

How we inspect

**Welsh language immersion arrangements in
local authorities**

For inspections from 2024



This guidance for inspectors outlines Estyn's approach to inspecting Welsh language immersion arrangements in local authorities. It should be read alongside 'What we inspect'.

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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Introduction

Purpose of the guidance handbook ‘How we inspect’

This handbook sets out our approaches to inspecting Welsh language immersion arrangements in local authorities. 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. Local authorities and Welsh language immersion providers can use this guidance to see how inspections work.

Where the inspection identifies practice worth sharing, inspectors will include a spotlight of this practice as part of the inspection report. 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 follow-up activity is available on p13 of this handbook.

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

Legal basis and policy background for the inspection of local government education services

Inspections of LGES are carried out under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997 which provides that His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales

(HMCI) ‘may, and, if requested to do so by the Secretary of State, shall, arrange for any local authority to be inspected’. Such an inspection ‘shall consist of a review of the way in which the authority are performing any function which relates to the provision of education for (a) persons of compulsory school age (whether at school or otherwise) or (b) for persons of any age above or below that age who are registered as pupils at schools maintained by the authority’.

Section 51 of The Children Act 2004 changes the Education Act 1997 so that ‘An inspection of a local education authority in Wales under this section shall consist of a review of the way in which the authority are performing:

- any function conferred on them in their capacity as a local education authority
- the functions conferred on them under sections 25 and 26 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 relating to education, training or youth support services’

Policy background

This guidance handbook takes account of current Welsh Government policies.

More information on Welsh Government policies can be found at [Education and skills | Topic | GOV.WALES](#)

Part 1: Arrangements for engagement with providers

Introduction

This section applies across the breadth of Estyn's engagement with schools and other providers. We expect all inspectors, including those contracted to Estyn and those working as peer inspectors, to adhere to these principles.

Principles of our work

We expect our inspectors to work according to a number of key principles. They will:

- take a pupil-centred approach to any activity and engagement
- always focus strongly on the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning
- take into account the specific context of the provider and adapt their approaches accordingly
- use a range of tailored methodologies and approaches 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

During inspections, we expect inspectors to consider everything in the 'what' and 'how' we inspect guidance documents, but only report on the key strengths and areas for improvement.

In addition, our inspectors will:

- ensure that all activity and engagement is responsive to the needs of all pupils
- 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
- apply the principle of equality for Welsh and English to all our activity

In inspections, our inspectors will:

- involve the provider fully in the inspection process, including the opportunity for the local authority to select a nominee (who should normally be a representative from the local authority with responsibility for Welsh language immersion arrangements)
- take suitable account of the provider's chosen improvement priorities, in addition to other key areas identified by the inspection team
- include peer inspectors in the inspection process

Our mind-set

Estyn's approach to engagement activity 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. Wherever appropriate, 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 our engagement and inspection activity and report on strengths and areas for improvement 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 pupils 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 pupils
- 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 Code of Conduct, but we also expect providers to:

- be courteous and professional, treating inspectors and inspection support staff with respect
- act in the best interests of pupils
- 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, pupils 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 wellbeing 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
- refrain from taking photographs or videos during the inspection process, including of draft evaluations developed during the inspection

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, the local authority should review the composition of the inspection team. It is the local authority'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.

The Welsh language

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

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 and the local authority with responsibility for 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 record details of the concern. They should inform the Reporting Inspector (RI) who should then contact one of Estyn's safeguarding lead officers. The lead officer will advise the RI of the next steps to take including what to record in the evidence base for the appropriate inspection area. This includes any risks relating to pupils' health, safety and well-being. The officer will also advise the RI whether or not to share the concern with the local authority.

Where these risks are a serious concern during core inspection activity, 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.

