

What we inspect (2024 – 2030): Maintained schools and pupil referral units



This document is also available in Welsh

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Introduction to 'What we inspect'

This handbook sets out what inspectors need to consider when evaluating the three inspection areas in maintained schools (primary, secondary, all-age and special schools) and pupil referral units (PRUs). It explains 'What we inspect'. The guidance is essential reading for reporting inspectors and all other members of the inspection team, including the nominee. It may also be useful for providers to support their understanding of the inspection guidance. There is a separate handbook that explains the inspection process and methodology, '[How we inspect](#)'.

The three inspection areas are set out below:

IA1: Teaching and learning

IA2: Well-being, care, support and guidance

IA3: Leading and improving

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

Evaluating each inspection area (IA)

Inspection teams will not give overall grades for each inspection area. However, they will make a robust and thorough evaluation of the school or PRU's provision and its impact on pupils' learning and well-being.

Inspectors will always include clear evaluations in relation to the main foci in each inspection area, as exemplified below. However, what inspectors report on within each inspection area may differ depending on the context and relative significance of what they find in each school or PRU. Inspectors may report 'by exception'. This means that they may report on some aspects only where there are particular strengths or areas for improvement.

Where inspectors identify any interesting or innovative practice that is worthy of sharing more widely, they will include a short 'spotlight on...' within the report (a short paragraph). We will showcase a range of these spotlights on our website. Where inspectors identify serious shortcomings in one or more inspection areas, the school or PRU will normally require a statutory level of follow-up activity (significant improvement or special measures). There is further guidance about follow-up activity in 'How we inspect'.

The inspection reports

Following an inspection, each provider will receive a report. The provider will also receive a parent and carer version of the report. The reports will be published on the Estyn website. Publication dates can be found on the website. The following outlines what is included in each section of the report.

About the school or pupil referral unit (PRU)

In our reports for schools, this section of the report will be brief and contain only factual background information about the school. This information will be pre-populated from the latest Pupil level annual school census (PLASC) return and will not contain any evaluation of the provision. The reporting inspector will share the content of this section with the school for information only. For consistency, this information cannot be amended from the information received from PLASC.

In our reports for PRUs, this section of the report will be brief and contain only factual background information about the PRU. During the inspection, the reporting inspector will share the content of this report with the PRU.

This section will contain brief information on:

- the size, nature and location of the school or PRU
- the background and circumstances of the pupils, such as the proportion eligible for free school meals
- the linguistic background of the pupils and the school's category according to Welsh-medium provision
- school category according to Welsh-medium provision
- any important changes since the last inspection
- any other relevant factors, such as the proportion of pupils with additional learning needs or the degree to which pupils leave or join the provider during the academic year
- the date of appointment of the headteacher
- the month/year of the school or PRU's previous inspection

If appropriate, the context should include the sentence: 'The school is a lead school for initial teacher education.' When the school has a religious character, the reporting inspector should also include the following statement: 'Estyn does not inspect denominational religious education or the religious content of collective worship when it is a school with a religious character. Instead, the governing body is required by law to arrange for denominational religious education and collective worship to be inspected separately.'

The context section will also include a link to <https://gov.wales/my-local-school-guide>, a website with information on schools for parents/carers and others with an interest in their local school.

Summary

The summary of an inspection report will summarise the main points of the inspection report. The summary will include the main strengths, the main areas for improvement and the recommendations.

Recommendations

Recommendations will come directly from the content of the report, identify what needs to improve and will be written in priority order.

What happens next

The 'What happens next' section will set out what the provider needs to do following the inspection. In all cases, leaders will need to respond to the recommendations by putting in place the actions needed to make the required improvements identified by the inspection team.

It should identify any interesting or innovative practice spotlights that we have included in the report or noting where we have invited the provider to prepare a case study.

This section will explain if the provision requires statutory follow-up (special measures or significant improvement). The reasons for the level of follow-up will be made clear in the main body of the report.

