



Inspecting for the future (2024 – 2030)

What and how we inspect (the inspection process): independent schools



This guidance for inspectors outlines Estyn’s approach to inspection activity with independent schools.

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

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Contents

Introduction	1
Purpose of the guidance handbook.....	1
Legal basis for the inspection of independent schools	1
Overview of engagement with independent schools	2
Part 1: What we inspect	3
Evaluating each inspection area (IA).....	3
The inspection reports.....	4
About the school	4
Summary	4
Main evaluation	4
Compliance with the regulations for registration	4
Safeguarding.....	5
Recommendations	5
What happens next	5
The evidence base of the inspection.....	5
Inspection areas	6
2024 Framework	7
1. Teaching and learning.....	7
2. Well-being, care, support and guidance	8
3. Leading and improving.....	9
Part 2: How we inspect – Core Inspection arrangements	10
Introduction	10
Principles of our work.....	10
Our mindset	11
Expectations of inspectors	11
Expectations of providers	12
Safeguarding, including health, safety and well-being issues	13
Approach to inspection.....	13
The Virtual Inspection Room.....	14
The inspection team.....	14
Contacting the provider before the inspection.....	15
Planning the inspection and preparing the team	16
During the inspection	17
After the core inspection	20
The factual accuracy check.....	20

Assuring the quality of inspections	20
Part 3: How we inspect – Monitoring Inspection arrangements.....	21
Parallels with core inspections	21
Differences from core inspections	22
Follow-up guidance	22
Meeting statutory requirements in independent schools	22

Introduction

Purpose of the guidance handbook

This handbook sets out our approaches to inspecting independent schools. It explains **what and how** we inspect. The guidance is essential reading for reporting inspectors and all other members of the inspection team. It may also be useful for providers to support their understanding of the inspection mind-set and methodologies.

There is further information about inspections on our website www.estyn.gov.wales

Legal basis for the inspection of independent schools

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

- the quality of education provided
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- the welfare, health and safety of pupils
- the suitability of proprietors, staff and supply staff
- the premises of and boarding accommodation
- the provision of information
- the manner in which complaints are to be handled

The Welsh Government, in its role as the registration authority for independent schools in Wales, may at any time:

- require His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) to inspect any registered school, or to secure its inspection by one or more reporting inspectors
- arrange for the inspection of any registered school by a body approved by the registration authority

Estyn must:

- make a report to the registration authority on the extent to which the school meets the standard/s to which the inspection relates
- where they are not met, indicate what the school needs to do in order to comply with the regulations
- if the registration authority so requires, arrange for the publication of the report

Overview of engagement with independent schools

Inspection of unregistered provision

- To determine whether a provision may need to register as an independent school

Initial inspection of a new independent school

- Registration inspection to advise the Welsh Government on the school's compliance with the registration standards

Follow up to registration visit*

- Follow up registration visit following the school's admittance of pupils, to advise the Welsh Government on the school's continued compliance with **all** the registration standards, but in particular Part 1 (quality of education provided), regulation 2(3)(a-k) (teaching)

Core Inspection (Section 163)*

- A full inspection focussing on the three inspection areas and the Independent School Standards

Monitoring Inspection*

- Monitoring inspection to ensure a school's continued compliance with the Independent School Standards

Responding to a post-inspection action plan

- HMI advise to Welsh Government on the school's response to recommendations from a full inspection where the regulations have not been met

Post-inspection monitoring of an independent school (Follow up)*

- Post-inspection monitoring of compliance with the registration standards

Focused visit*

- Focused monitoring visit to advise the Welsh Government on compliance with specified registration standard(s). These visits may be announced or unannounced

Application for material change

- Advice to the Welsh Government on the school's application to make a material change

In an inspection cycle all independent schools will have at least one core inspection (Section 163) and one monitoring inspection

** These activities result in a published report. Statutory timescales for publication only apply to core (Section 163) inspections but will also be used for the publication of monitoring inspection reports.*

Part 1: What we inspect

This section of the guidance sets out what inspectors need to consider when evaluating the three inspection areas in independent schools from 2024. It explains 'What we inspect'.

The guidance is essential reading for reporting inspectors and all other members of the inspection team, including the nominee.

