

Guidance for Inspectors

How we inspect
for inspections from 2023
- updated January 2024

This guidance is also available in Welsh.



Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Introduction

Purpose of the guidance handbook 'How we inspect'

This handbook sets out our approaches to inspecting maintained schools (primary, secondary, all-age and special schools), independent schools and pupil referral units. It explains **how** we inspect. The guidance is essential reading for reporting inspectors and all other members of the inspection team. It may also be useful for providers to support their understanding of the inspection mind-set and methodologies.

The guidance should be read alongside '[What we inspect](#)', which outlines the inspection framework. Schools and PRUs can use this guidance to see how inspections work.

Where the inspection identifies practice worth sharing, inspectors will invite the provider to write a case study that we will publish on our website. Where the inspection identifies important concerns in relation to standards, quality of education and training or leadership and management, we will arrange follow-up activity to support improvement. Guidance on the different types of follow-up activity is available on p16 of this handbook.

There is further information about inspections on our website www.estyn.gov.wales

Legal basis for the inspections of schools and pupil referral units

School and PRU inspections are governed by the Education Act 2005 and related regulations. Inspections must be conducted by teams of inspectors, led by an HMI, additional inspector or Registered Inspector, and must result in a published report. Section 28 of the Education Act 2005 says that inspectors must report on:

- the educational standards achieved
- the quality of education provided
- how far education meets the needs of the range of pupils
- the quality of leadership and management, including whether the financial resources are managed efficiently
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- whether the provision promotes healthy eating and drinking
- the contribution of the provision to the well-being of pupils

Some schools have a religious character and teach denominational religious education. In these schools, denominational religious education and the content of collective worship are inspected separately under Section 50 of the Education Act 2005 and are not included in Section 28 inspections.

The Education Act 2005 also outlines Estyn's right of entry and access to premises and information to enable it to carry out such functions. It also states that it is an offence intentionally to obstruct HMCI (and inspectors deployed by HMCI) in the exercise of functions in relation to inspection.

Legal basis for the inspection of independent schools

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

- the quality of education provided
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- the welfare, health and safety of pupils
- the suitability of proprietors and staff
- the premises and accommodation
- the school's provision of information
- the manner in which schools handle complaints

The Welsh Government, in its role as the registration authority for independent schools in Wales, may at any time:

- require Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) to inspect any registered school, or to secure its inspection by one or more reporting inspectors
- arrange for the inspection of any registered school by a body approved by the registration authority

Estyn must:

- make a report to the registration authority on the extent to which the school meets the standard/s to which the inspection relates
- where they are not met, indicate what the school needs to do in order to comply with the regulations
- if the registration authority so requires, arrange for the publication of the report

Policy background

While not governed directly by the following policies and conventions, this guidance handbook takes account of the following:

For all schools (both maintained and independent) and PRUs:

- the Welsh Government's statutory safeguarding guidance Keeping Learners Safe (maintained schools and PRUs only) <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-04/220401-keeping-learners-safe.pdf>
- the Welsh Government's anti-bullying guidance 2019 (maintained schools and PRUs only) <https://gov.wales/anti-bullying-guidance>

For maintained schools and PRUs only:

- the review of the curriculum in schools as set out in 'Successful Futures' (Welsh Government, February 2015) <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150317-successful-futures-en.pdf>
- the review of teacher training in Wales as set out in 'Training tomorrow's teachers' (Welsh Government, March 2015)

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/teaching-tomorrow%E2%80%99s-teachers.pdf>

- Professional standards for school practitioners 2019
<https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-development/professional-standards/>
- Workforce development plan 2019-2021
<https://gov.wales/workforce-development-plan-2019-to-2021>
- the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 <https://gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-statutory-guidance>
- the Welsh Government's mission for education in Wales from 2017 to 2021
[education-in-wales-our-national-mission.pdf \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/education-in-wales-our-national-mission.pdf)
- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the Welsh Government in 2004 as the basis for policy-making for children and young people <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>
- Schools as Learning Organisations model 2018 guidance and case studies
<https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-development/schools-as-learning-organisations/>
- Healthy eating in maintained schools: statutory guidance for local authorities and governing bodies 2014
<https://gov.wales/healthy-eating-maintained-schools-guidance-education-providers>
- National evaluation and improvement resource for schools
<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection/national-evaluation-and-improvement-resource-schools>
- The curriculum for Wales guidance [Curriculum for Wales – Hwb \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales)
- The journey to 2022 [WG41947 Curriculum for Wales document English \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/wg41947)

Inspecting the Curriculum for Wales in maintained schools and PRUs

Inspectors will approach their evaluation of the school or PRUs curriculum taking account of the provider's vision, context and rationale for developing their bespoke curriculum in line with the requirements for Curriculum for Wales. They will take account of the statutory guidance in place. Inspectors will evaluate how effective the school's curriculum is in creating a curriculum that provides a worthwhile range of learning experiences to improve the learning and progress for all pupils.

Inspectors should consider the positive or negative effects of any arrangements in place to enable groups of learners to access different learning experiences overall. For example, we will consider whether all pupils access a broad and balanced curriculum for as long as possible.

We will review our reporting requirements in relation to the curriculum on a regular basis. The reviews will ensure that the inspection framework remains aligned with the programme for statutory implementation of the Curriculum for Wales.

Inspecting the curriculum in independent schools

The Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 state that a school must draw up and implement effectively a written policy on the curriculum supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work. Inspectors should evaluate the breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which learning experiences across the school stimulate and challenge the full range of pupils so that they engage fully in their learning and make the best possible progress.

Taking account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Each inspection will start with a discussion with leaders about the impact of the pandemic on their learning community. This will be an opportunity for the school and PRU to share with the inspection team the initial and ongoing challenges brought about by the pandemic.

Throughout the inspection, we will take account of the school or PRU's context, and the impact of the pandemic on all aspects of its work.

