



Supplementary guidance on inspecting attendance

Autumn 2024

This guidance is also available in Welsh.

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- ▲ primary schools
- ▲ secondary schools
- ▲ all-age schools
- ▲ special schools
- ▲ pupil referral units
- ▲ independent schools
- ▲ further education
- ▲ independent specialist colleges
- ▲ adult community learning
- ▲ local authority education services for children and young people
- ▲ teacher education and training
- ▲ Welsh for adults
- ▲ work-based learning
- ▲ learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- ▲ reports to Senedd Cymru and provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the Welsh Government and others
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

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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What is the purpose?

This provides further guidance for inspectors to use alongside the sector guidance for inspection

For whom is it intended?

Maintained schools and PRUs and local government education services

From when should the guidance be used?

September 2024

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Supplementary guidance

Our inspection guidance explains What we inspect and How we inspect. However, we also produce supplementary guidance to help inspectors to consider specific aspects of education and training further.

The supplementary guidance documents set out some key principles, considerations and resources for inspectors. They relate to all sectors that Estyn inspects, unless they state that they are for a specific sector. They expand on certain aspects of education/training (e.g. the inspection of literacy) or on ways of conducting inspections (e.g. the use of learning walks) or specific inspection arrangements (e.g. guidance on inspecting church schools).

The supplementary guidance documents do not aim to be comprehensive. Inspectors are not required to work through them exhaustively when covering any specific aspect on an inspection. However, inspectors may find them useful when responding to specific emerging questions that arise during inspections or when they wish to reflect or investigate further.

The supplementary guidance documents may help providers gain an understanding of Estyn's inspection arrangements. They may also be helpful to providers in evaluating specific aspects of their own provision.

Our inspection work is based on the following principles:

- Inspectors will approach inspection with a positive mindset to ensure it is the best possible professional learning experience for the staff in each provider
- Inspectors will take a learner-focused approach to inspection
- Inspectors will always focus strongly on the quality of teaching and learning
- Inspectors will seek out well-considered innovative practice
- Inspectors will tailor the inspection activities according to the circumstances in each provider as far as possible
- Inspectors will be agile and responsive to emerging findings and will use the increased range of inspection tools and approaches available
- Inspectors will consider everything in the inspection framework, but will only report on the key strengths and weaknesses within each provider

Introduction

Under the inspection framework for September 2024 within inspection area 2 **inspectors should report on the attendance of all pupils, including those eligible for free school meals.**

Inspectors should refer to 'Belonging, engaging and participating: Guidance on improving learner engagement and attendance' Welsh Government Guidance document no: 293/2023.

From September 2024, inspectors should report on attendance in all inspection reports.

In their supporting evidence inspectors should always consider:

- How well leaders evaluate and plan for improving pupils' attendance
- The impact of the school's work to improve attendance
- How well the school works with the community to improve attendance
- How well the school records, analyses and responds to pupils' attendance rates
- How well leaders target and use resources to improve attendance
- How well the school supports pupils to reintegrate into school following periods of absence, including fixed term exclusions
- How well the school supports pupils with emotionally based school avoidance and engages with all groups of pupils to improve their attendance from their initial starting points

and how this is impacting on:

- the number of pupils who have attendance rates well below those of others in the school, especially those with attendance rates below 80% and those with attendance rates below 90%
- the improved engagement, participation and rates of attendance of particular groups of pupils in comparison to the rest of the school, such as pupils who are eligible for free school meals or pupils with additional learning needs
- comparative rates of attendance for year groups across the school
- whether pupils arrive at school and lessons punctually
- whether any deficit in attendance impacts on standards of pupils or groups of pupils, taking care not to simply imply causation from correlation

Inspectors should always consider the school's individual context and the impact of COVID-19 on the school community and subsequent effect on attendance.

Inspectors should also consider any additional information provided by the school, including their most up-to-date attendance data. They should take into account any analysis undertaken by schools to identify mitigating factors that may affect overall attendance rates, for example, a high proportion of pupils with serious medical needs that require regular hospital appointments or time at home. Inspectors should use meetings with pupils to pursue any emerging questions related to attendance, such as to gauge whether pupils understand the consequences of poor attendance.

Whilst national data provides a context to consider a school's attendance rates, inspectors should not be unduly influenced by comparisons with national rates of attendance as these rates are much lower than pre-pandemic levels.

In IA3, it is important that inspectors focus on the impact of leadership on improving rates of attendance.

