

Supplementary guidance

Inspecting schools with a religious character

September 2021

Supplementary guidance for inspecting schools with a religious character

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Aim of this supplementary guidance

The purpose of this supplementary guidance is to:

- explain how schools with a religious character will be inspected under section 50 and section 28 and distinguish the differences in responsibility between both inspections
- provide inspectors with background information about schools with a religious character

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About this guidance

Copyright statement

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
- special schools
- pupil referral units
- all-age schools
- independent schools
- further education
- independent specialist colleges
- adult learning in the community
- local authority education services for children and young people
- teacher education and training
- Welsh for adults
- work-based learning
- learning in the justice sector

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- 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

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About this guidance

Overview

The purpose of this supplementary guidance is to:

- explain how schools with a religious character will be inspected under section 50 and section 28 and distinguish the differences in responsibility between both inspections
- provide inspectors with background information about schools with a religious character

Guidance

What are faith schools?

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What are faith schools?

What we call 'faith schools' are schools with a religious character or have formal links with a faith-based organisation. They fall into two categories: maintained schools with a religious character and independent schools with a religious character.

Maintained faith schools resemble all other maintained schools in several ways. They follow the National Curriculum and are inspected by Estyn. Similarly, all maintained schools, whether or not they have a religious character, are required to have daily acts of collective worship and to teach religious education as part of their curriculum. Having a religious character gives a maintained school specific flexibilities in:

- the appointment of staff
- teaching and inspection of RE
- collective worship
- admissions policy
- the school's ethos

Independent faith schools in Wales currently include those who follow a Christian tradition and those that follow the Islamic faith. They are all inspected by Estyn. Independent faith schools must comply with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 in the same way as other independent schools.

Maintained faith school characteristics

Voluntary aided schools

Voluntary aided schools are mainly funded by the state with the foundation responsible for at least 10% of capital works but having greater influence over the school. The governing body runs the school, employs the staff and decides the school's admission arrangements, subject to rules set by Welsh Government. Pupils follow the national curriculum. In these schools, religious education (RE) is to be determined by the governors and in accordance with the provisions of the trust deed relating to the school or, where there is no provision in the trust deed, with the religion or denomination mentioned in the order designating the school as having a religious character.

Voluntary controlled schools

Voluntary controlled schools have all their costs met by the state and are controlled by the local authority. The land and buildings are typically owned by a charitable foundation, which also appoints about a quarter of the school governors. However, the local authority employs the school's staff and has primary responsibility for the school's admission arrangements. Pupils follow the national curriculum. RE provision in voluntary-controlled schools with a religious character is to be provided in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus. However, where the parent of any pupil at the school requests that RE is provided in accordance with provisions of the trust deed relating to the school (or, where there is no provision in the trust deed, in accordance with the religion or denomination mentioned in the order designating the school as having a religious character). The governors must make arrangements for securing that RE is provided to the pupil in accordance with the relevant religion for up to two periods a week unless they are satisfied that there are special circumstances which would make it unreasonable to do so.

Maintained school inspection: section 28 and section 50 inspections

Section 28 of the Education Act 2005 sets out Estyn's inspection duties in relation to maintained schools.

If a maintained school has a religious character, as designated by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, denominational religious education and the content of collective worship are inspected under section 50 of the Education Act 2005. The inspectors who conduct section 50 inspections are appointed by the school's governing body in consultation with the appropriate religious authority and are normally drawn from the relevant faith group's section 50 inspectorate (for instance, the Catholic Education Service in the case of Roman Catholic schools). Where religious education is required to be provided using the locally agreed syllabus relevant to the school, as in the case of voluntary controlled schools for example, religious education would be inspected under section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Although section 50 inspectors inspect acts of collective worship, religious education (RE) (in the case of voluntary aided schools) and or those lessons designated as providing denominational RE (in the case of voluntary controlled schools), Estyn inspectors and section 50 inspectors may attend acts of collective worship and may observe lessons in which RE is provided. In such cases, the Estyn inspector will not inspect or report on matters which are the responsibility of the section 50 inspector – generally the denominational content provided. The relationship between section 28 and section 50 inspections is governed by a protocol between Estyn and faith group inspectorates.

When inspecting RE lessons or acts of collective worship Estyn inspectors can comment on

- progress in learning
- skill development i.e. literacy or numeracy
- attitudes to learning
- the contribution of assemblies/ RE lessons to pupils' personal development and spiritual, moral, social and cultural education
- the quality of teaching

Estyn inspectors should avoid commenting on

- specifically denominational contents of assemblies or RE lessons
- the specific denominational nature or quality of the school's ethos. Avoid such phrases as: 'The school is very successful in promoting a strong Christian ethos'

Independent faith school characteristics

This guidance attempts to provide you with some background information to each type of independent faith school and the etiquette expected. Even in faith schools that follow the same religion there may be slight differences in etiquette.

Schools within the Christian tradition

OneSchool Global Schools (independent)

Background

OneSchool Global schools are run by local Exclusive Christian Brethren communities. These schools cater primarily for secondary-aged pupils. These schools are supported by the local faith communities. Teachers and headteachers are generally not members of the Exclusive Brethren community.

