



Estyn Annual Plan 2025-2026

This document 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
- maintained special schools
- pupil referral units
- independent schools
- further education
- independent specialist colleges
- adult learning in the community
- local government education services
- Welsh language immersion arrangements in local authorities
- youth work
- initial teacher education
- Welsh for adults
- apprenticeships
- 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, Medr 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:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

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Chief Inspector's foreword



At Estyn, our goal is simple: to make sure that every learner in Wales gets the best possible education and training. We are here 'For learners, for Wales'. We focus on continuous improvement, collaboration, and innovation to achieve this.

My Annual Plan reflects this goal and outlines our priorities and strategic commitments for the coming financial year.

Last year, we introduced a new six-year inspection cycle and updated most of our inspection frameworks. For schools and PRUs, our new approach has shifted away from inspections being a one-off event, to more collaborative, ongoing inspection visits. This approach is helping to bring inspection and a provider's own processes of evaluation and improvement closer, to drive more improvement. We introduced Interim Visits (IVs) in addition to core inspection visits, to provide meaningful feedback and support schools and PRUs, identify strengths, share best practices, and drive improvement. We've spoken to thousands of stakeholders and will continue to listen and consider feedback as we refine our frameworks for initial teacher education, apprenticeships, learning in the justice sector and non-maintained nurseries.

**“Our aim is to make our insights and findings useful,
engaging, and accessible to all education and training
professionals.”**

This year, we'll continue to drive improvement, collaboration and discussion by highlighting best practice through case studies, sharing the findings of our thematic reports, and publishing early insights from my Annual Report in October before its full release in January 2026. We're also improving how we communicate. We continue to develop our new website launched in September 2024 and will seek new approaches to developing content in engaging and interactive ways. We will build on our established social media channels, run a further series of Estyn live webinars, and develop our recently introduced Sgwrs podcast series. Our aim is to make our insights and findings useful, engaging, and accessible to all education and training professionals.

Internally, our focus is on embedding the new inspection frameworks and enhancing our people strategy, including learning and development opportunities for our staff and the education professionals who join us as external inspectors. We're also refining our approaches based on stakeholder feedback and working closely with the Welsh Government and Medr. On a broader scale, we're leading an international project with inspectorate partners on AI in education and, with the Welsh Government, reviewing how generative AI is being used in Welsh schools. Closer to home, our digital strategy will ensure that our teams have the right technology to work efficiently.

Education in Wales is evolving, and so is Estyn. By supporting schools and training providers, sharing evidence-based insights, and fostering collaboration, we're helping to shape a system that not only enriches lives but also strengthens our economy and culture. One of the most rewarding parts of my role is visiting all types of settings across Wales, meeting passionate educators and engaged learners. I'm looking forward to joining more inspections this year and seeing our new approaches in action.

We've achieved much in the last few years as we've moved to our new frameworks and are developing others, and I want to thank all my colleagues for their hard work and professionalism. I also want to thank all the providers we've worked with and the wider education community for their dedication to learners. Let's keep learning, improving, and innovating together.



Owen Evans

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales

Long-term vision

Estyn is His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. Inspection plays a central role in improving the quality of education and training for our children, young people and lifelong learners.

Learners are central to our work. Our vision and mission are shaped by this commitment. We are here for learners, for Wales.

Our strategic objectives clearly outline our unique contribution to promoting excellence within the system, while our values reflect the culture that drives our work. A later section of this plan provides an explanation of our strategic objectives and how we implement them.

Vision and Mission

Our **vision** is to improve the quality of education and training, and outcomes for all learners in Wales

Our **mission** is to support education and training providers to develop a self-improving and learning culture through our advice, inspection and capacity building

Strategic objectives

Providing public accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training provision in Wales

Informing the development of national policy by the Welsh Government

Building capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales

Values

- Place learners at the heart of our work
- Listen, learn and work with others
- Act openly, fairly and with integrity
- Show effective leadership and teamwork
- Promote health, wellbeing and equality in all we do
- Value and respect people and their work
- Encourage responsibility, initiative and innovation

The broader policy context

While Estyn operates independently, we work closely with the Welsh Government and Medr in our role to inspect, advise and improve.

We are influenced by various policy developments at national and regional levels. These policy changes can affect our priorities, inspection framework, and our approach to school and education provider evaluations. Some key policy areas that influence our work are set out in this section.

Medr has been established as a single entity with oversight for the tertiary education sector. We will work in partnership with Medr to consolidate our working arrangements and our role in inspecting post-compulsory education and training in line with Medr's strategic vision. [Medr Strategic plan 2025-2030](#).

The implementation of the new [Curriculum for Wales](#), the [Additional Learning Needs \(ALN\) Transformation Programme](#), and the review of school improvement support services [Welsh Government 2023](#) all stem from policy reforms aimed at driving improvement, with significant and wide-reaching impacts.

We will continue to work with the Welsh Government, Medr and other stakeholders to ensure that our inspection activity supports the implementation of these key priorities. We also remain committed to driving long-term change in support of key national ambitions such as:

- seeing the number of people able to enjoy speaking and using Welsh reach a million by 2050 [Cymraeg 2050: Welsh language strategy](#), along with the drive to increase Welsh-medium education (Welsh in Education Strategic Plans)
- mitigating the impact of poverty on learning and educational attainment, as outlined in the [Child poverty strategy for Wales](#)
- achieving an anti-racist Wales by 2030, as set out in the [Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan](#)
- making Wales the most LGBTQ+ friendly nation in Europe, as outlined in the [LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales](#)

Furthermore, we are committed to contributing to a better and more sustainable quality of life for all, in alignment with the principles of the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

Our priorities for 2025-2026

In addition to delivering our strategic objectives in the next section, the actions outlined here highlight the areas of work where we can have the most significant impact in the year ahead.

New inspection arrangements

We will continue with wide-scale consultation and engagement with providers and stakeholders to continually develop our inspection strategy, including evolving our approaches to interim visits. The focus for the coming year being to update inspection arrangements in initial teacher education, non-maintained settings, apprenticeships, and learning in the justice sectors.

