

Guidance on supporting maintained schools and PRUs going into a statutory category

What happens, what to do next and what to expect

This guidance is also available in Welsh

This guidance

This guidance is designed to support maintained schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) that have been placed in a statutory category. It provides guidance on what happens when a school or PRU goes into a statutory category, what the school or PRU and local authority must do following the inspection, what they could do and what to expect from Estyn. This guidance can be used in conjunction with the '[How We Inspect](#)' document which can be found on our website. This guidance is intended for maintained schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) and is not applicable to independent schools.

Being placed in a statutory category following a core inspection can be a very challenging experience for the school or PRU. It is challenging for the whole school or PRU community, but it can also be challenging for individuals, particularly leaders, on a personal level.

This guidance provides a range of considerations and ideas on how schools/PRUs can be supported through this process. However, each provider's context is different and not all the ideas or considerations in this document will be appropriate in all circumstances.

It may also be helpful to consult the latest [Welsh Government Guidance on Schools Causing Concern](#).

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1. What happens and what to do in the first few days

Well-being support

When a school or PRU goes into a statutory category it is important that the well-being of staff, particularly the headteacher and other leaders, is considered very carefully. Often, the headteacher is the one looking after the well-being of other staff in these circumstances, but it is an especially challenging experience for the headteacher. The governing body/management committee and the local authority play an important role in supporting the well-being of the headteacher throughout the process, but particularly during the inspection and in the immediate days and weeks following.

When a school or PRU is placed in a statutory category or if this is a possibility, the Assistant Director for that sector will inform the local authority. The local authority (LA) can then support the well-being of staff and the headteacher in particular. The LA and the governing body/management committee could consider:

- Contacting the headteacher to check on their well-being
- Contacting the Chair of Governors/Chair of Management Committee to offer support (in the case of the LA)
- Attending the school or PRU on the last day of the inspection to support the headteacher and attend the feedback meeting
- Attending the school or PRU on the day after the inspection to support the headteacher and help with framing messages to staff and governors
- Attending the meeting with staff to indicate that the school and LA will work in partnership to address the recommendations and support the staff (see below)
- Offering well-being support, such as access to any counselling services offered by the LA
- Identifying a mentor or point of contact from within the LA
- Advise the headteacher that their professional organisation or trade union (if applicable) can offer them pastoral support

Communications

The school or PRU will need to think about how to communicate the findings of the inspection. Normally, the report won't be published for 45 working days, so there is time to think about external communications. The report is confidential to the school or PRU until this time. However, the findings will need to be communicated to staff and governors in the first few days after the inspection. It might be helpful to consider the following:

- Getting all the staff together

- Holding a specific meeting for governors/management committee members
- Preparing what to say beforehand
- Thanking the staff for their work during the inspection period
- Noting the positives mentioned in the report
- Being clear about the areas for improvement
- Communicating clearly the outcome of the inspection
- Explaining what this means for staff in practical terms – i.e. termly visits for school or PRUs in Special Measures (see notes below), or a single visit in 12-18m for schools/PRUs requiring significant improvement
- Considering how messages are framed – e.g. this is an opportunity to continue to improve and develop

Despite the fact that the findings are confidential to the school or PRU until the report is published, pupils and parents may ask what happened as a result of the inspection. The outcome will need to remain confidential. However, it may be advisable for leaders to consider what staff will tell pupils and parents if they do ask, without revealing the actual outcome. For example, leaders could consider something along the lines of: ‘The inspection was useful in highlighting some very clear next steps for the school, and the full report will be published on...’

Supporting ongoing well-being during the improvement process

While the initial period following placement in a statutory category can be particularly challenging, the improvement process is often sustained over a longer period and can place continued pressure on staff and pupils. It is therefore important that well-being remains a consideration throughout the duration of the statutory category, not only in the immediate aftermath of inspection. Maintaining a focus on well-being alongside improvement work can help to sustain morale and increase the likelihood that improvements are embedded and maintained over time.

Schools and PRUs, governing bodies or management committees and local authorities should consider how they will monitor and support staff well-being over time. This may include regularly checking in with leaders and staff, reviewing workload and expectations, and ensuring that improvement activity is proportionate, prioritised and manageable. Where possible, improvement planning should take account of staff capacity and seek to avoid unnecessary duplication or excessive demands.

Leaders may also wish to consider the well-being of pupils during this period, particularly where inspection outcomes or follow-up activity create uncertainty or anxiety. Clear communication, opportunities for pupils to share their views and consistent pastoral support can help pupils feel secure and involved in the school or PRU’s improvement journey.