Background information

Overall attendance

Official attendance figures relate to pupils aged 5 to 15 in maintained schools.

The figures stated below for the primary and secondary sector in 2022-2023 are nationally collected and verified data. However, it is important to note that the other figures are the unverified data from the Welsh Government's weekly collection of attendance data following the pandemic.

In 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, there were no restrictions and regulations in place for the control of the spread of COVID-19, although pupils were still absent at times due to the illness. This is different to the case in 2021-2022 where various restrictions and regulations were in place for the first half of the school year.

Average attendance for the academic year from 4 September 2023 to 19 July 2024 was 89.0%. This shows an increase of 0.5%pts from 2022-2023 and 2.4%pts from 2021-2022.

Attendance was at its highest at 94.0% during the first week of the autumn term in 2023-2024. Attendance reached at least 90.0% on 89 days in 2023-2024 in comparison with 85 days in the previous academic year.

Illness was the biggest reason for pupils' absence, which accounted for 40.2% of all absences. 33.2% of absences were unauthorised by schools.

Absence for a family holiday accounted for 11.4% of all absences in 2023-2024, a notable increase from 9.5% in 2022-2023.

Thirty-one point nine per cent of pupils were persistently absent at the new 10% threshold in 2023-2024, compared to 32.5% last year. At the 20% threshold, 10.0% of pupils were persistently absent compared with 10.7% last academic year.

Male pupils' attendance at 89.1% was slightly higher than that of female pupils at 88.9%.

Attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals

Average attendance in 2023-2024 for pupils not eligible for free school meals is 90.8%. This shows an increase of 0.4%pts from the previous year when it was 90.4%

Average attendance in 2023-2024 for pupils eligible for free school meals was 83.4% compared with 83.1% in the previous year. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals therefore only increased by 0.4%pt. The gap has therefore stayed the same at 7.3%pts. 52.1% of pupils who are eligible for free school meals were persistently absent at the 10% threshold while 21.6% of pupils who are eligible for free school meals were persistently absent at the 20% threshold. The corresponding rates for pupils who were not eligible for free school meals were 26.1% and 6.6%.

Attendance by sector

The following tables provide separate data that is available for pupils in the primary and secondary sectors. To align with the verified data is published by Welsh Government, the primary data relates to the whole academic year, while the secondary data relates to the first five half terms.

Attendance (%)		2022-2023	2023-2024	Change
Primary	All pupils	91.5	92.1	0.6
	eFSM	87.4	88.1	0.7
	nFSM	92.9	93.4	0.5
	Gap	5.5	5.3	0.2
Secondary	All pupils	87.3	87.6	0.3
	eFSM	79.5	79.7	0.2
	nFSM	89.8	90.0	0.2
	Gap	10.3	10.3	0.0

Attendance of pupils who have additional learning needs

Inspectors should consider whether pupils who have additional learning needs are attending school regularly. Inspectors should consider these pupils' individual needs, as noted in their IDPs and any relevant information related to attendances.

Inspectors should be mindful that for the academic year 2022-2023, the national average difference between attendance of pupils with ALN (or SEN) and their counterparts was 5.4%pts lower in the secondary sector and 3.1%pts lower in the primary sector.

Where the difference in schools' attendance rates of pupils who have ALN and their counterparts vary considerably from these figures, inspectors should investigate the reasons for this.

All part time timetables (PTT) must include the agreement of the parents/carers and should include the pupil, the school, the LA and any other relevant practitioners who are working with the pupils.

Whilst PTT can help pupils re-integrate into school after a long absence or be a means of preventing greater absence, they have the overall effect of reducing time in school for pupils and can have a negative impact on pupil progress and well-being.

In addition, PTT can place pressures on families and have the potential to further pupil disengagement from education.

PTT should only be used in exceptional circumstances as a short-term measure (generally no more than 6 weeks) with the intention of returning to full-time education sooner, if feasible. Schools should ensure pupils on PTT receive a full-time education, where this is appropriate for individual pupils. This could be providing online learning, hard copies of resources. School should ensure pupils can access such arrangements prior to putting a PTT into place.

PTT should never be used as a means of managing behavioural issues. All pupils are entitled to a full-time education and access to the curriculum. In addition, schools are required to deliver the curriculum, other than when exceptions apply.