Main evaluation

The main evaluation will report on:

- (a) the quality of the education provided in the school or PRU
- (b) how far the education provided in the school or PRU meets the needs of the range of pupils at the school or PRU
- (c) the educational standards achieved in the school or PRU
- (d) the quality of the leadership in and management of the school or PRU, including whether the financial resources made available to the school or PRU are managed effectively
- (e) the development of the pupils at the school or PRU (except those over compulsory school age) by reference to the four purposes of a curriculum for those pupils
- (f) the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils at the school or PRU
- (g) the contribution made by the school or PRU to the well-being of those pupils

Spotlights on interesting and innovative practice will also be included in this section. It will include a brief heading, which captures the theme of the spotlight followed by the narrative. The heading and narrative will be contained in a separate box. In addition, we may invite the school or PRU to contribute a more in-depth case study when appropriate.

Additional information

This section will include statements on the following items:

- safeguarding arrangements
- healthy eating and drinking
- school funding
- health and safety issues (safety on the site)

Evidence base of the report

Inspectors use a wide range of evidence to make sure that their findings are valid, accurate and reliable. This section of the report will explain the sources of evidence that they used as well as the range of activities that they carried out during their visit.

Inspection areas

The following section explains what each inspection area covers and what inspectors need to keep in mind when evaluating each one. The inspection areas are numbered 1 – 3, but they are all equally important.

The inspection report will cover all 3 inspection areas. It will always report on all the main foci but not necessarily in the order of this handbook. The main foci for each inspection area are:

1. Teaching and learning

Focus

How effectively does the school's/PRU's curriculum, teaching and assessment support all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barriers, to make progress, to:

- learn and make progress?
- develop their knowledge, skills and understanding?
- develop positive attitudes to learning?

2. Well-being, care, support and guidance

Focus

How effectively does the school/PRU ensure that all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barriers to progress:

- are safe and secure?
- attend school regularly?
- are respected and fairly treated?
- develop leadership skills and take on responsibility?
- receive the guidance and support they require for

3. Leading and improving

Focus

How effectively do leaders:

- ensure that all pupils learn and make progress? (This includes those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barriers to learning.)
- develop a culture, inclusive ethos and strategic direction that support the progress and well-being of all pupils?
- identify and address areas for improvement, including

Guidance for inspectors – what we inspect

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|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• develop their Welsh language skills? | <p>the next steps in their development?</p> | <p>addressing previous recommendations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• address national priorities, including improving the quality of teaching and the development of the Welsh language?• ensure that professional learning improves the quality of teaching, supports school improvement and equips all staff to carry out their roles?• manage the school's/PRU's resources? |
|--|---|---|

The inspection team will consider all of the inspection areas. The team may not report on each one separately and not necessarily in the order above. They will make connections between the areas to tell the unique story of the provider and its context.

There is a series of [supplementary guidance documents](#) available on our website. These provide further information about our approaches to inspecting specific aspects of this framework.

2024 framework

Across the inspection framework, inspectors will consider the focus areas in relation to the impact they have on all pupils' learning and well-being.

1. Teaching and learning

Focus

How effectively does the school's/PRU's curriculum, teaching and assessment support all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example those pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barriers to make progress, to:

- learn and make progress
- develop their knowledge, skills and understanding
- develop positive attitudes to learning
- develop their Welsh language skills

When considering any of the aspects below inspectors should evaluate the difference they make to pupils' learning and how well teachers and other practitioners:

- ensure that their **teaching**:
 - moves learning along at an appropriate pace and presents all pupils, including those pupils with ALN and pupils who are adversely affected by poverty, with the appropriate level of challenge and support
 - demonstrates high expectations of all pupils

- uses questioning and feedback to support pupils' progress
- responds to pupils' learning during lessons and over time, and adapts accordingly
- helps pupils to understand their own strengths and areas for improvement and to develop as effective learners
- makes the learning environment stimulating and engaging
- is well matched to pupils with additional learning needs and based on a secure understanding of their needs
- provides pupils with opportunities to work independently and collaboratively
- provides pupils with opportunities to influence how and what they learn where appropriate
- is supported by additional staff where appropriate to assist pupils in their learning
- design and deliver a **curriculum** that:
 - provides pupils with a suitable breadth and depth of learning across all areas of learning and experience
 - develops an understanding of the history, cultural and linguistic heritage, ethnic diversity, identities, experiences and perspectives of their local area, Wales, and the wider world
 - inspires pupils and raises their aspirations
 - enables pupils to develop an understanding of the complex nature of societies through exposure to stories past and present of their local area, Wales and the wider world spanning different communities as well as in particular the stories of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people
 - supports pupils' creative and artistic development
 - supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural awareness
 - fosters positive and respectful attitudes to diversity (RSE)
 - develops pupils' awareness and understanding of different identities, views and values, the diversity of relationships, gender, sexuality including LGBTQ+ lives and explore the themes of gender equity, rights and advocacy (RSE)
 - supports pupils' personal, social development including their understanding the characteristics of healthy relationships (RSE)
 - helps pupils to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to make healthy lifestyle choices and understand the impact of these choices
- **develop pupils' skills** systematically and progressively during learning activities and over time so that they:
 - acquire the necessary skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing, numeracy as well as the digital skills to support their work and progress
 - apply their skills at an appropriate level across the curriculum
 - have the physical, social and emotional skills to prepare them for later life
 - develop Welsh language communication skills from their different starting points in formal teaching activities and informal situations