The three inspection areas are set out below:

IA1: Teaching and learning

IA2: Well-being, care, support and guidance

IA3: Leading and improving

There is further information about inspections on our website www.estyn.gov.wales

Evaluating each inspection area (IA)

Inspection teams will not give overall grades for each inspection area. However, they will make a robust and thorough evaluation of the school's provision and its impact on pupils' learning and well-being.

Inspectors will always include clear evaluations in relation to the main aspects of each inspection area, as exemplified below. However, what inspectors report on within each inspection area may differ depending on the context and relative significance of what they find in each school. Inspectors may report 'by exception'. This means that they may report on some aspects only where there are particular strengths or areas for improvement.

Where inspectors identify any interesting or innovative practice that is worthy of sharing more widely, they will include a short 'spotlight on...' within the report (a short paragraph). We will showcase a range of these spotlights on our website.

Where inspectors identify non-compliance with the Independent School Standards Regulations (Wales) 2024 this will be made clear within the report.

The inspection reports

Following an inspection, each provider will receive a report. The provider will also receive a parent and carer version of the report. The reports will be published on the Estyn website. Publication dates can be found on the website. The following outlines what is included in each section of the report.

About the school

This section of the report will be brief and contain only factual background information about the school. It will not contain any evaluation of the school or its provision. The reporting inspector normally agrees the content of this section with the school during the inspection and during the school's factual check of the draft report prior to publication. If there is disagreement about the content of this section, the reporting inspector will make the final decision about what to include in the report.

This section will contain brief information on:

- the size, nature and location of the school,
- the proprietor status / ownership of the school such as the administration group and /or charitable trust
- the background and circumstances of the pupils
- the linguistic background of the pupils
- any important changes since the last inspection
- any other relevant factors, such as the proportion of pupils with additional learning needs, English as an additional language, or the degree to which pupils leave or join the school during the academic year
- the date of appointment of the headteacher
- the month/year of the school's previous inspection

Summary

A summary of the main evaluation which captures the main strengths and areas of development of the school.

Main evaluation

This section is the main body of the report. It will be written as a continuous evaluation, punctuated by 'themes', and not necessarily ordered by inspection area. The report aims to highlight the causal relationship between aspects of the schools' provision and the impact these have upon the pupils. As such, each main evaluation may be structured individually and contain different 'themes', but all will include the strengths of the school and any areas for improvement.

Compliance with the regulations for registration

In this section of the report, inspectors will include an overview of the extent to which the school meets the regulatory requirements for each of the Registration Standards. Inspectors will specify in the report if one or more regulatory requirements is not met.

Safeguarding

A short statement regarding the strength of safeguarding arrangements at the school.

Recommendations

Recommendations should come directly from the content of the report, identify what needs to improve and be written in priority order.

What happens next

The 'what happens next' section will set out what the provider needs to do following the inspection. In all cases, leaders will need to respond to the recommendations by putting in place the actions needed to make the improvements identified by the inspection team.

It should identify any interesting or innovative practice cameos that we have included in the report.

This section will explain if the school requires follow-up because it has not met all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations.

The evidence base of the inspection

Inspectors use a wide range of evidence to make sure that their findings are valid, accurate and reliable. This section of the report will explain the sources of evidence that they used as well as the range of activities that they carried out during their visit.

Inspection areas

The following section explains what each inspection area covers and what inspectors need to keep in mind when evaluating each one. The inspection areas are numbered 1 – 3, but they are all equally important.

The inspection report will cover all 3 inspection areas. It will always report on all the main foci but not necessarily in the order of this handbook. The main foci for each inspection area are:

1. Teaching and learning

Focus

How effectively does the school's curriculum, teaching and assessment support all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils with ALN, affected by poverty, or other identified barriers to progress to

- learn and make progress?
- develop their knowledge, skills and understanding?
- develop positive attitudes to learning?

Compliance with Standard 1 and Standard 2 of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations

2. Well-being, care, support and guidance

Focus

How effectively does the school ensure that all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils with ALN, affected by poverty, or other identified barriers to progress:

- are safe and secure?
- attend school regularly?
- are respected and fairly treated?
- develop leadership skills and take on responsibility?
- receive the guidance and support they require for the next steps in their development?