In the past, inspectors have used a range of data to support their evaluations of outcomes. External (published) data has been affected by COVID-19 including, for example, key stage 4 and key stage 5 results, post-16 destinations, school attendance and school exclusions. Inspectors will not be able to compare data within or across the school or PRU or with other benchmarked provisions. They will not compare data between the period before the pandemic, the period during the pandemic and the period following the pandemic.

When considering well-being and attitudes to learning, inspectors will not report on the school's attendance rate compared with other similar schools. However, we will consider the effectiveness of the school's approaches to ensure that pupils attend school and engage with their learning on a regular basis, as part of their evaluation of the school's provision for care, support and guidance. We will take account of how well the school has evaluated and responded to any changes in pupils' social and emotional needs, behaviour and well-being as a result of the pandemic, school closures and distance learning.

We will consider the quality of classroom provision and learning experiences that pupils receive over time and whether it enables pupils to make the progress they should. We will routinely consider samples of pupils' work online, on paper or in their books. Part of this work may have been completed at home or through distance learning activities.

Inspectors will provide the school/PRU's leaders with the opportunity to brief the team about the impact of the pandemic on the school's progress in developing new initiatives and strengthening the provision. Inspectors will consider this information as part of the context of the school, and the emerging inspection evidence base.

Part 1: Inspection arrangements

Introduction

This section is set out in a way that reflects the sequence of work before, during and after a core inspection.

The reporting inspector (RI) is responsible for the conduct and management of the inspection and for the inspection report. While this guidance focuses mainly on the role of the reporting inspector, all team members must comply with the same inspection requirements.

Principles of inspection

Inspection teams work according to a number of key principles. They:

- take a learner-led approach to inspection
- always focus strongly on the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning
- consider everything in the ‘what’ and ‘how’ we inspect guidance documents, but only report on the key strengths and weaknesses
- focus each inspection on the specific provider and adapt their approaches accordingly
- use a range of tailored inspection methodologies and approaches that are bespoke to the provider’s circumstances, in order to evaluate the breadth of the provider’s work robustly and fairly
- 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

In addition, inspectors will:

- ensure that inspection is responsive to the needs of all learners
- ensure that evaluations are secure, reliable, valid and based on first-hand evidence
- involve the provider fully in the inspection process, including the opportunity for the provider to select a nominee
- use the provider’s improvement priorities as the starting point for the inspection and to identify key areas for investigation in order to make evaluations on the validity of its findings
- include peer inspectors in the inspection process
- keep to a minimum any requirements for documentation and preparation by the provider
- gain the perspective of learners and other stakeholders
- apply the principle of equality for Welsh and English to all our inspection work

Inspection mind-set

Estyn's approach to inspection is:

- **Fair and impartial** – this means that we work to be independent, objective and balanced. We are robust and consistent in our work. We weigh the evidence and its significance to provide an honest, credible and accurate view of the provider's strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Supportive** – we work to guide providers to implement improvements that benefit learners. We encourage innovation and recognise good intentions. We are friendly but always professional in our approach. We support educational reform. We work hard to develop meaningful relationships with providers and local and regional organisations.
- **Reflective** – we are open-minded. We listen to a wide range of stakeholders and reflect on their responses. We are thoughtful, measured and careful. We plan opportunities to think carefully about the inspection findings and to discuss them with others in the team.
- **Transparent** – we are well informed and communicate clearly, directly and succinctly. We use efficient and effective inspection methodologies to respond to the provider's unique situation. We plan inspection activity and report on strengths and weaknesses in ways that reflect the particular circumstances of each individual provider. As a result, our actions promote trust and respect.

Expectations of inspectors

Our expectations of inspectors explains how we embody our mind-set through our actions. Inspectors should uphold the highest possible standards in their work. All inspectors have to meet the expected standards of behaviour and conduct.

When conducting engagement with a provider, inspectors will:

- be courteous and professional
- establish and maintain appropriate professional boundaries when talking to both children and adults
- carry out their work with integrity, respect and due sensitivity
- take all reasonable steps to prevent undue anxiety and to minimise stress during inspection activity
- evaluate the work of the provider objectively using clear and robust evidence
- report honestly, fairly and impartially without fear or favour
- communicate clearly and openly
- act in the best interests of learners
- respect the confidentiality of all information received during the course of their work
- respond appropriately to reasonable requests

It is important that we evaluate the effectiveness of provision and leadership on their impact and not on the basis of any preferences for particular methods. The key to our evaluations is whether the methods and organisation are fit for the purpose in supporting all pupils to achieve high standards and strong levels of well-being.

Inspectors should inform Estyn of any perceived or actual conflicts of interest

whenever they receive notification of engagement, for example that they are part of a provider's inspection team.

Expectations of providers

In order that inspection and regulation are constructive and beneficial, it is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a professional working environment based on mutual courtesy, respect and professional behaviour. We expect inspectors to uphold Estyn's Expectations of Inspectors, but we also expect providers to:

- be courteous and professional, treating inspectors and inspection support staff with respect
- act in the best interests of learners
- provide evidence – or access to evidence - that enables inspectors to conduct the inspection in an open, honest and objective way
- recognise that inspectors need to observe practice and to talk to staff, learners and other stakeholders without the presence of a manager or senior leader
- work with inspectors to take all reasonable steps to minimise disruption, stress and bureaucracy
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with the reporting inspector and other inspectors
- draw any concerns about the inspection to the attention of inspectors in a timely and suitable manner through the nominee
- give due regard to the health and safety, and well-being of inspectors while on the premises
- maintain the confidentiality of meetings and inspection findings until the final publication of the report
- ensure that inspection teams have access to a private area to discuss inspection evidence and hold confidential discussions

Any CCTV and recording equipment should be brought to the attention of the team during the initial team meeting.

At the point of the inspection notification, schools/PRUs should review the composition of the inspection team. It is the provider's responsibility to highlight any perceived or actual conflicts of interest prior to the start any engagement, for example prior to their on-site inspection or interim visit.

Expectations of local authority and regional officers

Local authority and regional officers who attend feedback at providers are expected to comply with the same principles of the expectations of providers.