Our People strategy

The expertise of our people is our greatest asset. Our strategy will centre on empowering our people to make informed, high-quality decisions that benefit learners and our wider stakeholders.

Working with other inspectorates

Continue our work with other inspectorates from neighbouring countries at both strategic and operational levels, including leading a multinational project on AI in education with three partners from across Europe focussing on how inspectorates can use AI to enhance their work and approaches to evaluating schools' use of AI and its impact on learning. This is in addition to leading a review to understand how Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) is currently used in schools across Wales.

Communication

Using the findings from our recent stakeholder perception survey and our work with the various sectors, we will continue to ensure that our activities maximise our impact, are communicated effectively and that we deliver value to our stakeholders.

National priorities

We will continue to refine our activities to align with the national priorities set by the Welsh Government and Medr, ensuring that our inspection efforts drive and enhance continuous improvement.

Our data and digital strategy

We will provide our people with the technology needed to deliver our objectives and enhance their working lives, optimising our learning from AI. Specifically, we will improve our infrastructure and integrate our systems; improve our resource management system to ensure that we plan and deploy our resources efficiently; and optimise our knowledge management systems.

Delivering our strategic objectives

Our strategic objectives are focused on improving the quality of outcomes for learners in Wales through:

- providing public accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales
- informing the development of national policy by the Welsh Government
- building capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales

The way we think about our work – **our mindset** – helps us to:

- ensure the best for all learners
- offer leaders, teachers and support staff the chance to contribute professionally and constructively
- share what we've seen from across Wales to support improvement

Our Mindset



Fair and impartial

We are independent, objective, robust and consistent and our evaluations are honest, accurate and credible.



Supportive

Inspections are always supportive of improvements that benefit learners, encourage innovation and creativity, good intentions and educational reform.



Reflective

Our inspections are reflective, open-minded, receptive, thoughtful and measured.



Transparent

Our inspections are always transparent, focussing on direct and succinct communication.

Strategic objective 1: Provide public accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales



Estyn carry out inspections with the aim of improving the quality of education and training for all learners in Wales. We have a new approach to inspection across Wales and our reports will detail how well providers are helping learners to learn. The key reasons for inspection are:

- To evaluate the quality and standards of education and training
- To identify strengths and areas for improvement
- To support providers in their journey towards excellence
- To inform parents, carers, and the wider community about the quality of education provided

In 2025-2026, we will continue to embed our new inspection arrangements introduced last year for most sectors. We will be developing new inspection arrangements for:

- Initial teacher education
- non-maintained settings
- apprenticeships
- learning in the justice sectors

Details of our inspection processes for 2025-2026 and beyond, our inspection schedule and inspection reports can be found on [the inspection page](#) of our website.

We will provide ongoing professional development and training for Estyn and external inspectors to ensure that they are well prepared to conduct inspections with evaluations that are constructive, fair, and focused on fostering improvement for the benefit of learners.

Providers will be supported in understanding and implementing our inspection frameworks, with regular communication, guidance and resources provided.

Annex 1 sets out details of our planned core inspection activity across all sectors in 2025-2026. The activities outlined in this annual plan will be supported by comprehensive work programmes. However, we must stay flexible and adjust this plan as circumstances change.

Maintained schools and pupil referral units

There are 1,449 maintained schools (primary, secondary, all-age and special) and 23 pupil referral units (PRUs) in Wales. 148 secondary and all age schools have sixth forms.

Maintained schools and PRUs will have both a **core inspection** and an **interim visit** within a six-year inspection period.

Following a core inspection, reports are published on our website 45 working days after the start of the inspection. This provides a summary and overview of the findings of the inspection team, and highlights strengths as well as areas for improvement. We also publish a more concise report specifically for parents and carers alongside the full inspection report.

Interim visits are not intended to draw overall conclusions about the effectiveness of the school, but they will support leaders to review progress since the last core inspection and consider their next steps for improvement. Following an interim visit, we will provide feedback to the headteacher and publish a short letter on our website summarising the outcome of the visit. We will also provide some feedback to the school or PRU on the next steps in their improvement process.

As well as providing details of our planned inspection activity at **Annex 1**, **Annex 2** sets out details of our planned interim visit activity.

In 2025-2026 we will:

- focus on embedding and learning from implementation our new inspection arrangements encouraging and acting upon feedback as to how the inspection process can be further improved
- extend our deployment of peer inspectors on inspection, involving them on interim visits from the autumn term

Local government education services and the youth work sectors

Local government education services include those directly provided or commissioned by individual local authorities, as well as those delivered collaboratively with other

authorities. School improvement services are currently primarily co-ordinated through regional consortia or partnerships on behalf of local authorities, with models varying across Wales. There will be changes to the School Improvement landscape during 2025-2026, with local authorities taking ownership of School Improvement arrangements and developing models that meets their local needs.

With 22 local authorities in Wales, our local authority link inspectors engage with them regularly through ongoing liaison activities.

Our core inspections look at a broad range of service areas and how the local authority provides cohesive provision to support the education, training and well-being of children and young people. We also carry out enhanced local authority link inspector visits (ELVs), which provide the local authority with an evaluation of two aspects of their work. Their main purpose is to support the local authority in its improvement by outlining what is working well and identifying a few questions for further consideration. There will be no follow-up judgement, nor will an ELV trigger an inspection.

Audit Wales join us on our core inspections of local government education services and across the six-year inspection period we will work with each local authority to carry out:

- one core inspection
- two ELVs
- annual risk and assurance workshops, which we contribute to along with Audit Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)

Our inspection approach for the youth work sector is tailored to its unique needs. We have a model that can be applied to youth work delivered by local authorities and, where appropriate, to voluntary sector organisations providing youth work. During the coming year we will continue to develop our approaches, with an emphasis on our work with voluntary sector organisations.