- support pupils to develop positive **attitudes towards learning**, so that they:
 - behave well and participate positively in learning activities
 - persevere or look for new solutions when they face difficulties
 - foster positive working relationships with adults and their peers
 - respond positively and purposefully to feedback

2. Well-being, care, support and guidance

Focus

- How effective is the care, support and guidance the school/PRU provides in ensuring that all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barrier to progress:
 - are safe and secure
 - attend school regularly
 - are respected and fairly treated
 - develop leadership skills and take on responsibility
 - receive any additional guidance or support they require relating to the next steps in their development

When considering any of the aspects below inspectors should evaluate the difference they make to pupils' learning and how well teachers and other practitioners:

- create and maintain a **culture of safeguarding**, including following child protection procedures so that pupils are:
 - safe and secure
 - respected and treated fairly
 - free from bullying and harassment
 - free from physical, emotional, and verbal abuse
- ensure that pupils attend school regularly, for example by:
 - promoting and monitoring attendance including that of specific groups
 - challenging persistent absenteeism
 - working in partnership, for example with educational welfare services, social services, police, and other agencies
- co-ordinate suitable support for pupils with **additional learning needs**, including working in partnership with external agencies when appropriate
- support positive behaviour, and accurately record, report and respond to all types of bullying and harassment
- ensure that pupils with a history of exclusion and those educated other than at school demonstrate improved behaviour and attitudes to learning
- encourage pupils to influence the life and work of the school and to develop leadership skills and take on responsibility
- provide pupils with effective and impartial advice relating to the next steps in their development, for example in relation to:
 - opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of adult life
 - their transition to the next phase of learning

3. Leading and improving

Focus

How effectively do leaders:

- ensure that all pupils, including those at risk of adverse outcomes, for example pupils affected by poverty, with ALN or other identified barriers to progress, learn and make progress
- develop a culture, inclusive ethos and strategic direction that support the progress and well-being of all pupils
- identify and address areas for improvement, including addressing previous recommendations
- address national priorities, including improving the quality of teaching and the development of the Welsh language
- ensure that professional learning improves the quality of teaching, supports school improvement and equips all staff to carry out their roles
- manage the school's/PRU's resources

When considering any of the aspects below, inspectors should evaluate the difference they make to pupils' learning and how well teachers and other practitioners:

- develop a culture, inclusive ethos and strategic direction that are suitably focused on improving pupils' learning and well-being
- set and communicate **high expectations** for staff, pupils and themselves
- **evaluate** the school's/PRU's strengths and areas that require improvement, **and bring about improvement**
- have established a track record of making and sustaining improvements and the extent to which they have led to a positive impact on pupils' learning and well-being
- plan and deliver **professional learning opportunities** for staff that have a positive impact on pupils' learning and well-being
- manage the **performance** of staff to improve their practice and address underperformance where necessary
- promote the **Welsh language**, and take actions to address other national priorities (for example, improving teaching, equity, ALN reform, Curriculum for Wales)
- provide effective **governance** that offers support and challenge
- distribute **roles and responsibilities** to meet pupils' needs and bring about improvement in the school's/PRU's provision
- consider staff workload and well-being and to what extent any new or revised arrangements impact on the workload of their own staff and on headteachers, leaders and staff in other education settings
- develop productive relationships with parents, partner schools/PRUs, external bodies and the wider community
- deploy the **school's/PRU's resources** to ensure high quality teaching and learning and support for pupils' well-being
- use grant funding to improve outcomes for **targeted pupils**