Well-being: Safeguarding, including health, safety and well-being issues

Inspectors will carry out inspections in accordance with Estyn's guidance on inspecting safeguarding. If they observe anything that they think constitutes, in their opinion, a danger to the safety of staff, visitors or pupils, inspectors should alert managers at the provision.

If an inspector becomes aware of a safeguarding allegation/suspicion in respect of a

child, young person or vulnerable adult, they should follow the procedures set out in the current version of '[Estyn's policy and procedures for safeguarding](#)', which is available on our website.

In all cases, inspectors should make a note of the issue and that they have informed managers. Inspectors should report on obvious risks relating to health, safety and well-being under inspection area 4 (Care, support and guidance). Where these risks are a serious concern, inspectors should include a short comment in the report's text and a recommendation in the report. We will send a well-being letter to the provider and the local authority asking them to outline how they will address the shortcoming.

Approach to inspection

The number of inspectors and the number of days they spend at the provider may vary according to the size and context of the provider.

We will carry out inspections in line with our [Welsh Language Policy](#), available from our website. Inspectors will also use our supplementary guidance on [literacy](#) and [Welsh](#).

The Virtual Inspection Room

We will use an electronic system, called the 'Virtual Inspection Room' (VIR), for managing many aspects of the inspection. It is a web-based system that allows providers to upload information before the inspection and to download guidance from us about the inspection process. The VIR is also the place where headteachers and nominees can access the post-inspection questionnaires (PIQs).

We ensure the security of information uploaded by subjecting the VIR to penetration testing. This testing evaluates systems security. We identify and implement any actions to prevent unauthorised access. All users of Estyn's VIR system have a username and password, which are recorded and maintained securely within an active directory. The system also has features to ensure password protection including threat detection and conditional access.

The inspection team

There are different roles within the inspection team.

Team member	Explanation	Role
Reporting inspector (RI), may also be referred to as the lead inspector	The RI for an inspection will be one of the following: HMI (Her Majesty's Inspector of Education and Training in Wales) – HMI are appointed by the crown. They are civil servants employed directly by Estyn.	The RI leads and manages the inspection team. They liaise with the school/PRU and the team ahead of the inspection, and quality assure their team's work. The RI is the first point of reference for everyone during the on-

	<p>AI (Additional Inspector) – AIs normally join Estyn temporarily, for example on secondment from schools and other providers.</p> <p>Rgl (Registered Inspectors) – Rgls are trained and qualified lead inspectors who are contracted to lead specific inspections. Often Rgls are current or recently retired headteachers who have significant experience working with Estyn, for example as a peer inspector.</p>	<p>site part of the inspection process.</p>
<p>Team inspectors (TI)</p>	<p>The number of team inspectors is determined by the size of the provider. Team inspectors may be HMI or contracted additional inspectors who have been trained by Estyn. All team inspectors are qualified teachers. Sometimes, a team inspector with a particular specialism also joins an inspection team for a day, for example if there is a specialist ALN facility such as classes for pupils with a hearing impairment (HI).</p>	<p>Team inspectors may take responsibility for gathering evidence to inform the team’s evaluation of different aspects of the inspection. The RI directs and manages the team inspectors’ work.</p>
<p>Peer inspector (PI)</p>	<p>A peer inspector is a serving senior leader from another school or PRU who has completed Estyn’s PI training and assessment. All inspection teams have a peer inspector as a team member. In larger schools/PRUs, there may be more than one PI on the team. Sometimes challenge advisors join inspection teams.</p>	<p>PIs also take responsibility for gathering evidence to inform the team’s evaluations. They are an integral part of the inspection team. The RI directs and manages PIs’ work.</p>
<p>Lay inspector (LI) – maintained schools only</p>	<p>A lay inspector is not a qualified teacher and does not have a background working in schools or PRUs, although normally they have experience in community work of some form. They bring a different non-specialist dimension to the team’s work. All LIs are trained and assessed by Estyn, and contracted to work on specific inspections. Every maintained school and PRU inspection team includes an LI.</p>	<p>The lay inspector considers what it is like to be a pupil in the school, and they report back to the inspection team (including the nominee). Their views help to inform the team’s ongoing work. Normally the LI joins the team for one day of the inspection week, often the Tuesday.</p>
<p>Premises inspector –</p>	<p>In independent schools, to comply with the Education (School Premises)</p>	<p>This additional inspector will normally join the</p>

independent schools only	Regulations 1999, an appropriately qualified additional inspector who has experience and qualification in premises related issues joins the team.	independent school inspection team for one or more days to judge whether the school meets the relevant standards.
Nominee (from the provider being inspected)	We will invite providers to select a senior member of staff, called the nominee, to work with the inspection team. The nominee should have sufficient seniority to act as a link between the provider and the inspection team. In many cases, the nominee is the headteacher of the school, or the teacher in charge of the PRU provision.	Providers can access the guidance for nominees on preparing for the inspection from links within the initial contact form (ICF), completed by the Inspection Co-ordinator (IC) and available via the VIR.

Contacting the provider and the local authority responsible for maintained schools and PRUs before the inspection

The provider will receive 10 working days' notice of the inspection. For maintained schools and PRUs, we will send a letter to notify the local authority (and the diocese, where appropriate) of the inspection at the same time. For independent schools, we inform the Welsh Government of the inspection date.