2. What to do when the report is published

Being prepared

It is helpful to prepare for the time when the report is published. It is likely that there will be some media coverage, therefore preparing beforehand can help to alleviate any stress, pre-empt any issues and enable the school or PRU to respond swiftly to any queries. It is helpful for the school or PRU, the governing body or management committee and the local authority to work together to plan for this.

The date of publication is set in statute, therefore cannot be changed. Sometimes reports are published during the school holidays. It would be advisable for school/PRU leaders to work with the local authority on a strategy to manage such a situation, especially in terms of managing messages to parents – e.g. by arranging a general meeting for parents (without revealing the exact reason) on the first day back after the holidays, by pre-preparing media statements, by getting support from the LA communications team etc.

Informing stakeholders

The governing body or management committee of the school or PRU and local authority will be aware of the outcome of a core inspection. However, the school or PRU will need to inform other stakeholders, such as staff, pupils, parents and carers.

Communication with pupils

The outcome of the inspection will need to be communicated formally to pupils once the report is published. Leaders may want to use assemblies or form periods to do this. It might be helpful to prepare FAQs so that all staff are prepared to answer any questions. It could be helpful to explain what this will mean for them in practical terms. It may also be helpful to engage with pupils regarding what needs to improve – e.g. through the school or PRU Council or focus groups.

Communication with parents

It is helpful to prepare a communication (e.g. letter/email/video) to parents regarding the outcome of the inspection. It is also advisable to consider any communications on social media. Leaders will need to include actions related to communication with parents, and taking their views into account, as part of the post-inspection action plan (PIAP) process.

Parents and carers must be informed about the inspection outcome and the school/PRU's intended action plan to address Estyn's recommendations. For example, this can be via a summary letter or newsletter, website publication or a parents'/carers meeting/workshop. Holding a parent/carers meeting can be a helpful step for the school or PRU to communicate its action and to maintain the trust of parents/carers. It also allows parents and carers an opportunity to provide feedback and understand the follow-up process. This meeting can also be an opportunity to encourage parents to support the school with any of the

concerns raised during the inspection – e.g. pupils' attendance.

Sometimes, the LA decides to host these meetings, in order to support the school/PRU's leaders. At other times they attend these meetings.

Dealing with the media

When the report is published, it is likely that there will be some media coverage. Leaders may want to consider the following:

- Having a prepared statement for the media
- Working with the local authority on any media statement
- Deciding how/if they will respond to any requests for comments or interviews
- Deciding on any social media policy with the local authority

What the local authority can consider

- Support the school with a communications plan, especially in relation to managing messages to parents
- Arrange a meeting with union representatives on the day the report is published to talk about the report and respond to any issues their members may have raised
- Arrange a meeting with relevant elected members, the MS and MP to ask if there is anything they want to know and to seek their help in supporting the school. It is likely that parents will contact them, therefore it would be helpful for them to be well-informed beforehand.
- Support the school with the meeting for parents (see notes above)
- Support the Governing Body with their work in managing the process and supporting the school
- Alert all relevant departments in the LA of the outcome – e.g. cleaning, travel, catering, explain that this is a difficult period for the school and that they will be dealing with a lot of communication. Alert health and safety, HR and finance as they are likely to become a priority for support.

3. What a school or PRU must do after being placed in a statutory category, including the post-inspection action plan (PIAP)

Creating a post-inspection action plan (PIAP)

The governing body or management committee of a school or PRU placed in a statutory category, working with the local authority, are required to produce a post-inspection action plan (PIAP). We have found that PIAPs are most successful where the school or PRU works closely with the local authority to create a single, unified plan that is likely to bring about the required improvements. The actions of the school/PRU and local authority should be clear in the plan. The requirements are set in law and noted in [this Welsh Government document](#). Normally, either the reporting inspector from the core inspection or another experienced HMI will contact the provider to offer support to the school's/PRU's leaders, and consider how best to start work on this plan.

The governing body or management committee must share this plan with Estyn within 20 working days of the publication of the core inspection report. We will then organise a meeting to discuss the PIAP. Following the PIAP meeting with Estyn (see section 3), the school or PRU and local authority are also required to send a copy of their final, unified action plan to the Welsh Government. The school or PRU should send this to sarah.fulthorpe@gov.wales following approval by Estyn.

What should the post-inspection action plan (PIAP) include?