Compliance with Standard 3 of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations

3. Leading and improving

Focus

How effectively do leaders:

- ensure that all pupils learn and make progress? (This includes those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barriers to learning.)
- develop a culture, inclusive ethos and strategic direction that support the progress and well-being of all pupils?
- identify and address areas for improvement, including addressing previous recommendations?
- address national priorities, including improving the quality of teaching?
- ensure that professional learning improves the quality of teaching, supports school improvement and equips all staff to carry out their roles?

Compliance with Standards 4,5,6 and 7 of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations

The inspection team will consider all of the inspection areas. The team may not report on each one separately and not necessarily in the order above. They will make connections between the areas to tell the **unique story** of the provider and its context.

There is a series of supplementary guidance documents available on our website. These provide further information about our approaches to inspecting specific aspects of this framework.

2024 Framework

Across the inspection framework, inspectors will consider the focus areas in relation to the impact they have on all pupils' learning and well-being.

1. Teaching and learning

Focus

How effectively does the school's curriculum, teaching and assessment support all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils with ALN, affected by poverty, or other identified barriers to progress to:

- learn and make progress
- develop their knowledge, skills and understanding
- develop positive attitudes to learning

When considering any of the aspects below inspectors should evaluate the difference they make to pupils' learning and how well teachers and other practitioners:

- ensure that their **teaching**:
 - moves learning along at an appropriate pace and presents all pupils, including those pupils with ALN and pupils who are adversely affected by poverty and disadvantage, with the appropriate level of challenge and support
 - demonstrates high expectations of all pupils
 - uses questioning and feedback to support pupils' progress
 - responds to pupils' learning during lessons and over time, and adapts accordingly
 - helps pupils to understand their own strengths and areas for improvement and to develop as effective learners
 - makes the learning environment stimulating and engaging
 - is well matched to pupils, including those with ALN, and based on a secure understanding of their needs
 - provides pupils with opportunities to work independently and collaboratively
 - provides pupils with opportunities to influence how and what they learn where appropriate
 - is supported by additional staff where appropriate to assist pupils in their learning
- design and deliver a **curriculum** that:
 - provides pupils with a suitable breadth and depth of learning across all areas of learning and experience
 - develops an understanding of the history, cultural and linguistic heritage, ethnic diversity, identities, experiences and perspectives of their local area, Wales, and the wider world
 - inspires pupils and raises their aspirations
 - enables pupils to develop an understanding of the complex nature of societies through exposure to stories past and present of their local area, Wales and the wider world spanning different communities as well as in particular the stories of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people

- supports pupils' creative and artistic development
- supports the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural awareness (SMSC)
- fosters positive and respectful attitudes to diversity.
- develops pupils' awareness and understanding of different identities, views and values, the diversity of relationships, gender, sexuality including LGBTQ+ lives and explore the themes of gender equity, rights and advocacy (RSE)
- supports pupils' personal, social development including their understanding the characteristics of healthy relationships (RSE)
- helps pupils to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to make healthy lifestyle choices and understand the impact of these choices
- **develop pupils' skills** systematically and progressively during lessons and over time so that they:
 - acquire the necessary skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing, numeracy as well as the digital skills to support their work and progress
 - apply their skills at an appropriate level across the curriculum
 - have the physical, social and emotional skills to prepare them for later life
- support pupils to develop positive **attitudes towards learning**, so that they:
 - behave well and participate positively in learning activities
 - persevere or look for new solutions when they face difficulties
 - foster positive working relationships with adults and their peers
 - respond positively and purposefully to feedback

2. Well-being, care, support and guidance

Focus

- How effective is the care, support and guidance the school provides in ensuring that all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils with ALN, affected by poverty, or other identified barriers to progress:
 - are safe and secure
 - attend school regularly
 - are respected and fairly treated
 - develop leadership skills and take on responsibility
 - receive any additional guidance or support they require relating to the next steps in their development

When considering any of the aspects below inspectors should evaluate the difference they make to pupils' learning and how well teachers and other practitioners:

- create and maintain a **culture of safeguarding**, including following child protection procedures so that pupils are:
 - safe and secure
 - respected and treated fairly
 - free from bullying and harassment
 - free from physical, emotional, and verbal abuse
- ensure that pupils attend school regularly, for example by:
 - promoting and monitoring attendance including that of specific groups
 - challenging persistent absenteeism

