspectors must make that judgement.

At all times, our inspectors should remember that the main emphasis in LGES inspections is on the outcomes for learners.

In judging the extent to which senior leaders have the capacity to bring about improvements, inspectors will need to consider how well these leaders know and understand the strengths and areas for improvement in their organisation. Inspectors should also establish if senior leaders show the ability to tackle the areas for improvement through the sense of purpose and direction they provide, and through decisions and actions taken to address concerns. Discussions with senior leaders should provide evidence of how they are tackling these issues and if they are giving attention to the right things. Where relevant, inspectors should also take account of how well-informed elected members are about areas for improvement and how well

they use this information to take effective and appropriate decisions. They should consider how well the scrutiny committee fulfil their duties.

In all circumstances, it is vital that inspectors evaluate the work of the local authority or other education services provider in the context in which it is currently operating. They should not be unduly influenced by recently prepared plans for improvement that have yet to be implemented or the recent appointment of staff, such as a new chief executive or senior education officer. This is because, in both cases, the effect or impact of improvements will not have taken place, and inspectors must judge outcomes rather than speculative or good intentions.

Team discussions should take account of any mitigating factors to ensure the validity and reliability of judgements before coming to a decision that a local authority or other education services provider is causing significant concern.

If the local authority or other education services provider is judged to be causing significant concern, the reporting inspector should take the following steps:

- inform the appropriate inspection co-ordinator
- inform the Assistant Director or Strategic Director of the judgement (who will in turn inform HMCI)

Where relevant, the lead inspector for each local inspection question will share the team's findings for the question with the lead members of staff that provided the presentation at the start of the inspection week. The lead inspector will provide an opportunity to discuss the factual accuracy, clarity and understanding of the findings.

Feedback on local inspection questions will take place before the feedback on full findings.

Formal feedback on full findings

At the end of the on-site part of the inspection, the team will share the provisional findings with senior leaders and managers.

Prior to this feedback, the inspection team will provide key staff leading on the local inspection questions with feedback on their areas of responsibility. Where appropriate, the local authority may wish to involve school improvement officers or other partners in these meetings. These meetings will be an opportunity for the relevant officers to consider the provisional outcomes of the inspection in their key areas of responsibility and ask questions for clarification.

This will be followed by the whole team feedback to the local authority. Those present at this feedback should include the chief executive, chief education officer and other education senior leaders, the council leader, cabinet lead, and chair of scrutiny. The local authority may wish to invite other senior leaders to the feedback, such as a senior leader from the school improvement service, at their discretion. The nominee should agree the attendees with the reporting inspector in advance.

In addition, the Welsh Government and a representative from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) may wish to attend the feedback meetings, with observer status. If this is the case, the Welsh Government and the WLGA should

contact the local authority or other education services provider directly to arrange for the attendance of an official.

The feedback meeting provides the opportunity for leaders and managers to hear and to reflect on the judgements. The feedback should focus on the strengths and areas for improvement and the factors that contribute to them. The reporting inspector should explain that issues may be raised and discussed, factual matters may be corrected, understanding may be checked, and judgements may be clarified, but the judgements themselves are not negotiable.

All the judgements reported during an inspection are provisional and subject to moderation and validation by HMCI. The judgements are confidential to the local authority or other education services provider and key partners, and should not be communicated externally, including via social media, until we publish the report on our website. Any notes or recordings made at feedback, whether electronic or written, should also be treated as confidential and must not be communicated externally.

Reports and summaries for authorities causing significant concern

The RI must make clear in the evidence base that, in their opinion, the local authority, or an aspect of its education services, or the other education services provider is causing significant concern. They must also make clear the main shortcomings which led to that judgement.

After the inspection

The inspection report

The RI is responsible for producing a final inspection report that is clear to a lay audience and helpful to the local authority or other education services provider as well as its partners, learners, parents and the wider public. When writing reports, inspectors should take account of our writing guidance.

All reports will be published bilingually. The report will take the following form:

About the local authority or other education services provider

Summary

Recommendations

What happens next

Main findings

- Education services and their impact
- Leading and improving

Inspection reports will be published around thirty working days from the last day of the inspection.

