

Supplementary guidance:

inspecting attendance

Autumn 2023

This document is also available in Welsh.

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- ▲ primary schools
- ▲ secondary schools
- ▲ all-age schools
- ▲ special schools
- ▲ pupil referral units
- ▲ independent schools
- ▲ further education
- ▲ independent specialist colleges
- ▲ adult community learning
- ▲ 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

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

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What is the purpose?

This provides further guidance for inspectors to use alongside the sector guidance for inspection

For whom is it intended?

Maintained and independent schools and PRUs

From when should the guidance be used?

September 2023

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Supplementary guidance

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. They expand on certain aspects of education/training (e.g. the inspection of literacy) or on ways of conducting inspections (e.g. the use of learning walks) or specific inspection arrangements (e.g. 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.

Our inspection work is based on the following principles:

- Inspectors will approach inspection with a positive mindset to ensure it is the best possible professional learning experience for the staff in each provider
- Inspectors will take a learner-focused approach to inspection
- Inspectors will always focus strongly on the quality of teaching and learning
- Inspectors will seek out well-considered innovative practice
- Inspectors will tailor the inspection activities according to the circumstances in each provider as far as possible
- Inspectors will be agile and responsive to emerging findings and will use the increased range of inspection tools and approaches available
- Inspectors will consider everything in the inspection framework, but will only report on the key strengths and weaknesses within each provider

Introduction

Under the inspection framework for September 2023 within inspection area 2 **inspectors should report on the attendance of all pupils, including those eligible for free school meals.** This is an important change from 2021-2022 where we did not report on attendance due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

From September 2023, inspectors should report on attendance in all inspection reports.

In their supporting evidence inspectors should always consider:

- the number of pupils who have attendance rates well below those of others in the school, especially those with attendance rates below 80% from September 2022
- rates of attendance of particular groups of pupils in comparison to the rest of the school, such as pupils who are eligible for free school meals or pupils with additional learning needs
- comparative rates of attendance for year groups across the school
- whether pupils arrive at school and lessons punctually
- whether any deficit in attendance impacts on standards of pupils or groups of pupils, taking care not to simply imply causation from correlation

Inspectors should always consider the school's individual context and the impact of COVID-19 on the school community and subsequent effect on attendance.

Inspectors should also consider any additional information provided by the school, including their most up-to-date attendance data. They should take into account any analysis undertaken by schools to identify mitigating factors that may affect overall attendance rates. For example, a high proportion of pupils with serious medical needs that require regular hospital appointments or time at home. Inspectors should use meetings with pupils to pursue any emerging questions related to attendance, such as to gauge whether pupils understand the consequences of poor attendance.

Whilst national data provides a context to consider a school's attendance rates, inspectors should not be unduly influenced by comparisons with national rates of attendance as these rates are much lower than pre-pandemic levels.

The school's provision to support attendance will continue to be considered and reported under inspection areas 4 and 5. The inspection framework sections for IA4 and IA5 relating to attendance are largely unchanged from 2021-2022. **It is important that inspectors consider how successfully the school is promoting good attendance, analysing attendance issues and addressing persistent absence.**

In their supporting evidence inspectors should always consider:

- How well leaders evaluate and plan for improving pupils attendance
- The impact of the school's work to improve attendance
- How well the school works with the community to improve attendance

Supplementary guidance on inspecting attendance

- How well the school records and analyses and respond to pupils' attendance rates
- How well leaders target and use resources to improve attendance

Background information

Overall attendance in 2022-2023

The figures stated below for the secondary sector are nationally collected and verified data. However, it is important to note that the other figures are the unverified data from the Welsh Government's weekly collection of attendance data following the pandemic.

In 2022-2023, there were no restrictions and regulations in place for the control of the spread of COVID-19, although pupils were still absent at times due to the illness. This is different to the case in 2021-2022 where various restrictions and regulations were in place for the first half of the school year.

Average attendance for the academic year from 5 September 2022 to 24 July 2023 is 88.5%. This shows an increase of 1.9%pts from 2021-2022 when the rate of attendance was 86.8%.

Attendance was at its highest at 94.5% during the first week of the autumn term.

Attendance reached 90.0% on 85 days in 2022-2023 in comparison with 23 days in the previous academic year.

In 2022-2023, 80.0% missed more than a week of their education. The corresponding figure for the year 2021-2022 was 88.5%. Illness was the biggest reason for pupils' absence, which accounted for 42.7% of all absences. Thirty-two point four per cent of absences were unauthorised by schools.

Eighteen point one per cent of pupils were persistently absent in 2022-2023. Boys' attendance at 88.7% was slightly higher than that of girls at 88.4%.

Attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals in 2021-2022

Average attendance in 2022-2023 for pupils not eligible for free school meals is 90.4%. This shows an increase of 2.2%pts from the previous year when it was 88.2%

Average attendance in 2022-2023 for pupils eligible for free school meals is 83.1% compared with 82.1% in the previous year. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals therefore only increased by 1.0%pt. The gap has therefore grown to 7.3%pts (compared to 6.1%pts last academic year). Thirty-four per cent of pupils who are eligible for free school meals were persistently absent, compared to 18.1% of all pupils.

Attendance of Year groups in 2021-2022

The table below shows average attendance for 2021-2022 by year group:

Year	Average attendance for 2022-2023	Average attendance for 2021-2022
1	90.8%	89.6%
2	91.5%	90.0%
3	91.7%	90.2%
4	91.7%	90.1%
5	91.6%	89.7%
6	91.3%	89.6%
7	90.6% *	88.4%
8	88.4% *	86.3%
9	87.2% *	84.8%
10	86.6% *	84.7%
11	84.5% *	77.4%

Further details: [Attendance of pupils in maintained schools: 5 September 2022 to 24 July 2023 | GOV.WALES](#)

* [Validated data from official Welsh Government release on absenteeism from secondary schools](#)

Attendance in 2018-2019

This was the last full academic year before the COVID-19 pandemic started. The table below sets out overall attendance for the year in primary and secondary schools, with a breakdown for pupils eligible (or not) for free school meals.

	Primary schools	Secondary schools
All pupils	94.7%	93.8%
Pupils eligible for free school meals	92.1%	89.5%
Pupils not eligible for free school meals	95.3%	94.7%
p.p. gap between eFSM and neFSM pupils	3.2 p.p.	5.2 p.p.

Questions to ask staff

IA2

How does the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals compare to that of other pupils?

How does the attendance of pupils with additional learning needs compare to that of other pupils?

Are there any Year groups where attendance is particularly strong or weak?

Are there any other groups of pupils for whom attendance is a concern?

IA4

How well does the school record and analyse attendance data, and identify areas for improvement? Has the school identified any particular trends in attendance relating to particular groups of pupils?

How well does the school promote good attendance?

How well does the school work with families to support pupils with low attendance?

How well is the school responding where pupils are absent because their well-being is adversely affected when they attend school?

How well does the school work with other agencies to support pupils with low attendance? (Inspectors should be mindful that the capacity of external support services, such as local authority education welfare services, has been considerably stretched as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic)

If any pupils are on a reduced timetable for school attendance, are the arrangements for their education appropriate and monitored closely?

IA5

Do the school's leaders have a good overview of attendance, including areas for improvement?

How well do the school's leaders plan for improvement in attendance?

How well is the school using its resources to support good attendance?