In 2025-2026 we will:

- embed and learn from our new cycle of inspecting local government education services with four core inspections planned for 2025-2026
- continue our inspections of local authority statutory youth work and inspections of other voluntary youth work providers with 6 planned for 2025-2026

Welsh language immersion provision in local authorities

Local authorities receive a specific budget via a grant to develop Welsh language immersion provision. This can be provided by establishing a Welsh language immersion centre or by funding a peripatetic teacher to support latecomers to the language in

various schools. The majority of local authorities have established Welsh language immersion centres.

We launched our inspection arrangements for Welsh language immersion provision in 2024-2025; during 2025-2026 we will be embedding these arrangements and will carry out 4 inspections in this area.

Independent schools

There are currently 81 registered independent schools in Wales. Around half of these schools are organised and designed specifically to support pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). Most ALN specialist schools focus sharply on a particular learning need, for example, autistic spectrum condition (ASC) or social, emotional and mental health. The other half of independent schools in Wales are a range of primary, secondary and all-age schools. Most of these are co-educational, although a very few admit girls only. Additionally, a few of these schools are faith schools and a very few of have a boarding provision.

These schools must comply with Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 to maintain their registration.

We will continue to build on the objectives established in 2024-2025, focusing on strengthening our inspection and monitoring processes. The updated inspection framework introduced in 2024 will continue to support our core inspections as we monitor compliance and support improvement in independent schools across Wales.

Each independent school will receive:

- One core inspection per inspection cycle, focusing on evaluating the school's compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 and reporting against our inspection framework (**Annex 1**).
- One monitoring inspection per cycle to ensure that the schools continue to comply with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 (**Annex 3**).
- Follow-up visits (as required, up to three) should a school not meet the standards. The first two visits provide ongoing support for improvement and at the final visit the school's compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 is re-evaluated.

In 2025-2026 we will:

- continue to evaluate school's compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) 2024

- track the impact of our revised inspection framework, to ensure that it promotes a culture of continuous improvement
- continue to provide support to school's that require improvement in order to meet the standards, ensuring that action plans are effective and implemented
- continue to place a strong focus on ensuring that schools providing for pupils with ALN meet the specific needs of their pupils and support them to make progress
- provide training for inspectors that will ensure that they are fully equipped to evaluate compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 and provide constructive feedback to schools; training will be focused on building expertise in key areas, such as evaluating provision for ALN pupils and understanding the complexities of the regulations

Welsh for adults

The Welsh for adults sector comprises one National Centre and 11 providers, offering a variety of Welsh language courses ranging from entry to proficiency level, available both in-person and online.

During 2025-2026 we will begin to take account of the implications of the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill (second reading took place in February 2025).

In 2025-2026 we will:

- report on the first themed inspection using our new inspection arrangements (Summer term 2025)
- reflect on our first year of new inspection arrangements and make changes accordingly (summer term 2025)
- conduct another core inspection of Learn Welsh providers
- Begin the fieldwork for another annual themed inspection, sampling provision across a number of Learn Welsh providers.

Further education, adult learning in the community, independent specialist colleges and apprenticeships

Wales is home to 12 further education colleges. There are 13 regional partnerships, plus Adult Learning Wales that operates nationally, providing adult learning in the community provision. There are ten apprenticeship providers. Eight independent specialist colleges provide education and well-being support for learners with a wide range of ALN.

In 2025-2026 we will:

- continue to embed and learn from our new inspection arrangements introduced last year in further education colleges, adult learning in the community partnerships and independent specialist colleges

- complete the cycle of inspection for apprenticeship providers by August 2025
- work with Medr and apprenticeship providers to consider what kind of inspection or monitoring arrangements we will put in place from September 2025
- continue how we need to evolve our inspection arrangements to take into consideration Medr's quality framework which comes into effect from August 2026

Non-maintained nurseries

There are 527 non-maintained nurseries in Wales. We inspect all nursery settings that are not managed by schools and are funded to provide part-time early education for three and four-year-olds. We carry out these inspections jointly with CIW and we inspect at least once during a six-year inspection cycle. After each inspection, we publish our findings in a joint report on our website.

We commissioned and published an independent review of the joint inspection arrangements between Care Inspectorate Wales and Estyn in 2024-2025. [Independent review of joint inspection arrangements with Estyn published – Estyn](#). The review is positive about the impact of the joint inspection programme. Helpfully, it also discusses ways in which the approach could be improved and makes a range of recommendations for the two inspectorates to consider.

We have already agreed a streamlined follow-up process, which was introduced in January 2025, replacing the previous 'Focused Improvement' and 'Estyn-only review' categories with a single, unified category: 'Joint Follow-Up'.

The CIW and Estyn Steering Group are currently developing the key principles of the new inspection arrangement and implementation timeline, taking time to make sure that we consider the implications for both organisations. We are committed to the partnership we have established over the last five or more years and will work together to improve our approach in a manner that works for both organisations.

In 2025-2026 we will:

- jointly develop new inspection arrangements for the sector from 2026

Initial Teacher Education

Our new initial teacher education (ITE) system is the result of interconnected and interdependent reforms, including the introduction of our new curriculum, Cymraeg 2050, the ALN system, the reform of the professional standards, and regulatory changes for ITE accreditation.

There are currently six ITE providers, accredited by Education Workforce Council (EWC), each operating as a partnership between a higher education institution (HEI) and its lead

schools for ITE. Estyn plays a crucial role in upholding and enhancing quality in ITE. Through our inspections, we provide the EWC with essential insights, particularly if a provider is found not to meet accreditation requirements. The EWC has responsibility for accrediting each ITE programme based on criteria set by the Welsh Government.

In 2025-2026 we will:

- be completing our cycle of inspections for initial teacher education during the summer term 2025
- be consulting with the sector to finalising our arrangements for the inspection of initial teacher education from September 2025
- continue to hold joint stakeholder events with the EWC and work closely with ITE partnerships through their own stakeholder groups

In addition, we continue to engage regularly with the EWC and Welsh Government. We are supporting the Welsh Government with their review of initial teacher education and sit on the ITE Strategy Group.

