

Supplementary guidance on inspecting curriculum in maintained schools and PRUs

Summer 2025

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
- ⬆ learner referral units
- ⬆ independent schools
- ⬆ further education
- ⬆ independent specialist colleges
- ⬆ adult learning in the community
- ⬆ local government education services
- ⬆ Welsh immersion arrangements in local authorities
- ⬆ youth work services
- ⬆ initial teacher education
- ⬆ 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?

To provide guidance to inspectors for evaluating self-evaluation

For whom is it intended?

Inspectors of maintained schools and pupil referral units

From when should the guidance be used?

Summer 2025

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Supplementary guidance

The key Estyn documents that guide inspection activity are the inspection guidance handbooks for each sector. 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

This document contains guidance on inspecting curriculum in maintained schools and PRUs. When inspecting this aspect of a school/PRU's work, the primary focus should always be the impact that curriculum design and delivery has on pupils' progress and well-being.

This guidance is divided into three sections:

- Part one explains our general approach to inspecting a school's curriculum. It considers our principles from 'How we inspect'.
- Part two provides a commentary and questions for inspectors to consider when looking at each aspect of 'What we inspect'. This section sets out what inspectors need to consider regarding the impact of curriculum in relation to each inspection area.
- Part three is an appendix with questions to support discussion during inspection.

The section on 'What we inspect' sets out what inspectors need to consider regarding curriculum design and delivery and its impact on pupils' learning and well-being. It should be read in conjunction with the section on 'How we inspect', which explains the approaches inspectors might take when they evaluate the curriculum, including considering how well schools/PRUs tackle the impact of poverty on educational attainment when planning their curriculum.

When inspecting the curriculum, it is important that inspectors pay attention to the Curriculum for Wales [guidance](#), including the mandatory elements summarised [here](#). National guidance should be considered alongside this supplementary guidance and 'What we inspect' and 'How we inspect'. The guidance for education other than at school can be found [here](#).

Whole school curriculum planning

The Welsh Government states that 'a school's curriculum is everything a learner experiences in pursuit of the four purposes. It is not simply what we teach, but how we teach and crucially, why we teach it.'ⁱ A coordinated, whole-school approach to curriculum planning will ensure that every pupil, especially those who are adversely affected by poverty, is supported to make strong progress in their learning.

All curriculum development should have a clear purpose and be underpinned by high-quality teaching. A clear understanding of the purpose of learning and why specific

knowledge, skills, and experiences are important helps focus the planning of progress, learning, and teaching.

Part one – How we inspect the curriculum

Our approach to inspecting a school's curriculum should always focus on the impact that curriculum and teaching have on pupils' learning and well-being. Whilst inspectors should pay due regard to any guidance, including national guidance, they should not treat this as a checklist for schools/PRUs to meet.

Inspectors' evaluation of the school or PRU's curriculum will take account of the provider's vision, context and rationale for developing their curriculum in line with the requirements for Curriculum for Wales. Inspectors will take account of the statutory guidance in place and whether or not providers are meeting mandatory requirements. Importantly, we will evaluate how effective the school's or PRU's curriculum is in providing a worthwhile range of relevant and engaging learning experiences to improve the learning and progress of all pupils and support them to gain the knowledge, understanding and skills that they need.

Inspectors should consider the positive or negative effects of curriculum arrangements on the extent to which groups of pupils access the full range of learning experiences overall. For example, inspectors will consider whether all pupils of all ages access a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs and supports them to make progress in their learning and well-being.

Methodology

When inspecting a school or PRU's curriculum, inspectors should consider a range of evidence to support their evaluations. This may include:

- Pupils' work
- Observations of learning
- Curriculum planning or mapping
- Discussions with pupils, staff and leaders
- Extra-curricular activities
- Information about pupil progress in their learning and well-being, including relevant data

Inspectors should begin their conversation with school/PRU leaders by aiming to understand how and why a school/PRU has designed their curriculum in a particular way. They should focus on how well leaders share their vision for curriculum and teaching and how well this is understood by staff.

Inspectors should meet with a range of staff to consider how well they understand their role in curriculum design and delivery and to understand how professional learning has helped them to improve teaching and curriculum across the school. When meeting with

pupils, inspectors should discuss how well pupils feel that curriculum and teaching help them to make progress. Inspectors should consider pupils' work and the progress that they make from their starting points.

When observing learning, inspectors should consider how well the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and to what extent high quality teaching underpins the curriculum. High-quality teaching is a key enabler of effective curriculum delivery so the quality of teaching and resulting learning experiences for pupils should always be a focus when inspecting a school or PRU's curriculum. Inspectors should consider how well teaching enables pupils to make progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills and how well extra-curricular experiences support pupils to develop their learning and well-being.