Information and communication technology (ICT) developments have brought about a recent significant change to the curriculum. Schools are connected to a network run by the Focus Learning Trust and can use software licensed by the Trust. They may also make use of video conferencing to other OneSchool Global schools to extend opportunities within the curriculum. Pupils may not have access to television, radio or electronic media at home.

Curriculum

Although pupils are often taught together, in lessons such as physical education, games, dance or swimming pupils tend to be taught in separate gender groups. There is also a more traditional approach to technology, with the emphasis being on practical subjects such as cookery, needlework and woodwork.

The community traditionally avoided information communication technology, but this is now more widely in use for subjects such as business studies. As the Exclusive Brethren view the media as generally harmful, access to the internet is strictly controlled.

Brethren schools often start early and finish earlier than is usual in other schools. While some schools provide lunch time clubs there are no after school clubs because of the belief that children need to spend as much time as possible with the family. Most Brethren families attend an evening meeting each day and children also travel significant distances to get to school.

When talking to the children, avoid referring to subjects that are linked to the television or popular culture, the internet or media in general. Children may not have access to

television, radio or internet at home.

Etiquette

Female inspectors should consider wearing skirts rather than trousers and dress according to what the schools would consider modest.

These schools may offer hospitality and refreshments but will generally expect inspectors to consume it away from members of the community, as Exclusive Brethren do not eat or drink with those outside their fellowship. Most schools are small and often do not serve food on the premises: children bring packed lunches from home and unlike other inspections it may not be appropriate to disturb them during mealtimes or engage the children in discussion. Inspectors should bring their own lunch. Very few staff are members of the Exclusive Brethren community, so it may be possible to talk to the headteacher or other staff at coffee or lunchtime.

Many girls in the Exclusive Brethren community do not cut their hair and usually wear a head scarf or 'token'. Boys do not wear ties.

Muslim schools (independent)

Background

These schools seek to promote an Islamic ethos throughout the curriculum. They are generally supported by local communities and are therefore most frequently located in areas with substantial Muslim populations.

Daily prayers (Salat) five times a day will often dictate the shape of the school day, so timetables are usually adjusted in the autumn and spring terms to accommodate the midday and afternoon prayers.

During Ramadan, activities such as physical education may be restricted as many pupils will be observing the fast. During Eids and Muharram many schools will have celebrations to mark the importance of these events.

Boys and girls may be taught or seated separately according to the specific context, particularly during collective acts of worship. This should not be taken as a sign of inequality between different genders.

Most schools have a uniform for boys and girls. Most often it is the traditional Asian style clothes representing the Islamic principle of modesty. Girls will cover their head with the 'hijab' or scarf. Boys may wear a small cap.

Female staff often cover their heads; some wear the full face covering (niqaab).

The accommodation will include facilities for 'wudu', the required ritual washing before prayers and meals. This is done by sitting on a fixed stool before a tap, so that feet, hands and parts of the head can be washed under running water. These ablution areas may be separate from toilets, which may be 'western' or 'eastern' style. Troughs with several taps are sometimes provided as washbasins.

Curriculum

The curriculum varies according to the views of the Trustees and the Islamic tradition followed. In line with the independent school standards, inspectors should evaluate the breadth and balance of the curriculum, including skills taught in the different subjects

and across age groups.

Modern foreign languages provision is usually taught through Arabic and occasionally other European languages.

Art and music can be restricted. Inspectors may find evidence of music being taught through religious worship sessions: the tajweed (recitation of the Qur'an), the singing of Arabic songs (nasheed), the playing of the Duff (drums) and the call to prayer (adhaan). Pupils are taught these from an early age. Muslim schools will not teach any form of art that portrays the human form or living creatures. However, there is no restriction on the teaching of abstract, geometrical or arabesque styles of art.

For physical education, older girls will tend to wear tracksuits and cover their heads. Primary school pupils will be taught physical education together and separated once they reach secondary school.

Health and sex education will be taught within Islamic studies and often under the umbrella of personal, social and health education unless required by an examination syllabus such as GCSE science. Some schools require it to be taught only by Muslim teachers of the same gender as the pupils.

Etiquette

Schools will have a prayer room and shoes must always be removed before entering this room. Some school staff change into slippers. Inspectors are advised to bring slippers or wear socks. Some schools will have a purpose-built mosque on site. Some schools may also request inspectors to remove their shoes before entering the main school.

It is important for inspectors to be aware of and respect religious sensitivities. Muslims greet each other with 'as-salamu alaykum' – 'peace be on you'. The reply is 'wa' alaykum as-salam' – 'peace be also on you'. If used respectfully on entering a class, the children will respond.

Female inspectors are advised to wear a trouser suit or longer skirt and jacket to cover their arms. Female inspectors are also recommended to carry a scarf in case they enter the prayer room or a mosque when they will need to cover their head.

There is usually no physical contact between males and females who are not part of the same family. Muslim men do not usually shake hands with women, and Muslim women do not shake hands with men, so the best policy is not to offer to shake hands unless

someone offers their hand to you.

It is important to check with the school the etiquette regarding male inspectors entering the classroom of female teachers. In some schools, time will need to be given so that the female teacher can cover her head and/or face from the male inspector. Inspectors also need to be aware that they may find themselves providing feedback from a lesson to a teacher that may be wearing a full 'niqaab' (face and head cover). In some schools, male inspectors will need another female present in order to give feedback to a female teacher.