Learning in the justice sector

Wales has five prisons and one young offenders' institution. We collaborate with HM Inspectorate of Prisons during their inspections, focusing on the education, training, and skills aspects of purposeful activity. There are 17 youth offending services across Wales, and we are currently exploring new approaches to inspecting the care, support, and guidance provided to young offenders following the end of our joint inspections with HM Inspectorate of Probation. Additionally, Wales has one secure children's home, where we work alongside Care Inspectorate Wales to assess the education and training provision during inspections.

In 2025-2026 we will:

- continue our inspections of the secure children's home with CIW
- following a period of consultation and piloting our arrangements in February 2025, work with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons to finalise new inspection arrangements for implementation from April 2025

Assuring the quality of core inspections and interim visits

We apply a robust quality assurance process to all our inspections. The four key systems for assuring the quality of inspections are:

- quality assurance of all inspection reports, including moderation and validation of evaluations, findings and the level of follow-up, if appropriate, prior to publication and the quality assurance of post-visit published letters for interim visits

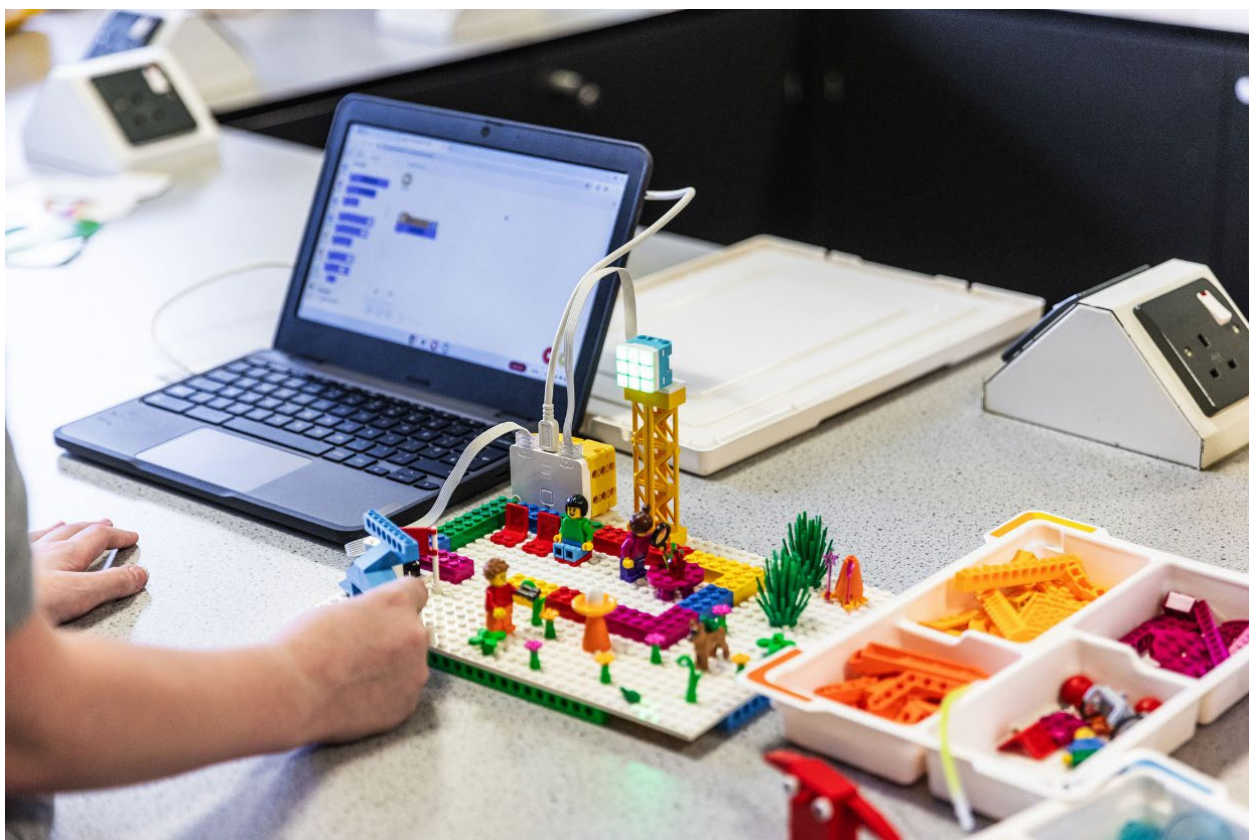
- quality assurance of a sample of inspections and interim visits through site visits
- inspector evaluation forms to record an evaluation of the performance of each additional inspector, peer inspector, lay inspector and school improvement partner, as appropriate
- post-inspection questionnaires for the head of a provider to give feedback on aspects of the inspection process

The findings from each element within the quality assurance system feed through to Estyn's quality assurance database and inform our annual self-evaluation processes to identify further improvements we can make across our work. We also use these evaluations to inform professional learning and development priorities for inspectors. The quality assurance system is audited regularly, most recently in February 2025, providing substantial assurance. The audit found that Estyn has effective arrangements in place to ensure the quality of inspections. The review did not identify any instances of non-compliance with the Quality Assurance processes.

The findings of all quality assurance activities also influence the award of contracts for Registered Inspectors, additional inspectors and lay inspectors, and the deployment of peer inspectors and school improvement partners.

In 2025-2026 we will:

- make improvements to our data systems for monitoring quality outcomes to improve efficiency
- strengthen our arrangements to support and encourage peer inspectors, additional inspectors, lay inspectors and school improvement partners to complete the self-assessment aspect of the inspection evaluation form, as a way to further improve their inspection practice
- update our writing guide to reflect our evolving approaches to the writing of inspection reports, interim visit letters and other documents



Follow-up inspection activity

During a core inspection, we consider whether the provider needs any further support. We call this 'follow-up' activity. In maintained schools and PRUs, this is required by legislation and there are two types of statutory follow-up activity:

- special measures
- significant improvement

Special measures and significant improvement require monitoring activity by Estyn inspectors, who will visit the school or PRU to evaluate the progress. Currently we do not publish details of interim monitoring activities during follow-up. This is because these visits are developmental in nature. We will publish a report once a maintained school or PRU is out of follow-up, or if they move from one follow-up activity to another.