Part two – What we inspect when evaluating the curriculum

Inspection area 1: Teaching and learning

‘What We Inspect’ states that inspectors should evaluate:

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

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

Inspectors should evaluate the difference they make to pupils’ learning and how well teachers and other practitioners 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 pupils’ spiritual, moral, social, and cultural awareness*
- *fosters positive and respectful attitudes to diversity. (RSE)*
- *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*

Inspectors should consider how well leaders have planned and coordinated their curriculum to ensure that pupils have purposeful learning experiences across all areas of

learning and experience and how well teaching is ensuring that pupils are engaged in their learning and making strong progress. Inspectors should consider:

- Does the school/PRU's curriculum enable pupils to gain relevant and engaging learning experiences across all areas of learning and experience?
- Does the curriculum enable them to gain sufficient depth of knowledge?
- Does the curriculum challenge all pupils to make meaningful progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills?
- Do pupils get sufficient opportunities to develop their skills across the curriculum?
- Is teaching effective in engaging pupils and supporting their progress?
- To what extent do teachers and learning support staff take full account of individual pupils' learning needs in the planning of the curriculum and in the delivery of individual lessons and sequences of lessons?
- How well do staff use assessment information to inform the planning and development of their curriculum?
- From 14, when pupils select a narrower range of subjects, do they get a sufficiently broad offer that is relevant to their needs?

14 to 16 curriculum and qualifications

For secondary age pupils, inspectors should consider how well the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 caters for pupils' needs and interests. Inspectors should consider how well schools provide opportunities for pupils to gain purposeful learning experiences and qualifications that meet their needs. Inspectors should consider:

- How well has the school/PRU designed its curriculum from 14 to give pupils a broad and balanced choice?
- How well do learning experiences support pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding?
- How well is the school/PRU ensuring that pupils get access to the full curriculum from Year 7 to Year 9?
- Are whole cohorts being entered for qualifications that are inappropriate for them?
- How well does the school/PRU work with partners to broaden the curriculum offer?

Where inspectors identify pupils being entered for qualifications that do not meet their needs, they should highlight this in the evidence base. If this has a negative impact on pupils' progress it should be noted in the report.

Skills development

When evaluating curriculum, inspectors should pay close attention to the impact of the provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills.

Inspectors should consider:

- How well do teachers and leaders ensure that pupils build on their skills purposefully and progressively across the curriculum?
- To what extent are pupils enabled to build on the skills they have developed in previous phases – e.g. from primary school in the case of pupils moving to secondary school?
- How well does the provision support pupils to improve their reading, oral and writing skills?
- How well does the provision support pupils to develop their numeracy and digital skills?
- How well does the provision support pupils to develop their physical, creative and other skills?
- How well does the school support pupils with weaker skills?

Inspection Area 2: Well-being, care, support and guidance

'What We Inspect' states that:

Inspectors should evaluate how well the curriculum ensures that all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barrier 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*

Under inspection area 2, in relation to evaluating the curriculum, inspectors should consider the following:

- How well does the curriculum promote learners' understanding of healthy lifestyles, including physical activity, nutrition, and mental health?

- To what extent does the curriculum encourage respect for diversity and the promotion of inclusion and positive relationships within the school and the wider community?
- How effectively does the curriculum engage learners, fostering a sense of belonging and motivation, to attend school regularly?
- To what extent does the school/PRU use the curriculum to build learners' confidence and resilience, encouraging regular participation in school life?
- How effectively does the school/PRU adapt the curriculum to support learners who experience irregular attendance, ensuring they remain engaged and make progress?
- How effectively does the curriculum promote positive behaviour by engaging learners in meaningful, relevant, and stimulating learning experiences?
- To what extent does the curriculum provide meaningful opportunities for learners to develop leadership skills, such as decision-making, communication, and teamwork?
- To what extent does the curriculum provide opportunities for learners to understand their rights and responsibilities, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)?
- To what extent is the curriculum informed by pupils' views and current issues of interest to them – e.g. addressing issues raised by the SHRN survey through PSE provision?