We will provide the local authority or other education services provider with a late draft of the report to help check the factual accuracy of the content. The local authority or other education services provider will have five working days in which to consider the draft report and to identify any factual errors. The factual accuracy check is not an opportunity to challenge judgements.

Five working days prior to the publication of the final report, the inspectorate will send an embargoed electronic copy to the relevant director at Welsh Government for discussion with Ministers.

We will send electronic copies of the final report to the relevant senior representatives of the local authority or other education services provider. For example, a local authority report will be sent to the chief executive of the local authority, the chief education officer, the council leader the elected member with main responsibility for education, and the chair of education scrutiny.

We will also send a copy of the report to Audit Wales. Where inspectors from one or more other inspectorates have joined the team for a local authority inspection, we will send a copy of the report to the inspectorate(s) concerned.

We will publish the report on our website. Audit Wales and other inspectorates may make the report available on their own websites after it has been published.

For a local authority, an aspect of its education services or an other education services provider causing significant concern

Within five days of the end of the inspection, the RI will:

- complete the relevant section of the reporting inspection form (RIF)
- place the completed RIF in the inspection documents section of the VIR
- inform the designated IC by email and copy to the IC inbox at ic@estyn.gov.wales

HMCI, or HMI acting on behalf of HMCI, will scrutinise the work of the inspection team to check the judgement. The RI should ensure that all the evidence collected during the process of the inspection is available for scrutiny. HMCI has the power to call for any information required.

If HMCI does not agree with the RI's opinion, the reasons will be explained, and they will be given the opportunity to discuss HMCI's decision and amend the report.

After the due process of internal challenge and moderation has been completed to secure the judgements, HMCI will, where confirmed, notify Welsh Ministers that the local authority, an aspect of its education services or the other education services provider is causing significant concern. In exceptional circumstances, we may wait until the local authority or other education services provider has responded to the factual accuracy check stage of the process.

Following publication of the report

For local authorities and other education services providers identified as causing significant concern, we will be proactively involved in the post-inspection process to plan for improvement. Further information is set out in the 'follow-up' section of this

guidance. In all other cases, the process following publication of the report is set out below.

Following the publication of the inspection report, the local authority or other education services provider should update its plans to address the recommendations and to take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. This should happen within three months of the publication of the inspection report.

We do not require a separate post-inspection action plan.

Following the publication of the inspection report, we usually expect that a relevant scrutiny committee scrutinises the report and challenges senior leaders, including officers and elected members, about their plans for improvement. At least one inspector involved in the inspection will attend this meeting as an observer, but will contribute to the session where it helps clarify any matters relating to the inspection and the report.

One of our link inspectors will discuss the updated plans with senior leaders as part of their ongoing work. The link inspector will also check that there are suitable arrangements in place to monitor the implementation of plans and evaluate their impact.

Promoting excellence in local government education services

We are keen to promote excellence in local government education services. If the inspection team has identified significant strengths in outcomes, education services or leadership and management, then we will work with the local authority or other education services provider to share its work through including a case study for publication as an appendix in the report. .

Timeline summarising key milestones during the inspection process

The timeline below is based on a standard inspection of a local authority. We will tailor this timeline to suit the context for inspections of other education services providers and for focused inspections of local authorities.

Assuring the quality of inspections

We are committed to:

- effective selection, training, briefing, support and deployment of inspectors, including peer inspectors
- effective training, briefing and support to allow the nominee to play an active role
- regular dialogue with the senior leaders during an inspection
- criteria and recording systems that comply with inspection guidance
- providing clear verbal feedback of the team's main findings and the detail for each inspection area
- producing accurate and well-presented reports

During the inspection week

The reporting inspector will carry out the quality assurance of the inspection in the

first instance. The local authority or other education services provider should raise any concerns about the conduct of an inspection with the reporting inspector as soon as possible during the inspection.

Usually a strategic director, assistant director or lead officer for LGES will join the inspection team for part or all their moderation meetings to quality assure the process. They will also seek to meet individually with senior leaders, the nominee and members of the inspection team to discuss the inspection process. They may provide advice and guidance to support the team to agree judgments.