In other sectors, follow-up arrangements may include statutory follow-up categories and non-statutory arrangements for monitoring progress.

The different types of sector 'follow up' can be found in our guidance handbooks on the [Inspection guidance resources](#) page of our website.

In 2025-2026 we will:

- continue formal monitoring of each provider in need of follow-up activity as a result of core inspection
- specifically, continue to monitor the progress of maintained school or PRUs placed in Estyn review until Spring term 2026 (previous category of 'follow-up' used by Estyn until September 2024)
- continue working with the Welsh Government and local authorities to support the multi-agency programme for secondary schools causing concern, including all secondary schools, all-age schools and PRUs in special measures
- continue to provide link inspector support to local authorities causing concern, including carrying out improvement conferences and monitoring visits as required
- work with the Welsh Government and Medr to agree how we support Medr when a provider is causing concern under their quality framework

Further joint working with inspection and other bodies

In 2025-2026 we will:

- work with QAA to share expertise and bring greater coherence in our inspection and quality review processes across tertiary education providers
- work with CIW and other inspectorates to consider how we develop the programme of Joint Inspections of Child Protection Arrangements going forward
- sustain collaboration with education and training inspectorates from neighbouring countries at both strategic and operational levels, facilitating regular knowledge-sharing and information exchange
- actively engage in the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI):
 - fostering the exchange of best practices and learning from other inspectorates
 - hosting a SICI workshop in Cardiff in April 2026, inviting representatives of inspectorates operating in Europe and beyond, focusing on current themes in education and inspection
 - leading a multinational project on AI in education with three partners from across Europe, focusing on how inspectorates can use AI to enhance their work and approaches to evaluating schools' use of AI and its impact on learning
- work with Ofsted to support, in a quality assurance role, on apprenticeship inspections in England, where requested due to an Ofsted conflict of interest

Safeguarding

We will remain vigilant in our work to uphold the safety and well-being of young people and vulnerable adults. Our ongoing activities will evaluate how effectively providers fulfil their responsibilities to safeguard children and, when appropriate, vulnerable adults.

We understand that safeguarding is not merely a policy; it is a culture that must be integrated into every aspect of a provider's work. To reinforce this, in September 2024 we strengthened our approach to inspecting safeguarding and will closely monitor this new strategy throughout 2025-2026. Our focus is on evaluating the depth and effectiveness of a school's safeguarding culture, ensuring that it is consistently at the heart of our inspections.

Safeguarding is an ongoing, shared responsibility. We will continue to uphold the highest standards and work closely with stakeholders to ensure that safeguarding remains a foundational element of a safe and nurturing learning community.



Strategic Objective 2: Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government and Medr



We offer a comprehensive, nationwide perspective on education and training in Wales, drawing on the extensive evidence gathered through our inspections and thematic reviews. Our role extends to participating in strategic committees and working groups, and we engage with Medr, Welsh Government Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries, officials, and other stakeholders to provide evidence-based advice that informs policy and regulatory development.

As part of our statutory duties, we produce an annual report on the standards of education and training in Wales. We plan to publish sector summaries in early October 2025, followed by the full report in January 2026. This year's report will likely focus on the following key themes:

- developing the Humanities AoLE
- the impact of planning for literacy on pupils' reading, writing and oracy skills
- developing mathematical understanding and applying numeracy skills across the curriculum
- developing pupils as independent thinkers
- the impact of leadership on teaching
- providing effective support for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils
- the effectiveness of education provision for care experienced learners

The items included in the thematic reviews for 2025-2026 reflect a strategic remit funded by the Welsh Government and informed by a joint process that included Medr.

We will begin work on seven detailed thematic reports included in our remit for 2025-2026:

- area of learning and experience review – science and technology (Welsh Government)
- healthy relationships in secondary schools and PRUs (Welsh Government)
- attendance and participation in education in FE colleges and sixth forms (Medr on behalf of Welsh Government Ministers)
- review of Education Welfare Services (Welsh Government)
- LA support for schools to manage their budget (Welsh Government)
- arrangements for and the quality of individual tuition for pupils educated otherwise than at school (Welsh Government)
- international languages (Welsh Government)
- Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in maintained schools and settings (Welsh Government)

We will continue to provide ongoing advice based on evidence from inspection, engagement work and other activity through meetings with Medr and Welsh Government officials, contributions to national working groups, the National Network Conversations, written advice, published guidance and reports.

We will also provide consultation responses on matters of education and training in Wales and publish our responses.

In addition, based on evidence gathered from inspections, engagement work and other activity, Estyn will also provide updates and advice on:

- Implementation of the Humanities AoLE
- The impact of planning for literacy on pupils' reading, writing and oracy skills
- Developing learners' mathematical understanding and applying numeracy skills across the curriculum
- Developing learners' digital competence
- Developing learners as independent thinkers
- The impact of leadership on teaching
- Ensuring Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils reach their potential
- Effective practice in promoting equity and inclusion
- Approaches to promote regular attendance and positive behaviour in schools
- Ensuring effective safeguarding practices are in place

We will also provide advice to various working groups. This will include support for those aspects of post-compulsory education and training within Medr's remit. We will also provide general support to the Welsh Government regarding education and training in Wales and specifically on school closure and reorganisation proposals. We will also provide ongoing support in the development of the revised National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH).

We will continue to work with partners to ensure that their monitoring and support for schools and PRUs causing concern dovetails with the school improvement support provided by others.

