

# Supplementary guidance

## Lesson observations and learning walks

September 2021

# **Supplementary guidance: Lesson observations and learning walks - September 2021**

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### **What is the purpose?**

To provide guidance to inspectors for evaluating learning and teaching during lesson observations and learning walks

### **For whom is it intended?**

Inspectors of maintained and independent schools, non-maintained settings and post 16/FE

### **From when should the guidance be used?**

September 2021

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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

Estyn also:

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

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# About this guidance

## Overview

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

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

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

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

Inspection teams work according to several key principles. These include that inspection teams:

- take a learner-focused approach to inspection.
- always focus strongly on the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning
- ensure that inspection is responsive to the needs of all learners.
- focus each inspection on the specific provider and adapt their approaches accordingly.
- adopt a constructive approach that makes the interaction with the provider a professional learning experience for their staff and the inspection team as a whole.
- consider everything in the inspection framework but will only report on the key strengths and weaknesses.
- will seek out well-considered innovative practice.
- ensure that evaluations are secure, reliable, valid and based on first-hand evidence.
- keep to a minimum any requirements for documentation and preparation by the provider.

- gain the perspective of learners and other stakeholders.



# Guidance

**Lesson observation: General principles**

**Lesson observations**

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# Lesson observation: General principles

The aim of all inspection activity is for the team to gather sufficient evidence from lesson observations, learning walks and other activities to assess the validity and accuracy of the provider's own evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses in relation to outcomes and the quality of its provision and leadership.

During inspections, the reporting inspector (RI) will organise a number of lesson observations and learning walks. Members of the inspection team should not undertake lesson observations or learning walks on their own initiative but should always refer back to the RI for discussion and to secure their agreement.

Learning walks give, inspection teams the opportunity to see a larger number of learners, classes, activities and teachers. There is no requirement on the inspection team to observe all teachers or all subject or learning areas. The RI and inspection team should not normally share the timetable of lesson observations and learning walks with the nominee unless there is a specific, persuasive reason to do so, for example to facilitate access to a designated area of the site or to ensure the health and safety of inspectors.

Estyn has no fixed template for the structure of lessons, or the teaching approaches required. Teachers should design learning experiences that they consider to be the most appropriate for the learners in the class and the learning objectives they wish them to achieve. Inspectors should only evaluate teaching in relation to how effective it is at helping pupils to secure learning and make progress over time.

Inspectors will consider any planning that teachers may use for the lesson observed, but they do not require teachers to do any bespoke lesson planning specifically for the inspection. Inspectors wish to see the planning that teachers normally use to guide the teaching and learning. There is no desire to increase the bureaucratic burden on teachers or support staff because of inspection activity.

The inspection team gathers a wide range of evidence on the quality of teaching and the progress made by learners, for example through scrutiny of teachers' planning and talking to learners about their work. Lesson observation and learning walks form only one part of that evidence. The focus of the inspection team will be to establish the prevalence and significance of the various strengths and weaknesses in learners' progress and achievement, the quality of their learning experiences and the quality of teaching across the provider for discussion in team meetings.

If inspectors are unable to gather sufficient evidence during lesson observations or

through learning walks about learners' standards, the progress that they make, their learning experiences and the quality of teaching, inspectors should speak with the nominee and request an additional sample of learners' work, further discussion with learners and teachers' planning for further scrutiny.

# Lesson observations

Lesson observations focus primarily on the work of a single class, session or lesson. Typically, they will involve an inspector observing learners in a classroom, laboratory or workshop setting. On occasions, the lesson observation may involve observation of learners outside the classroom, for example in outdoor areas, in a sports hall or performance space or in corridors.

Inspectors undertake lesson observations for at least 30 minutes. In most cases, they will observe learning for longer than this. The usual time for a lesson observation is between 45-60 minutes, but it could be longer depending on the nature of the lesson and the evidence required by the inspector. On occasions, an inspector may spend 30 minutes with a class at the beginning of a session and return later to see other parts of the lesson.

At the end of each lesson observation, the inspector will offer the teacher the opportunity for a brief professional dialogue on the lesson/activity observed. Where this is not possible, the inspector and the teacher should agree a mutually convenient time and location where the professional dialogue can take place. The inspector should always offer the opportunity for professional dialogue, but it is up to the teacher involved whether they wish to accept the invitation or not.

Professional dialogue with teachers should focus primarily on the work of the learners. Comments on the quality of teaching should relate to the strengths and weaknesses in the learning that took place and the contribution of the teaching to it.

# Learning walks

Inspectors will carry out learning walks during inspections. Learning walks focus on a specific aspect of the work of learners across a number of classes, for example standards in literacy or ICT or the quality of support for learners with additional learning needs. One inspector may undertake a learning walk across a range of lessons, or a number of inspectors may visit individual classes, workshops or areas of a provider for a short period with a common focus or theme in mind.

Due to the focused nature of the learning walk activity, and the spread of activity across a number of lessons/classes within a relatively short period, inspectors will not be in a position to offer professional dialogue to individual teachers after learning walks. During learning walks, inspectors may also not see very much whole class teaching at all. Inspectors on learning walks may focus on the work that learners undertake rather than the quality of the teaching.

During most inspections, the learning walk activities will usually take place between the start and middle of the time that the inspection team are with the provider, though they can happen at any time during the inspection period. The outcomes of learning walks and other inspection activities may inform the focus of inspection activity on any following day(s). Reporting inspectors will need to be flexible in their timetabling of further observations and other activities in order to respond appropriately to the emerging findings from the evidence obtained from learning walks.

There is no designated time allocation for a learning walk observation as the inspection focus may vary from learning walk to learning walk and from provider to provider. The RI should discuss the practicalities of learning walk activity with the inspection team and provide suitable guidance at the start of the inspection.

At the start of inspections, RIs will arrange for members of the inspection team to undertake learning walks at specific times and the RI will identify the specific focus for the learning walks. The RI will usually ensure that there is no overlap in the work of inspectors, for example. two inspectors observing the same activity in the same class. However, in open-plan learning environments, there may be occasions when inspectors may undertake observations and learning walks in similar areas, for example in a large, open-plan foundation phase area in a school, across a large workshop or performance space or in an outdoor area, such as a playground or playing field.

# Recording findings from lesson observations and learning walks

Inspectors should note emerging findings electronically in the relevant area of their electronic judgement forms (JFs) as they undertake inspection activity.

In most cases, inspectors should note their findings in the 'Observation notes' section of the JFs, which focuses on standards and teaching. These can then form the basis for team discussion on the overall strengths and weaknesses in learning, progress, achievement and teaching within the provider.

Inspectors should record their findings on any other aspects of the provision, for example the breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum, in the relevant section of their JF.