The PIAP should set out how the school or PRU will make improvements to address the recommendations identified by Estyn. Guidance on PIAPs can be found on Estyn's website [here](#). The format of the PIAP is a matter for school or PRUs. However, for each area for improvement (recommendation) identified in the inspection report, Welsh Government would expect the action plan to specify:

- the action the school proposes to take
- lead responsibility for the action proposed
- the support the school will access to address the area for improvement
- the timescale for the work to be completed with key milestones
- resources to be applied to the work
- success criteria, against which progress will be judged
- how progress will be monitored e.g. who, when and how
- how the school will inform parents and carers about the actions planned for the school, ascertain parents' views on these actions and how it will take those views into account
- detail on the action the local authority plans to take to address the areas for improvement

identified in the inspection report

- whether the local authority intends to use its powers of intervention to require the governing body to secure advice or collaborate, give directions to the governing body or headteacher and take any other steps, appoint additional governors, withdraw the school's delegated budget or replace the governing body with an IEB
- how it will inform parents and carers about the actions planned for the school, how it will ascertain parents' views on these actions and how it will take those views into account

There is a requirement within the Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014 for a school development plan to be updated following an inspection to reflect the findings. The PIAP may nest within the school or PRU's development plan but should form an integral part of the school or PRU's immediate improvement priorities. Welsh Government guidance on school improvement can be found [here](#).

The role of the governing body or management committee

As part of The Education (Wales) Regulations 2014, governing bodies have a requirement to revisit a school or PRU's development plan following an inspection. It is therefore important to ensure that such opportunities are scheduled.

4. What to expect from Estyn

During the inspection

During the inspection the Reporting Inspector (RI) will check on the headteacher's well-being and ask the nominee/headteacher about the well-being of staff. The RI will be able to explain the process for statutory categories (what they are, what they mean, what happens etc) and answer any questions the school or PRU may have. [‘How we inspect’](#) also contains valuable information about this aspect.

During the feedback meeting at the end of the inspection the RI will explain that the school has been placed in a statutory category. They will then explain briefly what that means in practical terms. This information is noted below.

Initial contact

Ten days prior to the PIAP meeting, the school or PRU will be contacted by the Inspection Coordinator to inform them of the meeting. The Reporting Inspector (RI) for the meeting will then contact the school or PRU to discuss the visit. The RI could be the RI from the core inspection, but it may be a member of the team or another HMI if the inspection was led by a Registered Inspector in the primary sector. They will be accompanied by one or two other inspectors. The RI will discuss with you what to expect from the PIAP meeting, who will attend, what will happen and so on.

PIAP meeting

The PIAP visit will usually be for one day. During this visit, a small team of inspectors (no more than three) will discuss the plan with the school or PRU leaders, governors and local authority representatives. This will be to evaluate whether the PIAP is likely to be an effective tool for addressing the school or PRU's recommendations and securing the necessary improvements. The aim of the meeting is for all parties to work collaboratively to discuss the strengths and areas of improvement in the plan. This is not an inspection visit, it is a supportive meeting to help the school or PRU to plan for improvement and to emphasise that all relevant parties should work together to address the recommendations. It is vital the local authority engage fully with this meeting as this is a crucial meeting for the school/PRU. It is likely that there are issues with improvement planning, therefore leaders will need support in order to be able to do this successfully.

Following the PIAP visit, we will send the school or PRU and local authority a letter to say whether or not the plan has been accepted and to suggest how it could be strengthened. If the plan is not accepted, a revised version must be sent to Estyn within 10 working days. We will then respond to this in writing but will not re-visit the school or PRU. Once the plan has been accepted, the school or PRU's governing body or management committee and the local authority can send the PIAP to Welsh Government.

Follow-up visit for school or PRUs requiring significant improvement

A follow-up visit for schools or PRUs requiring significant improvement will take place 12-18 months after

the publication of the core inspection report. The visit will usually be for up to three days, and the number of inspectors will be proportionate to the size and nature of the school or PRU. Inspectors will focus on the progress the school or PRU has made towards addressing the recommendations from the report, taking account of the milestones identified in the action plan. They will undertake a range of inspection activity, for example visiting lessons, talking to staff and pupils and scrutinising pupils' work.

If the team judges that the school or PRU has made enough progress in relation to the recommendations, the team will recommend to HMCI that the school or PRU be removed from the list of school or PRUs requiring significant improvement. We will publish a brief report on our website explaining our decision. If progress is insufficient, the team will normally identify the school or PRU as requiring special measures. In very exceptional cases, where the strategic director agrees, the team may judge the school or PRU as still requiring significant improvement. There will then usually be one further monitoring visit in around six months.

Follow-up visits for school or PRUs placed in special measures

Follow-up visits for school or PRUs placed in special measures will take place every four - six months and are usually termly. Each visit will focus on a few of the recommendations from the core inspection. Although each visit will focus on the progress the school or PRU has made towards addressing a sample of recommendations, over a 12 month period, we will normally evaluate progress against all of the recommendations. Visits will usually be for up to two days and inspectors will carry out a range of inspection activity which will vary, depending on which recommendation/s are the focus for the visit and the time of year. Activities could include:

- meetings with senior and middle leaders
- lesson observations
- learning walks
- scrutiny of pupils' work
- meetings with pupils
- joint observations or other monitoring activity
- scrutiny of other documentation

Although each visit will focus on the progress the school or PRU has made towards addressing a sample of recommendations, over a 12 month period, we will normally evaluate progress against all of the recommendations.