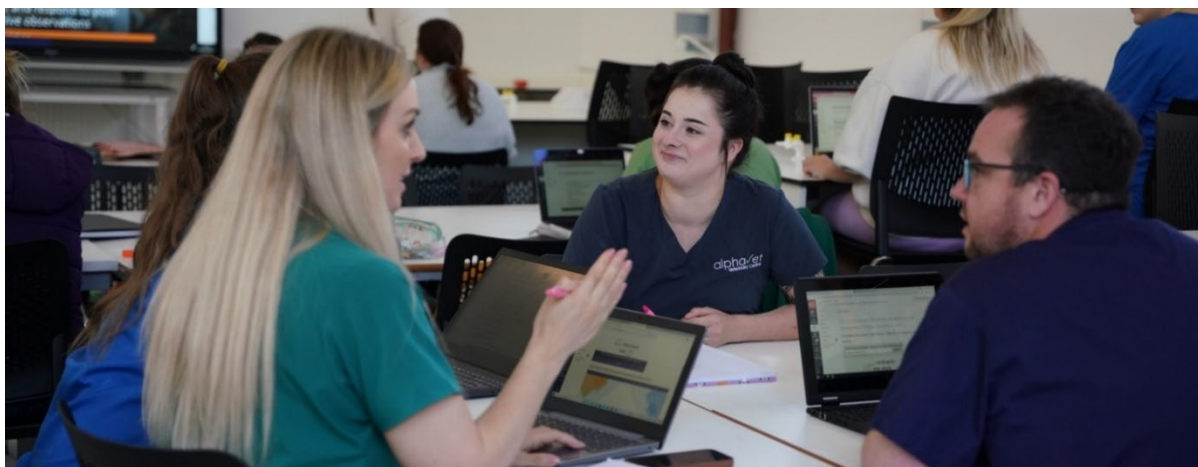
We will support the ongoing development of Medr. We will work with Medr and QAA (the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) to develop guidance for providers on effective self-evaluation and continuous improvement planning.

From September 2025, we are also piloting a new mechanism to gain demographic feedback from learners using pre-inspection questionnaires to help us monitor equality trends across sectors and over time. This will be used for analysis at a national level to inform our thematic work and evidence-based policy advice.

The full remit letter that the Cabinet Secretary for Education sent to HMCI can be seen [here](#).



Strategic objective 3 – Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales



Our inspection and thematic activities provide us with a strong foundation to assess the quality of education and training in Wales. Through professional dialogue and well-informed recommendations, we aim to inspire and support improvement across the system.

Our stakeholder forums and reference group, both sector-specific and project-focused, play a key role in shaping our work. They allow us to engage more meaningfully on specific issues and gain valuable insights beyond the inspection process, offering a broader perspective. We are committed to fostering greater diversity among the representatives in our stakeholder forums to ensure a more inclusive range of voices is heard.

Peer inspectors play a vital role in building a shared understanding and establishing clear expectations within the education and training sectors. With approximately 1,000 peer inspectors operating across various sectors, they have the opportunity to observe diverse practices while on inspection, which enhances their analytical skills and sector knowledge. Their insights contribute to strengthening capacity within their sectors, promoting a self-improving educational system. In addition to core inspection activity, we will involve pathway peer inspectors on interim visits of maintained schools and pupil referral units. This approach will be reviewed as part of our mid-cycle evaluation.

In 2024, we successfully trained our first cohort of additional ALN inspectors, who are experienced practitioners managing specialist ALN provision in schools or advising schools on ALN services. These peer inspectors, drawn from maintained and independent special schools as well as PRUs, may serve as Additional Learning Needs Inspectors (ALNIs). Depending on the size of the school being inspected, an ALNI will typically be deployed for one day. In addition to inspecting special schools, ALNIs may also evaluate

specialist provisions within mainstream schools catering to pupils with identified additional learning needs.

We will:

- collaborate with Medr and the Welsh Government forums and steering groups on various aspects of education and training policy and practice
- use recent survey insights about perspectives and perceptions of Estyn among stakeholders to assist us in our ongoing efforts to add value to stakeholder and improve the impact of our work
- continue to develop our website both testing and enhancing the user experience and developing a range of engaging content to communicate with all our stakeholders
- implement our stakeholder engagement program and various forums, to inform professionals, parents, and carers about our work, with a strong emphasis on broadening the diversity of stakeholder voices to enhance and enrich our initiatives.
- continue to explore the opportunities offered by new communication channels including new social media channels, Estyn live webinars and our Sgwrs series of podcasts
- engage with our stakeholder forums across all sectors to gain valuable insights and ensure our approach remains responsive to an ever-changing environment
- continue to recognise effective practice on inspection and share this widely to inspire and support improvement across the system
- provide ongoing professional development and training updates for our external workforce to ensure they are fully equipped for inspection
- enhance our training program by bringing new inspectors into our external workforce, with a strong focus on increasing the involvement of current practitioners as peer inspectors in inspection activities
- continue our leadership development programme for practitioners from ethnic minority backgrounds and recruit the third cohort of participants as part of our strategy to build capacity and increase diversity in the education workforce, including the peer inspector workforce and actively involve them in inspection

Our approach



Our team includes a management group, central staff, and inspectors. We also train additional inspectors, peer inspectors (current practitioners in education and training), local authority improvement partner inspectors, lay inspectors, and nominees (representing the provider) to contribute to inspection teams. Where possible, we facilitate secondment opportunities both into and out of our organisation.

Our [Corporate governance framework](#), comprising boards, committees, and groups, including our assurance framework, enables us to achieve our strategic objectives as an efficient and well-managed organisation. Non-executive directors on our Strategy Board and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) provide ongoing challenge and support to the senior management team within this framework.

Details of who we are and what we do are available on our website [About Estyn](#).

[A Modern Civil Service](#) is focused on modernising the service with a vision of a skilled, innovative and ambitious Civil Service for the future. We are committed to supporting and developing our workforce to foster continuous growth and advancement, including improving our systems to enhance efficiency. By better accessing and analysing data, we can maximize our impact. Additionally, we are exploring ways to further diversify our workforce.

Aligned with the Welsh Government's net zero goals, we are committed to conducting our work in an environmentally sustainable way and embedding sustainability across our operations. Our Welsh language policy ensures bilingual communication and aligns with stakeholders' language preferences.