- working in partnership, for example with educational welfare services, social services, police, and other agencies
- co-ordinate suitable support for pupils with **additional learning needs**, including working in partnership with external agencies when appropriate
- support positive behaviour, and accurately record, report and respond to all types of bullying and harassment
- ensure that pupils with a history of exclusion and those educated other than at school demonstrate improved behaviour and attitudes to learning
- encourage pupils to influence the life and work of the school and to develop leadership skills and take on responsibility
- provide pupils with effective and impartial advice relating to the next steps in their development, for example in relation to:
 - opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life
 - their transition to the next phase of learning

3. Leading and improving

Focus

How effectively do leaders:

- ensure that all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils with ALN, affected by poverty, or other identified barriers to progress, learn and make progress
- develop a culture, inclusive ethos and strategic direction that support the progress and well-being of all pupils
- identify and address areas for improvement, including addressing previous recommendations
- address national priorities, including improving the quality of teaching
- ensure that professional learning improves the quality of teaching, supports school improvement and equips all staff to carry out their roles
- manage the school's resources and/or public funding

When considering any of the aspects below, inspectors should evaluate the difference they make to pupils' learning and how well teachers and other practitioners :

- develop a culture, inclusive ethos and strategic direction that are suitably focused on improving pupils' learning and well-being
- set and communicate **high expectations** for staff, pupils and themselves
- **evaluate** the school's strengths and areas that require improvement, **and bring about improvement**
- have established a track record of making and sustaining improvements and the extent to which they have led to a positive impact on pupils' learning and well-being
- plan and deliver **professional learning opportunities** for staff that have a positive impact on pupils' learning and well-being
- manage the **performance** of staff to improve their practice and address underperformance where necessary

- take actions as appropriate to address other national priorities (for example, improving teaching and ALN reform) and appropriately promotes the school as a school in Wales.
- provide effective **governance** that offers support and challenge
- distribute **roles and responsibilities** to meet pupils' needs and bring about improvement in the school's provision
- consider staff workload and well-being and to what extent any new or revised requirements impact on the workload of their own staff and on headteachers, leaders and staff in other education settings
- develop productive relationships with parents, partner schools, external bodies and the wider community
- deploy the **school's resources** to ensure high quality teaching and learning and support for pupils' well-being
- use public funding to improve outcomes for publicly funded **pupils**

Part 2: How we inspect – Core Inspection arrangements

Introduction

This section is set out in a way that reflects the sequence of work before, during and after a core 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, we expect all inspectors, including those contracted to Estyn and those working as peer inspectors, to adhere to these principles.

Principles of our work

We expect our inspectors to work according to a number of key principles. They should:

- take a pupil-centred approach to any activity or engagement
- always focus strongly on the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning
- take into account the specific context of the provider and adapt approaches accordingly
- use a range of tailored inspection 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 core inspections, we expect inspectors to consider everything in the 'how and what' we inspect guidance document, but only report on the key strengths and areas for improvement.

In addition, inspectors will:

- ensure that all activity and engagement is responsive to the needs of all pupils
- ensure that evaluations are secure, reliable, valid and based on first-hand

evidence

- keep to a minimum any requirements for documentation and preparation by the provider
- gain the perspective of pupils and other stakeholders
- apply the principle of equality for Welsh and English to all our activity

In core inspections in particular, our inspectors will

- involve the provider fully in the inspection process, including the opportunity for the provider to select a nominee
- 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

Our mindset

Estyn's approach to inspection 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 pupils. 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 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. All inspectors have to meet the expected standards of behaviour and conduct.

When conducting engagement with a provider, inspectors will:

- be courteous and professional
- establish and maintain appropriate professional boundaries when talking to both children and adults
- 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 pupils
- 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 the evaluations is whether the methods and organisation are fit for the purpose in supporting all pupils 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 and regulation are 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 expect inspectors to uphold Estyn's Code of Conduct, but we also expect providers to:

- be courteous and professional, treating inspectors and inspection support staff with respect
- act in the best interests of pupils
- 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 observe practice and to talk to staff, pupils and 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 the 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, schools 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.

Safeguarding, including health, safety and well-being issues

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

If an inspector becomes aware of a safeguarding allegation/suspicion in respect of a child, young person or vulnerable adult, they should follow the procedures 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. They 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 pupils' health, safety and well-being. The officer will also advise the RI whether or not to share the concern with the school.