PTT arrangements should be recorded in a plan as a formal arrangement between the parent/carer, the child, the school, the LA and any other relevant practitioner. The range of plans which we might see include a reintegration plan following an exclusion. A managed move plan could be in place to support a change in placement as part of a process to avoid a permanent exclusion. A transition plan could be for a pupil moving from one type of provision to another. A pastoral support plan (PSP) would be a total plan to support the well-being of a pupil not just about the PTT arrangements. A behaviour support plan could also be used as part of a PTT arrangement.

In Wales, in 2023-2024, there were 2,279 EOTAS pupils mainly educated outside school. There was a combination of 902 pupils with subsidiary enrolment, i.e. they spend some time in school. Inspectors should consider how well the school supports these pupils and encourages them to participate in the life of the school. Where a pupil has a part time timetable in place, inspectors should expect to see reintegration plans, transition plans, pastoral support plans (PSP), behaviour support plans (BSP) and where appropriate, managed move plans.

In local authority classes and special schools, attendance rates can be affected by a range of factors, for example pupils' medical conditions and/or comorbidities. These pupils may also have additional absences due to medical or therapeutic appointments, which could negatively impact their attendance. Inspectors should consider how the school supports pupils and their families in these cases.

Attendance and transition

When considering the attendance of pupils in Year 7 and Year 8, inspectors should consider how well secondary schools have considered pupils' attendance as part of transition practices. They should consider how well secondary schools take a proactive and informed approach to improving attendance and reducing absenteeism.

- Is pupils' attendance a part of transition discussions and information sharing?
- Are secondary schools identifying early those pupils who may be at risk of poor attendance?
- How quickly is support in place for those pupils who had weaker attendance in primary school?

Attendance of Year groups

The table below shows average attendance by year group:

Year	Average attendance for 2021-2022	Average attendance for 2022-2023	Average attendance for 2023-2024
1	89.6%	90.8% +	91.8%
2	90.0%	91.6% +	92.3%
3	90.2%	91.8% +	92.5%
4	90.1%	91.8% +	92.2%
5	89.7%	91.7% +	92.0%
6	89.6%	91.4% +	91.9%
7	88.4%	90.6% *	90.9%
8	86.3%	88.4% *	88.3%
9	84.8%	87.2% *	87.2%
10	84.7%	86.6% *	86.9%
11	77.4%	84.4% *	84.6%

Attendance by local authority

The table below shows the attendance for all pupils in 2023-2024 by local authority, and the levels of authorised and unauthorised absence. This provides useful context when considering an individual school's attendance.

Local authority	Average percentage of sessions present	Average percentage of sessions of authorised absence	Average percentage of sessions of unauthorised absence
Wrexham	90.1	7.3	2.6
Powys	90.0	8.1	1.9
Monmouthshire	90.0	7.8	2.2
Flintshire	89.6	7.9	2.5
Cardiff	89.6	6.2	4.2
Bridgend	89.5	7.6	2.9
Vale of Glamorgan	89.4	6.4	4.2
Ceredigion	89.3	7.0	3.7
Newport	89.3	6.1	4.7
Gwynedd	89.1	8.4	2.5
Torfaen	89.1	8.3	2.6
Caerphilly	89.1	7.3	3.7
Wales	89.0	7.3	3.6
Swansea	89.0	7.6	3.3
Merthyr Tydfil	88.7	6.6	4.7
Isle of Anglesey	88.7	8.4	2.9
Pembrokeshire	88.7	8.2	3.1

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Conwy	88.3	7.7	4.0
Carmarthenshire	88.3	8.1	3.6
Denbighshire	88.3	7.7	4.0
Rhondda Cynon Taf	88.2	7.1	4.6
Neath Port Talbot	88.0	6.5	5.4
Blaenau Gwent	87.7	8.7	3.6

Note that pupils in PRUs are not included in the local authority attendance rates. Pupils in PRUs typically have notably lower attendance than average, so if these pupils are discounted from a local authority's data then the local authority is presented in a slightly favourable light in the table above. A few local authorities do not have a PRU and therefore all pupils are included in their data.

Further details: [Attendance of pupils in maintained schools: 5 September 2022 to 24 July 2023 | GOV.WALES](#)

* Validated data from official Welsh Government release [on absenteeism from secondary schools](#)

+ [Validated data from Welsh Government release on absenteeism from primary schools](#)

[Attendance of pupils in maintained schools: 4 September 2023 to 19 July 2024](#)

Attendance in 2018-2019

This was the last full academic year before the COVID-19 pandemic started. The table below sets out overall attendance for the year in primary and secondary schools, with a breakdown for pupils eligible (or not) for free school meals.