Following this, the inspection co-ordinator will contact the provider by telephone to set up the arrangements for the inspection. During this discussion, the inspection co-ordinator will:

- explain the purpose of the inspection and discuss an outline programme for the inspection
- discuss the specific information required before the inspection, including the provider's completion of a safeguarding self-evaluation form (either the Estyn proforma or the local authority's template, or the national self-evaluation template), and make the arrangements for receiving it in electronic form through the Virtual Inspection Room
- ask if there are any issues or risks the team should be aware of and request a general health and safety briefing for the team at the start of the inspection
- establish whether the provider wishes to have a nominee and, if it does, agree the role of the nominee and explain the process for completing the nominee guidance
- provide links and guidance for the completion of the suite of online pre-inspection questionnaires (e.g. learners, parents, staff etc)
- agree arrangements for setting up a meeting with parents/carers
- ensure that there are agreed procedures for addressing any concerns or complaints that might arise during the inspection
- arrange for members of the governing body, management committee or the proprietor to meet inspectors during the inspection period
- organise any domestic arrangements, such as a base for the inspectors, parking and internet access

- set up the arrangements for feeding back the inspection findings
- agree the arrangements for completing the post-inspection questionnaire (PIQ)
- inform the provider in writing, through the initial contact form, of the key inspection arrangements

The inspection co-ordinator will request the following information from the provider through the Virtual Inspection Room as soon as possible after the formal notification of the inspection:

- key background information e.g. names of staff and information about their roles and responsibilities
- a copy of the most recent development or improvement plan
- details of the timetables for the period of the inspection

If the inspection takes place early in the school year, providers may wish to share samples of pupils' work from the previous year with inspectors, if available.

When we notify providers of the inspection, they will receive information on how to access online questionnaires for pupils, parents/carers and staff. In maintained schools and PRUs, questionnaires are also available for members of the governing body or management committee. The outcomes of the pre-inspection questionnaires will form part of the pre-inspection evidence and support inspectors to form their evaluations of the school's work.

We notify the local authority of the inspection when we notify the provider. When we contact the local authority, we request a report that should provide brief details on the provider's main strengths and areas for development.

An independent school may receive state-funding for pupils, for example those:

- in EYDCP placements
- with additional learning needs [ALN]
- who are in the care of the local authority

We will arrange to obtain a briefing on the school from the placing authority. Where provision is also inspected by CIW, we will liaise directly with that organisation in accordance with the protocol.

Planning the inspection and preparing the team

The reporting inspector will plan the inspection and allocate responsibilities to members of the inspection team, taking into account the provider's improvement priorities and any other information.

We require providers to place a full plan of all the activities during the inspection week in the VIR. The reporting inspector will plan the team's activities based on the information provided.

During the inspection

Initial team meeting

The initial inspection team meeting is likely to include:

- a health and safety briefing from the provider
- a briefing from the headteacher or teacher in charge about the context of the school/PRU, including the impact of the pandemic
- a brief position statement from the headteacher or teacher in charge to set out the provider's strategic priorities and its current stage of development
- a discussion with the headteacher or teacher in charge (led by the RI) about the improvement priorities identified by the provider and the progress to date in its improvement work
- a discussion regarding how inspectors will be able to access important information

The RI will confirm these arrangements with the headteacher or teacher in charge during the pre-inspection phone call.

Gathering and reviewing inspection evidence

The team will plan the inspection so that they can cover the reporting requirements within the five inspection areas. The main forms of evidence are:

- samples of pupils' work
- discussions with pupils, staff, leaders, managers, governors, parents and others
- observation of teaching and other activities, including evidence gathered through learning walks
- pre-inspection questionnaire responses
- documentary or electronic evidence, e.g. information on pupils' progress
- information from the local authority/regional consortium where appropriate

The team will use direct observation of pupils' work wherever possible to gather evidence to support their evaluations. Inspectors may select an additional sample of pupils' work, if required, to support their evaluations of a specific aspect.

Providers should make information available to the inspection team about the standards achieved by pupils, particularly the results of any initial screening tests and other relevant assessments. This will help inspectors to evaluate pupils' progress, to come to a view about the standards pupils achieve compared to their starting-points and the way teachers use the information from assessment to influence their planning and their lessons.

The team will need to consider stakeholders' views on the provider and test out the validity of those views during the inspection.

Recording inspection evidence

Inspectors will complete their evidence forms electronically as part of Estyn's digital system for collecting, collating and recording inspection findings.

Team meetings

The main purpose of team meetings is to arrive at an accurate, reliable, valid and corporate view of learning and the quality of provision and leadership. Meetings will provide opportunities for inspectors to:

- test the validity of the provider's self-evaluation processes and priorities for improvement
- discuss emerging issues
- identify any gaps in the evidence base
- consider the main inspection findings and any recommendations

In the very few instances where the nominee is not the headteacher, it is important that the reporting inspector holds a brief daily meeting with the headteacher to clarify inspection issues and the broad, emerging findings of the inspection team.

Professional dialogue

Throughout the inspection, inspectors will engage in professional dialogue with practitioners. This dialogue may include meeting with individual teachers, often in their classrooms to discuss their planning and assessment of pupils' work. Inspectors may want to meet with groups of support staff, to understand the school's arrangements to support pupils with ALN. Inspectors may decide to meet with leaders, either individually or as a group, to understand the impact of the provider's leadership on bringing about improvements to pupils' outcomes.

Professional dialogue enables inspectors to gain first-hand evidence from practitioners that can be triangulated with other sources of evidence. The dialogue will provide emerging, interim findings on aspects of the evidence base. These findings may be amended, on reflection, for example after scrutiny of pupils' work or talking to pupils or as the result of moderation within the team.

Normally, at the end of a lesson observation, inspectors will have a brief professional dialogue with the member of staff on the learning seen. It may be necessary, in some cases, to conduct this discussion later during the inspection.

At all times, the main focus of the professional dialogue should be on the pupils, the progress they make during the lesson and the standards they achieve. Inspectors should try to focus on any strengths or areas for development in relation to the specific work seen.

Due to the sharply focused nature of learning walks, and the spread of the activity across a number of lessons/classes within a relatively short period of time, inspectors will not be in a position to offer professional dialogue to individual teachers after learning walk activity.

Formal feedback

At the end of the on-site part of the inspection, the team will provide oral feedback to senior leaders. In addition:

- Maintained schools and PRUs should invite a representative from the governing body or management committee, and one representative from either the local

authority or regional consortium to attend the meeting

- In faith schools, the school may also invite a representative from the local diocesan authority
- In independent schools the proprietor should be invited to attend the meeting
- Independent special schools may want to invite representatives from local authorities that place pupils at the school

The feedback should focus on the main findings of the inspection, including the recommendations, and the main evaluations of each of the five inspection areas.