Where these risks are a serious concern during core inspection activity, inspectors should include a short comment in the report's text and a recommendation in the report. When a Standard is not compliant, we may also issue a safeguarding or site security letter. In the unlikely event that a safeguarding, health, safety or well-being issue is raised that does not lead to the failure of an Independent Schools Standard, then a well-being letter will be issued to the proprietor and Welsh Government 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 school who will be expected to provide evidence of the concern being resolved during the inspection.

If the concern/s is more serious and cannot be addressed quickly, the RI should inform the IC who will issue a site security letter to the proprietor and to Welsh Government. It will be their responsibility to ensure that the issue/s is addressed. The school 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

The number of inspectors and the number of days they spend at the provider may vary according to the size and context of the provider.

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

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 providers to upload information before the inspection and to download guidance from us about the inspection process. The VIR is also the place where headteachers and nominees can access the post-inspection questionnaires (PIQs).

In addition, all independent schools will be required to place key policy documents in a secure provider area on an annual basis. It is the responsibility of the school to ensure the most up to date documents are uploaded as these documents will be accessed by inspectors prior to any inspection activity.

We ensure the security of information uploaded by subjecting the VIR to penetration testing. This testing evaluates systems security. We identify and implement any actions to prevent unauthorised access. All users of Estyn’s VIR system have a username and password, which are recorded and maintained securely within an active directory. The system also has features to ensure password protection including threat detection and conditional access.

The inspection team

There are different roles within the inspection team.

Team member	Explanation	Role
Reporting inspector (RI), may also be referred to as the lead inspector	The RI for an inspection will be: HMI (His Majesty’s Inspector of Education and Training in Wales) – HMI are appointed by the crown. They are civil servants employed directly by Estyn.	The RI leads and manages the inspection team. They liaise with the school and the team ahead of the inspection, and quality assure their team’s work. The RI is the first point of reference for everyone during the on-site part of the inspection process.
Team inspectors (TI)	The number of team inspectors is determined by the size of the provider. Team inspectors may be HMI or contracted additional inspectors who have been trained by Estyn. All team inspectors are qualified teachers.	Team inspectors may take responsibility for gathering evidence to inform the team’s evaluation of different aspects of the inspection. The RI directs and manages their work.
Peer inspector (PI)	A peer inspector is a serving senior leader from another school who has completed Estyn’s PI training and assessment. Normally, inspection	PIs also take responsibility for gathering evidence to inform the team’s

	teams have a peer inspector as a team member. In larger schools, there may be more than one PI on the team.	evaluations. They are an integral part of the inspection team. The RI directs and manages their work.
Premises inspector – independent schools only	In independent schools, to comply with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999, an appropriately qualified additional inspector who has experience and qualification in premises related issues joins the team.	This additional inspector will normally join the independent school inspection team for one day on a core inspection to judge whether the school meets the relevant standards. However, these inspectors may join the team on other inspections or visits if appropriate.
Nominee (from the provider being inspected)	We will invite providers to select a senior member of staff, called the nominee, to work with the inspection team. The nominee should have sufficient seniority to act as a link between the provider and the inspection team. In many cases, the nominee is the headteacher of the school.	Providers can access the guidance for nominees on preparing for the inspection from links within the initial contact form (ICF), completed by the inspection co-ordinator (IC) and available via the VIR.

Contacting the provider before the inspection

The provider will receive 10 working days' notice of the inspection. We also inform the Welsh Government of the inspection date.

Following this, the inspection co-ordinator will contact the provider by telephone to set up the arrangements for the inspection. During this discussion, the inspection co-ordinator will:

- explain the purpose of the inspection and discuss an outline programme for the inspection
- discuss the specific information required before the inspection, including the provider's completion of a safeguarding self-evaluation form (either the Estyn proforma or the school's template), 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 provider wishes to have a nominee and, if it does, agree the role of the nominee and explain the process for completing the nominee guidance
- provide links and guidance for the completion of the suite of online pre-

inspection questionnaires (e.g. pupils, parents, staff etc)