At the end of each visit, we will judge whether the school or PRU continues to require special measures or not. We will provide a report for the school or PRU following the visit, but this will not be published on our website. Its aim is to support the school or PRU to continue to improve. We will continue to carry out monitoring visits until HMCI decides that the school or PRU has made enough progress to be removed from special measures. At this point, we will publish a report on our website.

While a school or PRU is in special measures, governors and the local authority may not appoint any newly-qualified teachers (NQTs or GTPs) to the staff, without seeking approval from Estyn. If Estyn supports the appointment, the school or PRU will need to provide a support plan for the NQT. See this [guidance](#) for further information.

5. Support for schools/PRUs in a statutory category

There are a number of ways in which a school or PRU can be supported whilst in a statutory category.

- Schools or PRUs should work with their local authority following the core visit and follow-up visits. The local authority should plan how they will support the school or PRU in addressing the recommendations.
- The school or PRU's improvement partner can support the school or PRU, for example by working alongside leaders to strengthen improvement planning and gain first-hand evidence to support evaluations.
- Many local authorities set up a multi-agency panel to support school or PRUs in Special Measures. This panel meets at least termly and involves the school or PRU, a member of the governing body or management committee, the school or PRU improvement partner and representatives from the local authority.
- Many local authorities have a multi-agency or team around the school/PRU approach for providers in both Significant Improvement as well as Special Measures. It can be helpful for this form of support to continue when a school/PRU is removed from statutory category.
- When a school or PRU has come out of the statutory category it can be helpful for the LA to arrange a meeting with the headteacher and chair of governors to discuss what worked, what could officers have done better, lessons learned and so on. This can help to inform the support for other providers in the future.
- If the school/PRU has any queries or concerns about follow-up visits, they can contact the Inspection Coordinator at Estyn, who will pass on their query to the most appropriate inspector.
- A school or PRU should also contact their local authority following the core visit and follow-up visits to find out how they will be able to support the school or PRU in addressing recommendations.

6. Myths and reality

Myth: The PIAP has to be presented in a particular way

Reality: There is no preferred or suggested format for the PIAP. However, there are some guiding principles that should be adhered to – see notes above on guidance on the PIAP.

Myth: Schools/PRUs must have a PIAP and an improvement plan

Reality: The PIAP will essentially be the improvement plan, but schools/PRUs may want to include other priorities for that are not covered by the recommendations. Most schools/PRUs prepare a PIAP to cover the recommendations and add any additional priorities at the end.

Myth: The PIAP has to stay the same and cannot be changed without approval from Estyn

Reality: The PIAP will essentially become the improvement plan. Once Estyn has accepted the initial PIAP it is only natural that the detail, for example timeframes and the detail of specific actions will need to change and evolve over time. The PIAP does not need to be sent to Estyn for approval every time this happens. However, the focus of the plan, including the main planned actions and success criteria, are unlikely to change.

Myth: The more support for schools/PRUs in statutory category the better

Reality: Often, when schools/PRUs go into a statutory category support comes from every direction on a broad range of things. This can be overwhelming for the school/PRU and different people often give different messages, which can be contradictory and confusing. It is helpful to work with the school/PRU to plan a programme of support that meets its needs, is manageable and prioritised appropriately. It is also helpful to ensure that there is no contradictory messaging and to manage the amount of support.

Myth: Before it can be removed from special measures, a school must have improved to the point where it would not go into follow-up if re-inspected

Reality: There is no 'point' that a school must reach in order to be removed from special measures. What is important is the pace and sustainability of the improvements that are being made. Often, inspectors will consider whether the school has 'done (at least) one thing well' and is able to transfer this model for improvement work across other aspects of the school's work. It is likely that there will remain some shortcomings in provision when a school is removed from follow-up. However, if leaders at all levels are clearly demonstrating the capacity to make the necessary improvements, then the school can be removed from follow-up.

Myth: Once a school/PRU is out of a statutory category they no longer need any support

Reality: When a school/PRU is removed from a statutory category, this does not mean that they no longer need any support. They may not need the level of support they previously received, but this should have

reduced over time as the school/PRU improved anyway. However, a certain level of support following removal from category can be helpful. Too often, schools/PRUs that have previously been in a statutory category go back into a statutory category in the next inspection, as improvements haven't been embedded or sustained.