If an inspector identifies a site security concern, they should inform the RI. If the RI considers that the concern can be addressed quickly, they should inform the local authority who will be expected to provide evidence of the concern being resolved during the inspection. If the concern/s is more serious and cannot be addressed quickly, the RI should inform the IC who will issue a site management letter to the local authority. It will be their responsibility to ensure that the issue/s is addressed. The centre should also be informed of this. If a less significant issue is not addressed satisfactorily during the inspection, then this process will also apply.

Part 2: Core inspection activity - Approach to inspections

The length of the inspection and size of the team may vary according to the number of providers of Welsh language immersion in the local authority.

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 nominees can access the post-inspection questionnaires (PIQs).

We ensure the security of information uploaded by subjecting the VIR to security 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 His Majesty’s Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales (HMI). 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 local authority / Welsh language immersion provider 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-site part of the inspection process.
Team inspectors (TI)	The number of team inspectors is determined by the number of Welsh language immersion providers in the local authority. Team inspectors may be HMI or contracted additional inspectors who have been trained by Estyn. All team inspectors are qualified teachers.	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.

Peer inspector (PI)	A peer inspector is a serving senior leader in a local authority, school or Welsh language immersion provider who has completed Estyn’s PI training and assessment. All inspection teams have a peer inspector as a team member.	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.
Nominee (from the local authority being inspected)	We will invite a representative of the local authority to become the nominee, to work with the inspection team. The nominee acts as a link between the provider and the inspection team.	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 local authority responsible for Welsh language immersion arrangements before a core inspection

The local authority will receive 15 working days’ notice of a core inspection.

The inspection co-ordinator will contact the local authority 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 and make arrangements for receiving information electronically 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. pupils, parents, staff etc)
- ensure that there are agreed procedures for addressing any concerns or complaints that might arise during the inspection
- arrange for teachers and support staff within the Welsh language immersion providers to meet inspectors during the inspection period
- arrange for headteachers of schools where pupils are registered to meet inspectors during the inspection period
- organise any domestic arrangements, such as a base for the inspectors, parking and internet access across all sites where appropriate
- set up the arrangements for feeding back the inspection findings

- agree the arrangements for completing the post-inspection questionnaires (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
- details of the location of all Welsh language immersion providers and providers who access support for immersion
- details of the number of pupils attending each provider, where appropriate
- a copy of the most recent development or improvement plan
- a copy of the local authority's WESP
- details of the timetables for the period of the inspection
- a list of staff DBS checks (formally CRB) with the check numbers, issue date and level of check completed e.g. enhanced with barring list

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. If providers are unable to share pupils' previous work, inspectors will take this information into account when discussing work and progress with staff and pupils.

When we notify providers of the inspection, they will receive information on how to access online questionnaires for pupils, parents/carers, staff and headteachers. The outcomes of the pre-inspection questionnaires will form part of the pre-inspection evidence and support inspectors to form their evaluations.

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 local authority about the context of the local authority's arrangements for Welsh language immersion. This should last no longer than 20 minutes
- a brief position statement from the local authority to set out the provider's strategic priorities and its current stage of development aligned with the WESP.

- a discussion with the local authority (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 local authority during the pre-inspection Teams call.

Gathering and reviewing inspection evidence

The team will plan the inspection so that they can cover the reporting requirements of the three inspection areas. The RI will plan the inspection activity flexibly, in response to the provider's individual circumstances. This means that the activities planned in one provider may not mirror those planned in another. In addition, inspectors report 'by exception'. This means that the team will always consider everything within the inspection areas but the final report may not include every aspect of the framework.

The main forms of evidence are:

- observation of teaching and other activities, including evidence gathered through learning walks
- samples of pupils' work
- discussions with pupils (past and present), staff, leaders, managers, headteachers of pupils' registered schools and others
- pre-inspection questionnaire responses
- documentary or electronic evidence, e.g., information on pupils' progress
- relevant information from the local authority

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 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 local authority’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

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 if appropriate. Inspectors may decide to meet with leaders such as headteachers of schools who host Welsh language immersion providers, headteachers of pupils’ registered schools or of schools who receive peripatetic support, to understand the impact of the local authority’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, following a lesson observation, inspectors will offer 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 improvement in relation to the specific work seen.