- agree arrangements for setting up a meeting with parents/carers
- ensure that there are agreed procedures for addressing any concerns or complaints that might arise during the inspection
- arrange for members of the governing body, or the proprietor to meet inspectors during the inspection period
- organise any domestic arrangements, such as a base for the inspectors, parking and internet access
- set up the arrangements for feeding back the inspection findings
- agree the arrangements for completing the post-inspection questionnaire (PIQ)
- inform the provider in writing, through the initial contact form, of the key inspection arrangements

The inspection co-ordinator will request the following information from the provider through the VIR as soon as possible after the formal notification of the inspection:

- key background information e.g. names of staff and information about their roles and responsibilities
- a copy of the most recent development or improvement plan
- details of the timetables for the period of the inspection

If the inspection takes place early in the academic year, providers may wish to share samples of pupils' work from the previous year with inspectors, if available. If providers are unable to share pupils' previous work, inspectors will take this information into account when discussing work and progress with staff and pupils.

When we notify providers of the inspection, they will receive information on how to access online questionnaires for pupils, parents/carers and staff. The outcomes of the pre-inspection questionnaires will form part of the pre-inspection evidence and support inspectors to form their evaluations of the school's work.

An independent school may receive state-funding for pupils, for example those:

- in Early Years placements
- with additional learning needs
- who are in the care of the local authority

We will arrange to obtain a briefing on the school from the placing authority. Where provision is also inspected by CIW, we will liaise directly with that organisation in accordance with the protocol.

Planning the inspection and preparing the team

The reporting inspector will plan the inspection and allocate responsibilities to members of the inspection team, taking into account the provider's improvement priorities and any other information.

We require providers to place a full plan of all the activities during the inspection week in the VIR. The reporting inspector will plan the team's activities based on the information provided.

During the inspection

Initial team meeting

The initial inspection team meeting is likely to include:

- a health and safety briefing from the provider
- a short briefing from the headteacher or teacher in charge about the context of the school
- a brief position statement from the headteacher to set out the provider's strategic priorities and its current stage of development
- a discussion with the headteacher (led by the RI) about the improvement priorities identified by the provider and the progress to date in its improvement work
- a discussion regarding how inspectors will be able to access important information

The RI will confirm these arrangements with the headteacher during the pre-inspection phone call.

Gathering and reviewing inspection evidence

The team will plan the inspection so that they can cover the reporting requirements of the three inspection areas. The RI will plan the inspection activity flexibly, in response to the provider's, individual circumstances. This means that the activities planned in one provider may not mirror those planned in another. In addition, inspectors report 'by exception'. This means that the team will always consider everything within the inspection areas but the final report may not include every aspect of the framework.

The main forms of evidence are:

- observation of teaching and other activities, including evidence gathered through learning walks
- samples of pupils' work
- discussions with pupils, staff, leaders, managers, governors or management committees, parents and others
- pre-inspection questionnaire responses
- documentary or electronic evidence, e.g. information on pupils' progress
- relevant information from the local authority/regional consortium

The team will use direct observation of pupils' work wherever possible to gather evidence to support their evaluations. Inspectors may select an additional sample of pupils' work, if required, to support their evaluations of a specific aspect.

Providers should make information available to the inspection team about the standards achieved by pupils, particularly the results of any initial screening tests and other relevant assessments. This will help inspectors to evaluate pupils' progress, to come to a view about the standards pupils achieve compared to their starting-points and the way teachers use the information from assessment to influence their planning and their lessons.

The team will consider stakeholders' views on the provider and test out the validity of those views during the inspection.

Recording inspection evidence

Inspectors will complete their evidence forms electronically as part of Estyn's digital system for collecting, collating and recording inspection findings.

Team meetings

The main purpose of team meetings is to arrive at an accurate, reliable, valid and corporate view of learning and the quality of provision and 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 the main inspection findings and any recommendations

In the very few instances where the nominee is not the headteacher, it is important that the reporting inspector holds a brief daily meeting with the headteacher to clarify inspection issues and the broad, emerging findings of the inspection team. However, normally, the headteacher should be the nominee. This means that they will hear the emerging findings at each team meeting and be well placed to gather any further evidence for the team to consider.