We are committed to fulfilling our Public Sector Equality Duty and promote equality and diversity through the delivery of our strategic objectives, by drawing the attention of

providers to their own duty to promote equality. Our equality objectives cover how we consider equality when we inspect and how we will ensure that our own staff and those we contract with have equality of opportunity and are treated equally.

People strategy

We will:

- develop and implement our people strategy during 2025-2026 with an emphasis on empowering our people to make informed, high-quality decisions that benefit our stakeholders
- continue to invest in our workforce's learning and development to support our people and the organisation to develop and innovate
- engage with our staff to explore the issues and act on the People Survey 2024 results

Data and digital strategy

We will:

- continue work on our data and digital strategy:
 - the review of our IT systems to improve our infrastructure and integrate our systems
 - improve our resource management system to ensure that we plan and deploy our resources efficiently
 - maximise our knowledge management systems
 - continue to pilot our exploratory work using Gen AI, and where appropriate, roll out to all staff

Statutory and corporate responsibility

We will continue to meet our statutory responsibilities and key corporate activities including equality and diversity, Welsh language standards and sustainability.

Following staff consultation that asked for input on how we can adapt and improve the strategy from 2025 onwards, the Welsh Language Working Group will update our corporate [Strategic Welsh Language Plan](#).

In addition, we will develop our Welsh language training offer for staff who wish to learn or improve their Welsh language skills. This will include intensive residential training opportunities. Staff will have the opportunity to apply for these courses and will be chosen based on certain criteria including their future commitment to attending follow-on courses. We will also look to establish a mentoring system, pairing learners with Welsh speaking staff, to help them integrate and utilise their language skills in their work.

The Green Dragon Environmental Standard is awarded to organisations that can demonstrate effective environmental management and that are taking action to understand, monitor and control their impacts on the environment. We will seek re-accreditation to the Standard in the Summer term and subsequently publish our Environmental Report 2025.

[Estyn's Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028](#) is published on our website. We will complete an end of year review of the plan and we are developing an action plan to advance the necessary work for implementing the Strategic Equality Plan.

Our budget

Although inflationary pressures have continued to ease over the course of the 2024-2025 financial year, we remain mindful of the ongoing financial constraints and their impact on public sector budgets. Rising costs across various areas continue to pose challenges, and we recognise the difficult decisions facing our colleagues within the Welsh Government. Despite these pressures, we are reassured that the value of our work in improving outcomes for learners across Wales continues to be acknowledged and supported.

The 2024-2025 financial year also saw the introduction of our new inspection framework, requiring significant investment in preparation and implementation. As we move into 2025-2026, our focus will move towards ensuring that this framework beds in effectively while enhancing efficiency, service delivery and stakeholder engagement, thus ensuring that we continue to provide high-quality support and insight across the sector.

However, we must do so in a way that is fiscally responsible and sustainable with the aim of delivering more with the resources available to us. In their 2024 report *Improving Productivity Could Release Tens of Billions for Government Priorities*, the National Audit Office highlights the importance of increasing efficiency to maximise public value, an objective that aligns closely with the Welsh Government's own emphasis on optimising capacity, efficiency, and effectiveness across public services (e.g. NHS Wales Planning Framework 2022-2025).

The report highlights five opportunities to deliver savings which are:

- Digital transformation
- Procurement
- Asset Management
- Major projects
- Error, fraud and tax evasions

We believe that two greatest opportunities for improvement at Estyn during 2025-2026 are digital transformation and procurement.

Digital Transformation

We have already begun our digital transformation journey at Estyn and have already transitioned several of our legacy systems to cloud based alternatives. We have also begun exploring how artificial intelligence could aid our work. In the forthcoming year we will continue to evaluate our systems, and explore and, where appropriate, invest in artificial intelligence, robotic process automation (RPA), and other digital tools to enhance our effectiveness and improve productivity. Simultaneously, we will also continue to invest in our people, ensuring that they have the knowledge and skills required to capitalise on these contemporary tools and techniques effectively.

Procurement

The Procurement Act 2023, effective from 24 February 2025, introduces a streamlined and more transparent procurement framework across the UK. This legislation aims to simplify procurement processes, making it more accessible for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and promoting value for money in public spending.

In Wales, the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 further emphasises the importance of socially responsible procurement. This Act mandates that public sector organisations consider social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being in their procurement activities, aligning closely with our commitment to improving outcomes for learners across Wales.

The Welsh Procurement Policy Statement (WPPS) aligns with procurement reforms in Wales by promoting a sustainable, fair, and inclusive approach to public procurement. It supports the broader procurement reforms by ensuring practices are consistent with Wales' well-being goals, incorporating social value into contracts, and fostering innovation and responsible practices across public procurement.

These reforms necessitate that we adapt our procurement strategies to comply with the new legislative requirements. By doing so, we not only ensure compliance but also enhance our operational efficiency and effectiveness. Embracing these changes will enable us to engage more effectively with a diverse range of suppliers, including local SMEs, fostering innovation and ensuring that our services deliver maximum value to the public.

Together, our continued investment in new or alternative digital technologies, and the incorporation of public sector procurement reforms reflect two of the five opportunity areas outlined by the National Audit Office.

Financial Year (April to March)	Core funding for running costs £m	Depreciation £m	Capital funding £m
2025-2026	£16.487	£0.276	£0.250

In addition to this core funding, in 2025-2026, Estyn will receive £497,700 of additional grant funding that will cover work on additional thematic reviews as well as youth work inspection activity.

Our Operational Group and Strategic Management Group review and discuss our financial performance monthly, continuously seeking opportunities to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Additional oversight is provided throughout the year by the Strategy Board and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC).

Changes in funding

Funding for our post-16 work in FE, apprenticeships, adult learning in the community and sixth forms will come from the Welsh Government on Medr's behalf for 2025-2026. Medr will oversee funding spends for 2025-2026 and oversee funding allocations for 2026-2027, under an agency agreement with WG.