	Primary schools	Secondary schools
All pupils	94.7%	93.8%
Pupils eligible for free school meals	92.1%	89.5%
Pupils not eligible for free school meals	95.3%	94.7%
p.p. gap between eFSM and neFSM pupils	3.2 p.p.	5.2 p.p.

Questions to ask staff on maintained school inspections

IA2

How does the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals compare to that of other pupils?

How does the attendance of pupils with additional learning needs compare to that of other pupils?

Are there any Year groups where attendance is particularly strong or weak?

Are there any other groups of pupils for whom attendance is a concern?

How well does the school record and analyse attendance data, and identify areas for improvement? Has the school identified any particular trends in attendance relating to particular groups of pupils? Has the school analysed any notable differences in their use of absence codes compared to national averages?

How well does the school promote good attendance?

How well do staff in special schools support and encourage pupils to attend regularly? What processes are in place to minimise the disruption of therapeutic and medical appointments?

How well does the school support pupils with chronic conditions or comorbidities to engage and participate in the life of the school? Are health care plans in place?

How well does the school work with families to support pupils with low attendance?

How well is the school responding where pupils are absent because their well-being is adversely affected when they attend school?

How well does the school work with other agencies to support pupils with low attendance? (Inspectors should be mindful that the capacity of external support services, such as local authority education welfare services, continues to be considerably stretched as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic)

If any pupils are on a reduced timetable for school attendance, are the arrangements for their education appropriate and monitored closely?

IA3

Do the school's leaders have a good overview of attendance, including areas for improvement?

How well do the school's leaders plan for improvement in attendance?

How well is the school using its resources to support good attendance?

How well do leaders deploy resources to support parents/carers to encourage their child/ren to engage, participate and attend regularly?

In schools with local authority classes and special schools, how well do leaders understand the context for pupils and address any barriers to attendance? Examples include staff deployed to meet and greet, travel training, staggered start and finish, the relationship between the school and transport companies.

Questions to ask about attendance when inspecting a PRU

How well does the PRU use the pupil information shared prior to pupils' entry to consider attendance? Does information include prior interventions to improve attendance and any external agency involvement to allow PRUs to plan for improvement?

Where there are significant concerns for a pupil's attendance, how effectively is the information shared with the local authority or referred to local authority panel for additional support?

How robust are processes for monitoring and analysing pupil attendance and trends? How well are attendance codes monitored?

How well do external agencies support the work of the PRU to improve pupil attendance?

How well does the local authority and management committee monitor attendance across the PRU?

How well does the local authority and management committee monitor the use of part-time education and pastoral support programmes (PSPs)?

How effective are arrangements to address attendance issues, particularly for pupils with persistent absenteeism?

How effective are opportunities for the sharing of good practice for improving pupil attendance with other similar provisions?

How well does the curriculum offer promote better attendance?

How effective are processes to support parents/carers to address attendance concerns? What could be improved? For example, does the PRU explore reasons why parents/carers think their child may not be attending?

How well are arrangements for pupils to access part-time education used and monitored? (How many pupils access part-time education? On average how long do pupils access part-time education? Who is this agreed with? How frequently are these plans reviewed? Is there an agreed plan in place shared with the parents/carers and pupils to increase access to education?)

Where pupils have dual placement with a mainstream school, how well are attendance rates monitored? How well does the PRU work with mainstream schools to address any attendance issues?

How well are PSPs used? How effective are they and how does the PRU know? (Who are they agreed with? Who are they shared with? Is there an agreed plan of action, including a clear timeframe to return pupils to full-time access to education?)

How well do pupils understand the importance of attending regularly?

How well are pupils involved in discussions around their attendance? (How often? What is the impact of any discussions? What do pupils say about why they do not attend the PRU? Can they make suggestions on what would help them attend more regularly?)

Inspecting attendance as part of a Local Government Education Services (LGES) inspection

From September 2024, inspectors should review school attendance rates as part of a LGES inspection and refer to attendance in the report where appropriate. This will either be in response to a specific local inspection question about attendance, or as part of a response to a broader question, for example, a question relating to the effectiveness of school improvement services or a question relating to support for a specific group of vulnerable learners. When considering attendance at a local authority level, inspectors will take account of the context of the local authority, as well as attendance rates locally and nationally before the COVID-19 pandemic. Where attendance in a local authority is considerably below pre-pandemic levels, inspectors should strongly consider including a recommendation to improve attendance in the inspection report.