Professional dialogue

Throughout the inspection, inspectors will engage in professional dialogue with practitioners. This dialogue may include meeting with individual teachers, often in their classrooms to discuss their planning and assessment of pupils' work. Inspectors may want to meet with groups of support staff, for example to understand the school's arrangements to support pupils with ALN. Inspectors may decide to meet with leaders, either individually or as a group, to understand the impact of the provider's leadership on bringing about improvements to pupils' outcomes.

Professional dialogue enables inspectors to gain first-hand evidence from practitioners that can be triangulated with other sources of evidence. The dialogue will provide emerging, interim findings on aspects of the evidence base. These findings may be amended, on reflection, for example after scrutiny of pupils' work or talking to pupils or as the result of moderation within the team.

Normally, following a lesson observation, inspectors will offer a brief professional dialogue with the member of staff on the learning seen. It may be necessary, in some cases, to conduct this discussion later during the inspection.

At all times, the main focus of the professional dialogue should be on the pupils, the progress they make during the lesson and the standards they achieve. Inspectors should focus on any strengths or areas for improvement in relation to the specific work seen.

Due to the nature of learning walks, and the spread of the activity across a number of lessons/classes within a relatively short period of time, inspectors will not be in a position to offer professional dialogue to individual teachers after learning walk activity.

Formal feedback

At the end of the on-site part of the inspection, the team will provide verbal feedback to senior leaders. In addition:

- in independent schools the proprietor should be invited to attend the meeting

The feedback meeting provides the opportunity for leaders and managers to hear and to reflect on the team's findings. The feedback should focus on the strengths and areas for improvement and the factors that contribute to them, including the recommendations. The reporting inspector should explain to the provider that issues may be clarified and factual matters may be corrected. However, the purpose of the meeting is for the provider to understand rather than negotiate the inspection team's findings.

During the inspection, the team will consider if there is any effective practice that is worth sharing with other providers. Where this is the case, the reporting inspector will include a spotlight on this practice as part of the inspection report.

During all core inspections, the inspection team will consider whether the provider needs any follow-up activity. The reporting inspector will inform leaders if any follow-up activity is required.

All the evaluations and findings reported during an inspection, including the level of follow-up if appropriate, are provisional and subject to moderation and validation by HMCI. They are confidential to the provision's staff and governors or management committees. They should not be communicated beyond this group, including via social media, until we publish the report on our website.

Complaints about the conduct of the inspection

If there are any issues about the inspection process overall or the conduct of individual inspectors, then the nominee should raise these directly and as soon as possible with the reporting inspector. The nominee should not wait until after the inspection but should raise any issues while the team is on site. Issues occasionally arise due to misunderstandings, and these can usually be resolved quickly and satisfactorily close to the time when they occurred.

There is guidance on our complaints handling procedures on our website.

There are some things that we do not address through our complaints-handling procedure, for example complaints, or challenges, about evaluations or follow-up decisions made after an Estyn inspection or review. This is because, before and during an inspection, the school has the opportunity to provide all of the evidence needed for the inspection team to reach its judgements accurately and fairly.

After the core inspection

The core inspection report

The reporting inspector is responsible for producing a final inspection report that is clear to a lay audience and helpful to the provider.

When writing reports, inspectors should take account of Estyn's writing guidance, which is available on our website www.estyn.gov.wales.

We base the structure of the inspection report on our inspection framework. The report will take the following form:

- **About the school**
- **Summary**
- **Main evaluation**
- **Compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024**
- **Safeguarding**
- **Recommendations**
- **What happens next**

We will produce the report within statutory timescales.

The factual accuracy check

We will give the provider a draft of the report prior to publication, to help check the factual accuracy of the content. The provider will normally have five working days in which to consider the draft report and to identify any errors.

The focus of the check is on resolving any factual inaccuracies in the inspection report. It does not focus on the findings. There is further guidance for providers on the nature and scope of this check on our website.

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 headteacher during inspection
- criteria and recording systems that comply with inspection guidance
- careful review and analysis of evidence
- providing clear verbal feedback of the team's main findings and the detail for each inspection area
- producing accurate and well-presented reports

As part of our quality assurance procedures, we invite providers to complete a post-inspection questionnaire (PIQ). The questionnaire will be available in the VIR. Providers should complete the first part of the PIQ as soon as possible after the on-site inspection and submit it electronically to Estyn through the VIR system. They

can complete the second part of the PIQ after the publication of the inspection report, again through the VIR system.