Monitoring our performance

We produce our annual plan each year in April, followed later in the year by the publication of our annual report and accounts. The annual report and accounts outline our progress in delivering the plan and includes a complete set of accounts for the financial year.

In 2025-2026, we will continue utilising a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to measure, evaluate, and report on our performance. This will involve regular updates to key groups, including the Operational Group, Inspection Leadership Group, Strategic Management Group, and Strategy Board, detailing progress toward achieving our strategic objectives and meeting key performance indicators. Additionally, internal audit reports will be shared with the Operational Group, Strategic Management Group, and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

We have established a set of high-level key performance indicators to assess progress toward our strategic objectives which we review annually. These are complemented by a wider range of operational management indicators, many of which are reported internally and externally, including in our annual report and accounts.

Key performance indicators:

SO1 – Ensure public accountability to our service users and enhance capacity in the delivery of education and training in Wales

Key performance indicators	Target 2025-2026
a) Percentage of completed inspections that met planned inspection activity set out in our annual plan	98%
b) Deployment of peer inspectors on core inspections in line with Estyn standards	at least one peer inspector on each inspection
c) Deployment of lay inspectors on all school and PRU core inspections in line with Estyn standards	One lay inspector on each school and PRU inspection

SO1 / SO3 - Ensure providers' experience of inspection is a positive process that promotes improvement

Key performance indicators	Target 2025-2026
Percentage of those providers who complete a post inspection questionnaire who indicate their satisfaction following inspection:	97%
a. That inspectors gave helpful feedback during the inspection by identifying relevant strengths and areas for improvement (PIQ1 – Q 15)	
b. With the reliability and independence of our evaluation (PIQ2 – Q21)	97%
c. That the inspection helped them to plan for improvement (PIQ2 – Q19)	97%

S01 / S03 – Develop our working arrangements with Medr whose aim is to promote greater coherence and collaboration across post-16 provision

Key performance indicators	Target 2025-2026
Further our work arrangements with Medr at both strategic and operational levels and ensure an updated MOU is agreed and deliver on funded work.	31 March 2026

S02 / S03 – Ensure that our stakeholder events and resources amplify the positive impact of Estyn’s work and drive improvement across the education and training sector in Wales

Key performance indicators	Target 2025-2026
a) Proportion of stakeholders who rate our stakeholder events as useful or very useful	a) 96%
b) Proportion of stakeholders who rate Estyn's communication as positive	b) 55%
c) Proportion of stakeholders who believe that our work has led to improvements in the delivery of education and training services and policy development in Wales	c) 55%
d) The combined users accessing our key publications (Annual report & Thematic reports) during the reporting period	20,000 annual target
e) The number of views of our multimedia resources on our Youtube channel	10,000 annual target
f) Click through rate (CTR) of our half termly external stakeholder newsletter (this is distributed to more than 2,500 contacts highlighting topical headlines and publications)	CTR: 7% (2-3% is industry average)

Our approach – Create and maintain an engaged and skilled workforce

Key performance indicators	Target 2025-2026
Percentage positive annual Civil Service People Survey	For the latest Survey:
a) employee engagement index (EEI) score	In the top quartile
b) learning and development theme score	At least the median benchmark score

Annex 1: Planned inspection activity 2025-2026

Planned inspection activity by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and independent inspectors – 2025-2026 (financial year)

Planned number of inspections leading to reports⁽¹⁾

Unit of inspection	No of providers (2025)	Summer 2025 ⁽³⁾	Autumn 2025	Spring 2026
Non-maintained nursery settings ⁽²⁾	527	30	30	30
Primary schools	1205	64	68	70
Secondary schools	174	6	14	13
All age schools	31	1	2	2
Maintained special schools	39	2	2	2
Pupil referral units	23	2	1	2
Independent ALN Specialist	*	1	4	3
Independent Secondary	*	0	0	0
Independent Primary	*	1	1	0
Independent All Age	*	1	0	3
Independent specialist colleges	8	1	1	0
Local government education services	22	1	1	2
Youth work inspections	-	1	1	1
Further education institutions	12	0	0	2
Initial teacher education (ITE) partnerships	6	0	0	0
Apprenticeship providers	10	1	0	0
Adult learning in the community (ALC) partnerships (including Adult Learning Wales)	14	1	1	1
Welsh for adults (WfA) – 11 Learn Welsh providers plus a National Centre.	12	0	1	0
Welsh language immersion		1	1	1
Total		114	128	132

OVERALL TOTAL = 374

(1) Based on information as of 31/03/2025.

(2) These inspections are jointly delivered with CIW. (3) Spring term 2025 continues to the 13th April 2025.

* The total number of independent schools in Wales is calculated as 81.

Annex 2: Planned engagement activity 2025-2026

Planned engagement activity by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and independent inspectors 2025-2026 (financial year)

Planned number of interim visits (Annual) ⁽¹⁾

Unit of inspection	Summer 2025	Autumn 2025	Spring 2026
Non-maintained nursery settings	0	0	0
Primary schools	48	73	61
Secondary schools	7	14	9
All age schools	1	2	0
Maintained special schools	1	2	2
Pupil referral units	1	2	2
Total	58	93	74
Overall total			225

(1) Based on information as of 31/03/2025.



Annex 3: Planned monitoring inspections in the independent sector 2025-2026

Planned monitoring inspections in the independent sector by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and independent inspectors – 2025-2026 (financial year)

Unit of inspection	Planned number of monitoring inspections (Annual) ⁽¹⁾		
	Summer 2025	Autumn 2025	Spring 2026
Independent ALN Specialist	3	2	3
Independent Secondary	0	2	0
Independent Primary	1	1	1
Independent All Age	1	0	1
Total	5	5	5

(1) Based on information as of 31/03/2025.

We welcome feedback and comments about this annual plan, which can be emailed to us at feedback@estyn.gov.wales

This annual plan will be submitted for the attention of, and approved by, the First Minister of Senedd Cymru.