The feedback meeting provides the opportunity for leaders and managers to hear and to reflect on the team's findings. The feedback should focus on the strengths and areas for improvement and the factors that contribute to them. The reporting inspector should explain to the provider that issues may be raised and discussed, and factual matters may be corrected. The purpose of the meeting is for the provider to understand rather than negotiate the inspection team's findings.

During the inspection, the team will consider if there is any effective practice that is worth sharing with other providers. Where this is the case, the reporting inspector will ask the provider to prepare a case study (or studies – a maximum of two) for dissemination on our website.

During all core inspections, the inspection team will consider whether the provider needs any follow-up activity. The reporting inspector will inform leaders if any follow-up activity is required.

All the evaluations and findings reported during an inspection, including the level of follow-up if appropriate, are provisional and subject to moderation and validation by HMCI. They are confidential to the provision's staff and governors or managers. They should not be communicated beyond this group, including via social media, until we publish the report on our website.

Complaints about the conduct of the inspection

If there are any issues about the conduct of the inspection overall or the conduct of individual inspectors, then the nominee should raise these directly and as soon as possible with the reporting inspector. The nominee should not wait until after the inspection but should raise any issues while the team is on site. Issues occasionally arise due to misunderstandings and these can usually be resolved quickly and satisfactorily, close to the time when they occurred.

There is guidance on our complaints handling procedures on our website.

After the inspection

The inspection report

The reporting inspector is responsible for producing a final inspection report that is clear to a lay audience and helpful to the provider.

When writing reports, inspectors should take account of Estyn's writing guidance, which is available on our website www.estyn.gov.wales.

We will publish reports bilingually, where schools have made this request, in line with our Welsh Language Policy.

We base the structure of the inspection report on our inspection framework. The report will take the following form:

About the school or PRU

Overview of the main findings

Recommendations

What happens next

Main evaluations

- 1 Learning
- 2 Well-being and attitudes to learning
- 3 Teaching and learning experiences
- 4 Care, support and guidance
- 5 Leadership and management

The evidence base of the inspection

We will produce the report within statutory timescales.

The factual accuracy check

We will give the provider a late draft of the report to help check the factual accuracy of the content. The provider will normally have five working days in which to consider the draft report and to identify any errors.

The focus of the check is on resolving any factual inaccuracies in the inspection report. It does not focus on the findings. There is further guidance for providers on the nature and scope of this check on our website.

Assuring the quality of inspections

We are committed to:

- effective selection, training, briefing, support and deployment of inspectors, including peer inspectors and lay inspectors
- effective training, briefing and support to allow the nominee to play an active role
- regular dialogue with the headteacher or teacher in charge during inspection
- criteria and recording systems that comply with inspection guidance
- careful review and analysis of evidence
- providing clear verbal feedback of the team's main findings and the detail for each inspection area
- producing accurate and well-presented reports

As part of our quality assurance procedures, we invite providers to complete a post-inspection questionnaire (PIQ). The questionnaire will be available in the VIR.

Providers should complete the first part of the PIQ as soon as possible after the on-site inspection and submit it electronically to Estyn through the VIR system. They can complete the second part of the PIQ after the publication of the inspection report, again through the VIR system.

The reporting inspector will quality assure the inspection team's work in the first instance. We quality assure a sample of inspections through on-site visits. We assure the quality of all written inspection reports before they are published on our website. Our arrangements for assuring the quality of inspections are available on our website www.estyn.gov.wales.

Part 2: Follow-up guidance

This guidance identifies the steps that inspection teams in maintained schools and PRUs should take to help them to identify the most appropriate level of follow-up activity. It will be useful for schools and PRUs to understand these procedures and the factors that inspection teams will consider when deciding on the most appropriate level of follow-up.

This guidance is flexible as we need to be responsive to the wide variety of situations that occur in schools/PRUs as they improve after core inspections. We reserve the right to adapt the guidance to meet the needs of specific schools/PRUs.

Guidance for inspectors on placing a maintained school or PRU into follow-up

Background

During all core inspections, the inspection team will consider whether the school or PRU needs any follow-up activity.

There are three types of follow-up activity:

- 1 Special measures**
- 2 Significant improvement**
- 3 Estyn Review¹**

Special measures and significant improvement are statutory categories that apply to schools and PRUs causing concern as defined by the Education Act 2005 and any associated circulars. Estyn has a duty inform the Minister for Education and Welsh Government officers when schools are placed in these categories. We will keep them informed of subsequent progress following monitoring inspections, as required by the legislation.

The definition of a school in need of special measures and the definition of a school in need of significant improvement are in section 44 of the Education Act 2005.

Special measures and significant improvement require monitoring activity by Estyn inspectors, who will visit the school or PRU to evaluate the progress. If a school or PRU requires additional support from the local authority, then Estyn will identify this through their report.

The same quality assurance processes apply to follow-up work as to core inspections. The only judgement reported during a monitoring visit is whether a school continues to require follow-up activity. This decision is provisional and subject to moderation by HMCI. It is confidential to the school until the report is published.

¹ Estyn review continues for schools inspected under the current inspection framework until September 2024. After that time, Estyn will review the progress of schools currently in Estyn review, but will not place further schools into this level of follow-up.

Guidance for inspectors about schools causing concern that may require placing in a statutory category

In accordance with relevant legislation, on **every** inspection, inspectors should consider if the school is in need of special measures by considering:

- if the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education
- if the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school

Inspectors must consider if the school has the capacity to improve before coming to a judgement about whether it requires special measures. If they conclude that the school does not require special measures, they should then consider whether the school is in need of significant improvement. Inspectors must consider:

- if the school is performing significantly less well than it might in all circumstances reasonably be expected to perform

The inspection team must report as they find and be able to substantiate their judgements on the basis of sound evidence. Coming to a judgement that a school needs special measures or significant improvement is not an easy task, but it must not be avoided. If the evidence points to the conclusion that the school requires special measures or is in need of significant improvement, inspectors must make that judgement.