We apply a robust quality assurance process to all of our inspections. The reporting inspector will quality assure the team's work in the first instance. After the end of on-site activity, the report and evidence base are quality assured by an experienced HMI who has not been involved in the inspection thus far. The full evidence base is scrutinised and matched to the report text, to ensure that the two align. In addition, the quality assurance process considers the appropriateness of the level of follow-up, and the recommendations emanating from the inspection. As part of the quality assurance process, recommendations may be amended, removed or added.

There is then a further moderation process. The evidence base and the report are scrutinised by the appropriate assistant directors. Whenever the outcome of an inspection is statutory follow-up, in addition to an assistant director, the strategic director moderates the report alongside the evidence base, on behalf of HMCI. On a very few occasions, this moderation process may result in a change to the level of follow-up.

In addition, we quality assure a sample of inspections through on-site visits. Our full arrangements for assuring the quality of inspections are available on our website www.estyn.gov.wales.

Part 3: How we inspect – Monitoring Inspection arrangements

Parallels with core inspections

This section describes the parallels between the sequence of work before, during and after a monitoring inspection with that of a core inspection.

The following aspects of our approach to conducting core inspections also applies to monitoring inspections:

- Principles of our work
- Our mindset
- Expectations of inspectors
- Expectations of providers
- Safeguarding, including health, safety and well-being issues
- Approach to inspection
- The Virtual Inspection Room
- The inspection team
- Contacting the provider before the inspection
- Planning the inspection and preparing the team
- During the inspection
- After the core inspection
- The factual accuracy check
- Assuring the quality of inspections

Differences from core inspections

Length of inspection and team members

Monitoring inspections will be shorter than core inspections and be conducted by a smaller team of inspectors. Monitoring inspections will continue to involve peer inspectors, but not a nominee. The RI will ensure there are regular meetings between the team and school throughout the inspection. The size of team and length of inspection will be based upon the size and context of each school.

Independent School Standards Regulations (Wales) 2024 and progress towards recommendations

Monitoring inspections will evaluate the progress the school has made towards the recommendations left at the last core inspection and the school's compliance with the Independent School Standards Regulations (Wales) 2024. Monitoring inspections will not report against the framework that underpins core inspections.

The monitoring inspection report

The structure of the monitoring inspection report will focus upon progress towards the recommendations left at the last core inspection and compliance with the Independent School Standards Regulations (Wales) 2024.

The report will take the following form:

- **About the school**
- **Summary**
- **Main evaluation**
- **Compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations**
- **Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report**
- **Recommendations**
- **What happens next**

There is no statutory timeframe for the production of the monitoring inspection report. For consistency, we will produce the report within 45 working days in line with the statutory timescales for core inspection reports.

Follow-up guidance

Meeting statutory requirements in independent schools

The Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 govern the work of independent schools. We expect independent schools to evaluate how they meet these requirements through their own normal self-evaluation procedures.

Inspectors will use the school's self-evaluation and other information to identify whether an independent school meets its statutory requirements.

Inspectors will identify in the independent school's inspection reports any failure to meet statutory requirements. This may be at either a core or monitoring inspection.

Where a school fails to meet any of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations, the requirement to comply with these regulations will be the first recommendation in the inspection report. The school will be required to submit a post inspection action plan to the Welsh Government to indicate what action will be taken to ensure continued compliance.

Schools who fail to meet any of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations will receive a letter from Welsh Government informing them of the requirement to submit a post inspection action plan (PIAP).

If the PIAP is accepted and we believe the school has the capacity to make the required changes within a reasonable timescale, the school will be revisited or a desk top activity completed to evaluate compliance against the standards.

If the PIAP is not accepted and /or we believe the school does not have the capacity to make the required changes, without additional support, we initiate a programme of follow-up activity as outlined in our follow-up guidance.

Estyn will conduct a review visit, normally within a year to report to the Welsh Government whether the school is compliant with the regulations to ensure their continued registration. When necessary, Estyn may provide schools with additional support to plan for and meet the regulations.

If a school continues to fail to meet the standards for registration Welsh Government may decide to:

- de-register the school
- tell the school to cease using any part of the school premises for all purposes or purposes specified
- close any part of the school's operation
- cease to admit any new pupils, or new pupils of a description specified