Due to the nature of learning walks, 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 verbal feedback to senior leaders such as local authority representatives and senior leaders.

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, including the recommendations. The reporting inspector should explain to the provider that issues may be clarified and factual matters may be corrected. However, the purpose of the meeting is for the local authority 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 include a spotlight of this practice as part of the inspection report.

During all core inspections, the inspection team will consider whether the local authority 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 follow-up if appropriate, are provisional and subject to moderation and validation by HMCI. They are confidential to the provider's staff and managers. They should not be communicated beyond this group, including via social media, until we publish the report on our website.

Complaints about the inspection process

If there are any issues about the inspection process 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.

However, there are some things that we do not address through our complaints-handling procedure, for example complaints, or challenges, about evaluations or follow-up decisions made after an Estyn inspection or review. This is because, before and during an inspection, the local authority has the opportunity to provide all of the evidence needed for the inspection team to reach its judgements accurately and fairly.

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 local authorities have made this request, in line with our Welsh Language Policy.

We base the structure of the inspection report on our inspection framework. We will produce the report within statutory timescales.

The factual accuracy check

We will give the local authority a draft of the report prior to publication, to help check the factual accuracy of the content. The local authority 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
- effective training, briefing and support to allow the nominee to play an active role
- regular dialogue with the nominee during inspections
- 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 the local authority to complete a post-inspection questionnaire (PIQ). The questionnaire will be available in the VIR. The local authority 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.

We apply a robust quality assurance process to all of our inspections. The reporting inspector will quality assure the team's work in the first instance. After the end of on-site activity, the report and evidence base are quality assured by an experienced HMI who has not been involved in the inspection thus far. The full evidence base is scrutinised and matched to the report text, to ensure that the two align. In addition, the quality assurance process considers the appropriateness of the level of follow-up, and the recommendations emanating from the inspection. As part of the quality assurance process, recommendations may be amended, removed or added.

There is then a further moderation process. The evidence base and the report are scrutinised by the appropriate assistant directors. Whenever the outcome of an inspection is statutory follow-up, in addition to an assistant director, the strategic director moderates the report alongside the evidence base, on behalf of HMCI. On a very few occasions, this moderation process may result in a change to the level of follow-up.

In addition, we quality assure a sample of inspections through on-site visits. Our full arrangements for assuring the quality of inspections are available on our website www.estyn.gov.wales.

Part 3: Follow-up guidance

There will be one category of follow-up for inspections of Welsh language immersion arrangements in local authorities: 'causing significant concern'. The guidance below sets out how we will work with a local authority where arrangements cause significant concern following their inspection. Follow-up activity may involve virtual meetings online rather than on-site meetings. These will be used with discretion, either where circumstances or regulations necessitate it, or where it is efficient without impeding the effectiveness of the inspection process or inconveniencing anyone involved.

Monitoring visit

We will carry out a monitoring visit around a year after the core inspection. We will formally notify the authority 15 days in advance. The size of the team and design of the visit will be tailored to the specific context of the local authority and the nature of the recommendations.

We may use a survey to gather the views of relevant stakeholders before a monitoring visit. We may also carry out preliminary activities with relevant stakeholders, in person or online, such as meeting a group of headteachers.

A VIR will be set up for the visit, which will allow the local authority to share a few key documents and supporting information that is relevant. During the monitoring visit, inspectors will consider how well the local authority has addressed each of the recommendations and how much progress has been made overall.

Removing follow-up

After any monitoring visit, inspectors could recommend to HMCI that the Welsh language immersion arrangements for a local authority, is no longer causing significant concern and can be removed from follow-up. We will publish a report of the monitoring visit. The report will include an evaluation of progress, a summative commentary on progress and an overall judgement on progress, which will confirm whether or not the local authority has made sufficient progress to be removed from follow-up. If inspectors are not satisfied with progress, we will return in around a year's time for a further monitoring visit.