Inspection Area 3: Leading and improving

'What We Inspect' states that inspectors should evaluate how effectively leaders:

- *ensure that all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example pupils affected by poverty, with ALN 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 and the development of the Welsh language*
- *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/PRU's resources*

Under inspection area 3, inspectors should consider the following:

- How effectively do leaders establish and share a clear vision for the curriculum and teaching?
- To what extent do leaders ensure the curriculum is ambitious, broad, balanced, and inclusive for all learners?
- Where relevant, how well do leaders work with partners to broaden or improve their curriculum offer?
- How well do leaders ensure that the curriculum reflects national priorities, including the promotion of the Welsh language, culture, and heritage?
- How effectively do leaders ensure that professional learning supports staff to deliver the Curriculum for Wales confidently and effectively?
- How effectively do leaders monitor and evaluate the implementation of the curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of all learners, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those from disadvantaged backgrounds?
- How effectively do governors challenge and support leaders to ensure the curriculum aligns with the four purposes and promotes learner progress?
- How do decisions and considerations regarding finances and resources impact on the curriculum?

Part three: Appendix 1 - Suggested questions for meetings

Questions for senior leaders

Vision and planning

- What is your vision for the curriculum and teaching? With whom have you consulted in developing your vision?
- How do you make decisions about the content and on what basis are decisions made?
- How specific is the curriculum in terms of what pupils need to know and be able to do at the end of each year / phase? To what extent is progression built into the curriculum?
- How does your work with other schools/PRUs/partners support your design process? How well do transition arrangements support pupils in building on their prior learning?

- How well do you avoid unnecessary repetition in learning from Year 6 into Years 7 and 8?
- How do you organise your curriculum?
- How well does your curriculum and learning experiences meet pupils' needs and interests? What about in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form?
- To what extent do teachers and learning support staff take full account of individual pupils' learning needs in the planning of the curriculum and in the delivery of individual lessons and sequences of lessons?
- How well does the design and delivery of the curriculum ensure equity, equality, and accessibility for all?
- How well does the curriculum clearly identify and provide pupils with appropriate and authentic opportunities to develop their understanding of the mandatory cross-cutting themes?
- How do considerations regarding resources and finances impact on curriculum planning?
- How are you preparing for the introduction of any new qualifications?

Teaching and professional learning

- How well do teachers and leaders have a shared understanding of effective teaching?
- How well does professional learning support teachers to improve the quality of their teaching of their subject / area of learning and cross-curricular skills, where appropriate?
- How well does the school/PRU support non-specialist teachers and support staff?

Progress and progression

- How well do staff understand the progress pupils should be making? How well do they assess this?
- How are you ensuring that pupils are provided with sufficient opportunities to make progress in their learning?
- How well do you provide for more able and talented pupils, and for those pupils with the greatest difficulties?
- How well do you use assessment information to shape your curriculum?

Context

- How well does your curriculum reflect the nature of your context, including the linguistic and diverse nature of Wales and the wider world?
- How well does the school/PRU plan for teaching pupils about the history and experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and LGBT+ people?

Skills

- How well do you plan for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum?
- How do you ensure that opportunities for pupils to develop their skills are progressive?
- How do you support pupils with weaker skills?

Welsh

- How well does the school/PRU provide for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills and their understanding of Welsh history and culture?
- How do you promote the advantages of learning Welsh and being multilingual?

Wider curriculum

- How do you ensure the cultural development of your pupils?
- How do you enrich pupils' experiences? What activities and clubs are held outside of lessons? What extra-curricular visits / trips does the school undertake and what contribution do these make to pupils' learning and the curriculum as a whole?

Social, moral, spiritual and cultural education

- How does the curriculum, including the PSE programme, support the development of the social and emotional skills of all pupils from all backgrounds?
- How well does the curriculum develop pupils' understanding of religion, values and ethics?
- How does the school/PRU help pupils develop the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to make healthy lifestyle choices, for example in relation to healthy eating and drinking, substance misuse, relationships and sexuality education and online security?
- How does the curriculum support pupils' well-being and mental health?
- How does the curriculum help pupils understand the impact of lifestyle and behavioural choices on their mental and physical health and well-being now and in the future?

- How do you plan the content of the personal development provision? How is this led?
- How do you monitor the quality and consistency of provision?
- What use is made of external experts to enhance provision?

Self-evaluation and improvement planning

- How do you evaluate the effectiveness and impact of your curriculum?
- What are your findings?
- How do you use your findings to plan for improvement?
- What steps have you taken to improve your curriculum? What impact has this had?
- Discuss examples of how you have strengthened your curriculum as a result of effective self-evaluation and improvement planning?

Questions for middle leaders

- How have you developed the curriculum in your subject/area?
- How well do staff in your department/area understand the progress that pupils should be making at different points?
- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your curriculum?
- How are you preparing for the introduction of any new qualifications?

ⁱ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/curriculum-for-wales-continuing-the-journey#priorities-for-curriculum-development-and-learning>