After the inspection week

As part of our quality assurance procedures, we invite the local authority or other education services provider to complete a post-inspection questionnaire (PIQ). The questionnaire will be available in the VIR. The first part of the PIQ should be completed as soon as possible after the on-site inspection and submit it electronically through the VIR. The second part of the PIQ should be completed after the publication of the inspection report, again through the VIR.

A member of our senior team will quality of all inspection reports before their publication on our website. Our standard arrangements for assuring the quality of inspections and the arrangements for dealing with complaints are available on our website.

Part 2: Follow-up arrangements

There will be one category of follow-up for local government education services inspections: 'causing significant concern'. The guidance below sets out how we will work with a local authority or any other services providers in any of these circumstances.

For local authorities or education services causing significant concern

Post-inspection improvement conference

Where a local authority is identified as causing significant concern, we will chair an improvement conference around three months after the inspection with senior leaders (officers and, where relevant, elected members) from the local authority or other education services provider and other key stakeholders. We will send a formal notification four weeks in advance of the conference but will aim to ensure that the date is suitable before we issue this notification. We will usually involve the reporting inspector from the inspection and the local authority link inspector (LALI) in the conference.

The purpose of the conference would be to check that the local authority or other education services provider has fully understood the reasons for the inspection judgements, and to check that appropriate plans are being developed to address shortcomings.

Following the conference, we will send a letter to the chief executive of the local authority or equivalent senior leader of another education services provider. This letter will confirm the degree of assurance inspectors received during the conference that the Inspection judgements have been accepted and that suitable plans are being developed to address shortcomings. In the letter, inspectors may include recommendations for the local authority or other education services provider to support further improvement in its plans to address the concern.

In most cases, we will invite the Welsh Government, Audit Wales and the Welsh Local Government Association to participate in the conference. We may also invite CIW where appropriate. For a local authority with an aspect of education services causing significant concern, we will invite these other organisations to the conference on a needs basis depending on the service that we're focusing on.

Monitoring visits

Following the post-inspection improvement conference, we will develop a schedule of monitoring visits with the local authority or other education services provider. The views of the local authority or other education services provider will be considered in developing the schedule.

These monitoring visits will be used to check how well the local authority or other education services provider is progressing with its plans to address the recommendations from the inspection, and what impact their actions are having. A monitoring visit may not cover every recommendation.

Where possible, we will usually involve the LALI in every monitoring visit, and we will usually involve the reporting inspector from the inspection in at least the first monitoring visit.

A monitoring visit will typically be spread over three days, with two days of activity starting at lunchtime on the first day and finishing at lunchtime on the third day, but ultimately we will work with the local authority or other education services provider to agree a suitable timetable of activities that will enable us to monitor progress of the recommendations being considered during the visit.

We may use a survey to gather the views of relevant stakeholders before a monitoring visit. We may also carry out preliminary activities with relevant stakeholders, in person or online, such as meeting a group of headteachers.

We will formally notify the authority four weeks in advance of a monitoring visit but will aim to ensure that the date is suitable before we issue this notification. We may invite Audit Wales or CIW to contribute to a monitoring visit if appropriate.

A VIR will be set up for each monitoring visit which will allow the local authority or other education services provider to share a few key documents and supporting information that is relevant.

Following each monitoring visit, we will publish a short report within four weeks. We will ensure that the local authority or other education services provider has the opportunity to check it for factual accuracy before publication. This report will confirm the degree of assurance inspectors received during the visit that the local authority's actions since the inspection are having the desired impact on the areas for improvement. In the report, inspectors may include recommendations for the authority to support further improvement in its plans to address the concern.

Removing follow-up

After any monitoring visit, inspectors could recommend to HMCI that the local authority or the other education services provider is no longer causing significant concern and can be removed from follow-up. To be in this position, inspectors would need to be assured that enough progress has been made in addressing each recommendation from the inspection. We expect that it would usually take at least two years for a local authority to be able to demonstrate enough progress.

If HMCI agrees, then the report for the monitoring visit will include an evaluation of progress for each recommendation, and an overall judgement that sufficient progress has been made that follow-up can be removed as the local authority or the other education services provider is no longer causing significant concern.