1 Special measures

Section 44 of the education act 2005 states, 'special measures are required to be taken in relation to a school if:

- (a) the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education, and
- (b) the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school'.

Schools identified as in need of **special measures** during a core inspection are likely to have many important shortcomings in their work. Some may have a few important areas for improvement to a very marked degree or many areas for improvement to a lesser degree. In most instances, it will be the cumulative weight and effect of a combination of these areas for improvement which, when taken together, will prompt the decision that a school is not providing an acceptable standard of education. While one feature alone is unlikely to result in a decision that a school requires special measures, where inspectors find low standards and poor teaching and learning, significant risks to pupils or the likelihood of a breakdown of discipline, the school will normally require special measures.

Inspectors must also consider carefully whether the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. In judging whether senior managers have the capacity to bring about improvements, inspectors will need to give attention to how well these persons know and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Inspectors should also establish if senior managers show the ability to tackle

the weaknesses through the sense of purpose and direction they provide. Discussions with senior managers should provide evidence of how they are tackling these issues and if they are giving attention to the right things. Senior managers should be able to demonstrate that they know what quality of work they expect of learners and those they manage and be able to communicate these expectations to colleagues.

Inspectors should also take account of how well governors understand the issues that affect the performance of the school. They should evaluate how well they use the information provided by leaders to take effective and appropriate decisions. Inspectors should consider whether governors meet the duties imposed on them by educational and other legislation.

Inspectors must give particular consideration to identifying the school as needing special measures when there are important shortcomings in inspection area 5, leadership and management.

At all times, inspectors should remember that the main emphasis in school inspections is on the progress that pupils make from their starting points, the standards that they achieve and their levels of well-being. These aspects above should be discussed as a matter of importance in team meetings. Inspectors' discussions should take account of any mitigating factors to ensure the validity and reliability of judgements before coming to a decision that a school does or does not require special measures.

Inspectors may also find it helpful to use the questions below to help them to judge whether a school requires special measures. It would not be necessary for each question to be answered as 'yes' to result in a school requiring special measures.

General

- Is the school failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education?
- Do the leaders and managers demonstrate insufficient capacity to secure the necessary improvement?

Outcomes (IA 1 and 2)

- Is the achievement of pupils not as good as would normally be expected?
- Are pupils making insufficient progress in their acquisition of knowledge, understanding and literacy and numeracy skills? Are pupils regularly disruptive?
- Do substantial proportions of pupils or a particular group of pupils attend poorly?
- Is the level of exclusions high?
- Do pupils lack motivation and display negative attitudes to learning?
- Are any pupils at physical or emotional risk from other pupils or adults in the school?
- Is there evidence of significant levels of racial tension or harassment of vulnerable or minority groups?

Provision (IA 3 and 4)

- Is there a high proportion of ineffective teaching?

- Are the teachers' expectations of pupils' achievement too low?
- Does the curriculum fail to engage groups of pupils?
- Are relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves poor?
- Does the school fail to prepare pupils for adult life, including the world of work, where appropriate?
- Does the school fail to promote the well-being of its pupils?
- Are there serious shortcomings in the school's provision to safeguard pupils, for example in addressing any perceived bullying or poor behaviour?
- Do weaknesses in the school's provision mean that pupils are at physical or emotional risk from other pupils or adults in the school?

Leadership (IA 5)

- Have leaders had a limited impact on achieving clear and sustained progress?
- Do the governors hold the school to account with insufficient robustness?
- Do self-evaluation processes lack accuracy and rigour, giving the school an overgenerous view of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching?
- Do improvement planning processes lack clarity and precision and are ineffective in securing improvement?
- Do leaders have a limited impact in tackling important weaknesses in performance?
- Is poor management of resources and accommodation seriously impeding educational progress?

The inspection team must be clear about why they judge that a particular school is in need of special measures.

Procedures to be followed if the school is judged to require special measures

Inspectors should report their decision using the prescribed wording and must follow the specific procedures set out below.

If the school is judged to require special measures, the RI should take the following steps:

- telephone and inform the appropriate inspection co-ordinator at Estyn (tel. 02920 446446) before the school is told of the judgement and no later than the end of the inspection in the school:
 - 1) inform the headteacher or teacher in charge verbally that, in the opinion of the inspection team, there are serious deficiencies in the school's performance and capacity, and list those deficiencies
 - 2) explain that it is likely that the school will be judged to require special measures and that the team now needs to review the evidence
 - 3) remind the senior managers of the need to ensure confidentiality about the team's possible findings
- at the oral report to senior management, state that the team has judged that the school does not give an acceptable standard of education, and explain carefully the reasons for this judgement. The following form of words could be used:

‘I am of the opinion that special measures are required in relation to this school because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and senior leaders lack the capacity to secure the necessary improvements. In accordance with the Education Act 2005 I shall send a draft report to HMCI and will await his judgement whether he agrees or not that this school requires special measures.’

The RI should be prepared to justify the judgement, and to take note of any factual matters which the senior management wishes to put forward. The RI should make clear to senior management and any governor and LA officer present that:

- this judgement is their judgement and is shared by team
- in accordance with the Education Act 2005, the RI will inform HMCI
- HMCI must state whether or not they agree with the judgement
- if HMCI agrees with the judgement the school will be subject to special measures
- the issue of the report may be delayed because of the circumstances, but the maximum delay is three months from the time when it was due

Reports and summaries for schools requiring special measures

The RI must make clear in the Reporting JF that, in their view, the school is not providing an acceptable standard of education and senior leaders lack the capacity to secure the necessary improvement (that is, it requires special measures). They must also make clear the shortcomings which led to that judgement. The evidence base for the inspection should fully substantiate the judgement.

HMCI, or HMI acting on behalf of HMCI, will scrutinise the inspection evidence (in the Reporting JF) to check the judgement. HMCI has the power to call for any further information required.

Estyn may visit the school within three weeks to corroborate the judgement that the school is in need of special measures, but this will not normally be necessary. The purpose of this visit will be to:

- inspect those aspects of the school where inspectors have found deficiencies
- determine the validity of their evaluations
- check that they conducted the inspection properly

If, following quality assurance procedures, HMCI **agrees** with the judgement that the school is failing to give an acceptable standard of education to its pupils and senior leaders lack the capacity to make the necessary improvements, the report will state:

‘In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that special measures are required in relation to this school’.

If HMCI **does not agree** with the RI’s judgement, the report will state:

‘In accordance with the Education Act 2005, I am of the opinion, but HMCI disagrees, that special measures are required in relation to this school.’

Before publication of the report, we will write a letter of confirmation to the school, copied to the local authority, explaining that:

- the school is placed on a list of schools requiring special measures
- the school works with the local authority to address the weaknesses
- Estyn will monitor the progress of the school regularly, normally every four to six months

HMCI has a duty to notify the Cabinet Secretary for Education and the local authority that the school or PRU requires special measures.

Monitoring visits to schools in special measures

We ask the school and the LA to work together to create a unified post-inspection action plan (PIAP). This should be sent to Estyn within 20 working days of the publication of the report. In practice, normally we will be in touch before this time to offer our support to the school.

The PIAP visit will usually be a one day visit. The visit will support our formal evaluation of the unified PIAP (formerly the school's plan and the local authority's statement of action). We will discuss the plans with school leaders, governors and local authority representatives. Together, we will ensure that the plan is robust enough to address the recommendations highlighted in the report as a matter of urgency. When we judge that the plan meets requirements, the school and local authority should ensure that they send a copy of the document to the Welsh Government.

Subsequent visits will usually be for two days. They will take place at least every six months, and may be termly. We will undertake a range of inspection activity, which may include visiting classes, talking to staff and pupils or taking account of the outcomes of questionnaires, interviewing governors and senior leaders, considering pupils' work and other documentation.

Normally, each visit will focus on the progress the school has made towards addressing a sample of recommendations. Over a 12 month period, we will normally evaluate progress against all of the recommendations. It is likely that key recommendations will be evaluated more than once before the school is ready to be removed from special measures.

At the end of each visit, we will judge whether the school continues to require special measures or not. If progress is insufficient, the school will still require special measures. We will continue to carry out monitoring visits until HMCI decides that the school has improved enough to remove it from special measures.

If we become concerned that progress towards removing a school from special measures is too slow, we may arrange an additional visit. We may meet with the school's leaders and representatives from the local authority and regional consortium to reconsider whether the actions that the school has planned and the support that the school is receiving are fit for purpose. We will inform Welsh Government whenever we have concerns about the school's rate of progress.

While a school is in special measures, governors and the local authority may not appoint any newly-qualified teachers (NQTs or GTPs) to the staff, without seeking our approval.

When the team judges that the school has made sufficient progress, we will recommend to HMCI that it be removed from the list of schools requiring special measures. We will publish a brief report on our website explaining our decision.

Improvement conferences for schools in special measures

Where we identify that a school's progress in addressing the recommendations from its core inspection is too slow, we may decide to hold an improvement conference. This involves a one-day 'all round the table' discussion between inspectors, senior leaders, governors and representatives from the local authority and regional consortium.

The conference will focus on:

- The progress the school has made since the core inspection
- Barriers to further progress
- Reviewing the PIAP and local authority statement of action and identifying where they require strengthening and/or updating

2 Significant improvement

Schools in need of **significant improvement** are likely to have fewer important areas for improvement than schools in need of special measures. If inspectors have seriously considered, but rejected, the judgement that the school is in need of special measures, it is highly likely that it will come into the category of schools requiring significant improvement.

While the school in this category may be just about providing an acceptable standard of education, it is important that the inspection team consider if there is room for **significant improvement**. The guiding principle must be whether the school is performing significantly less well than it might in all circumstances be expected to perform.

Inspectors must give particular consideration to identifying the school as needing significant improvement if there are significant shortcomings in one or more inspection area or important areas for improvement in many of the inspection areas.

At all times, inspectors should remember that the main emphasis in school inspections is on the progress that pupils make from their starting points, the standards that they achieve and their well-being. Inspectors' discussions should take account of any mitigating factors to ensure the validity, accuracy and reliability of judgements before coming to a decision that a school is in need of significant improvement.

In all circumstances, it is vital that inspectors judge the work of the school in the context in which it is currently operating. Inspectors **should not** be unduly influenced by:

- recently prepared plans for improvement that have yet to be implemented
- the recent appointment of staff, such as a new headteacher

This is because, in both cases above, the effect or impact of improvements will not have taken place. Inspectors must judge the school's current performance and outcomes, rather than good intentions and an aspirational outlook.

Procedures to be followed if the school is in need of significant improvement

If the school is judged to be in need of significant improvement, the reporting inspector (RI) should:

- telephone and inform the appropriate inspection co-ordinator at Estyn (tel. 02920 446446) before the school/PRU is told of the judgement, no later than the end of the inspection in the school
- tell the headteacher or teacher in charge and any governor and LA representative present at the end of the inspection that the team has reached the judgement that the school is in need of significant improvement

HMCI, or HMI acting on behalf of HMCI, will scrutinise the inspection evidence (in the VIR) to quality assure the team's evaluations. HMCI has the power to call for any further information required.

Reports and summaries for a school in need of significant improvement

If, following quality assurance procedures, HMCI **agrees** with the RI's judgement, the report will state: 'In accordance with the Education Act 2005 HMCI is of the opinion that this school/PRU is in need of significant improvement'.

If HMCI **does not agree** with the RI's opinion, the report will state: 'In accordance with the Education Act 2005, I am of the opinion, but HMCI disagrees, that this school/PRU is in need of significant improvement'.

Before publication of the report, we will write a letter of confirmation to the school or PRU, copied to the local authority, explaining that:

- the school or PRU is placed on a list of schools in need of significant improvement
- the school or PRU should work with the local authority to address the weaknesses
- inspectors will visit the school or PRU, normally in the term after publication of the report, to evaluate whether the school or PRU's post-inspection action plan (PIAP) and, for schools only, the local authority's statement of action are suitably robust to bring about the required improvements
- about 12-18 months after the publication of the report, Estyn will undertake a monitoring visit to the school or PRU and make one of the following decisions:
 - 1) if enough progress has been made, the school or PRU can be removed from the list of schools in need of significant improvement
 - 2) one further visit may be necessary if the school or PRU is making adequate progress (in exceptional circumstances only)

- 3) if the school or PRU has not made enough progress and does not give sufficient indication that it has the capacity to do so, then consideration will be given to placing the school in special measures

HMCI has a duty to notify the Cabinet Secretary for Education and the local authority that the school or PRU is in need of significant improvement.

Monitoring visits to schools in significant improvement

If a school or PRU is identified as requiring significant improvement, we will inform the Welsh Government that the provider has been placed in a statutory category. We ask the school and the local authority to work together to create a unified post-inspection action plan (PIAP). This should be sent to Estyn within 20 working days of the publication of the report. In practice, normally we will be in touch before this time to offer our support to the school.

The PIAP visit will usually be for one day. The visit will support our formal evaluation of the unified PIAP (formerly the school's plan and the local authority's statement of action). We will discuss the plans with school leaders, governors and local authority representatives. Together, we will ensure that the plan is robust enough to address the recommendations highlighted in the report as a matter of urgency. When we judge that the plan meets requirements, the school and local authority should ensure that they send a copy of the documents to the Welsh Government.

Subsequently, we will send a small team of Estyn inspectors to visit the school or PRU about 12-18 months after the publication of the inspection report. The visit will usually be for two and a half 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 highlighted in the report, taking account of the milestones identified in the action plan. They will undertake a range of inspection activity, for example visiting classes, 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 schools requiring significant improvement. We will publish a brief report on its website explaining our decision.

If progress is insufficient, the team will normally identify the school or PRU as requiring special measures. In exceptional cases, where the school has made appropriate progress and is nearly, but not quite, at a point where it can be removed from the list, 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. The six-month period should ensure that the school or PRU is ready to be removed from the list. If it is not, then the provider will be placed in special measures.

3 Estyn review

If inspectors have seriously considered but rejected placing a school/PRU in a statutory category, but are concerned that follow-up is necessary, they may consider

whether it requires Estyn review. Normally, school/PRUs will need this level of activity when there are weaknesses in the quality of leadership and management that have an impact on pupils' outcomes. For example, it may be that the school/PRU has a variable track record of planning and implementing improvements urgently enough.

If the school or PRU is judged to require Estyn review, the reporting inspector should tell the headteacher or teacher in charge at the end of the inspection that the team has reached this judgement and complete the relevant section on the reporting JF. After moderation and validation of the agreed inspection outcomes within Estyn, we will write a letter of confirmation to the school, copied to the local authority, explaining that inspectors will review the progress made by the school with the local authority.

We are taking account of feedback and evaluating our ongoing work with local authorities to determine the precise monitoring format for Estyn review from 2022 onwards. It is likely that inspectors will work with the local authority to monitor the school's progress in addressing the recommendations highlighted in the report around 12-18 months after the report's publication. If there is clear evidence of progress and its impact on improving pupil outcomes, Estyn will remove the school from the list of schools requiring Estyn review and no further follow-up activity will take place. If clear progress is not evident, then, normally, inspectors will visit the school to observe and evaluate the improvements at first hand. In some instances, additional time may be required to embed the improvements. We will provide further detail when available.

Meeting statutory requirements in independent schools

The Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2002 govern the work of independent schools. We expect independent schools to evaluate how effectively they meet these requirements through their own normal self-evaluation procedures.

Inspectors will use the self-evaluation and other information to identify how effectively an independent school meets its statutory requirements. We will investigate any issues during the inspection where they are likely to have a significant impact on standards and quality.

Inspectors will identify in the independent school's inspection report any failure to meet statutory requirements that affect quality and standards.

Follow-up in independent schools

Where a school fails to meet any of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations, the RI will inform the school in the final feedback meeting and the requirement to comply with these regulations will be the first recommendation in the inspection report.

The school will receive a letter from the Welsh Government informing them of the requirement to submit a post inspection action plan, and the date this MUST be received by. In addition, the Welsh Government will outline that failure to successfully address the actions in the PIAP may result in the school being

instructed to:

- (a) cease using any part of the school premises for all purposes or purposes specified in the order
- (b) close any part of the school's operation
- (c) cease to admit any new pupils, or new pupils of a description specified in the order

Or the Welsh Government may

- determine that the school is to be removed from the register

It is the Welsh Government's responsibility to ensure PIAPs are submitted in a timely manner.

Estyn review activities

1. We will review the PIAP submitted
2. We will advise the Welsh Government whether or not to accept the PIAP

If the PIAP is accepted and we believe the school has the capacity to make the required changes within a reasonable timescale (12 months maximum), the school will be revisited or a desk top activity completed to evaluate compliance.

This will result in a letter to the Welsh Government to indicate that the school is now fully compliant and this will also be posted on our website.

If the PIAP is not accepted and /or we believe the school does not have the capacity to make the required changes, without additional support the following process will be followed.

If the PIAP is rejected, one HMI will visit the school to work with leaders onsite to support them in completing the PIAP.

Once a PIAP has been accepted, but we believe the school does not have the capacity to make the required changes a series of visits over a maximum of 12 months will be planned.

On the final visit, which must take place within 12 months, we will evaluate whether the school is compliant. If this is the case, there will be no further action taken. This will result in a letter to the Welsh Government to indicate that the school is now fully compliant and this will also be posted on our website.

If the school is non-compliant at this stage it will be the responsibility of the Welsh Government (as the regulator) to take the necessary further action.