

A Learning Inspectorate

Independent review of Estyn

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June 2018



Contents	Page
Letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and HMCI	1
Acknowledgements	2
Foreword	3
1 Introduction	5
2 The current context of education in Wales	6
3 Estyn's current work: findings and issues	14
4 Estyn, inspection and education reform	27
5 Future school inspection	38
6 System-level evaluation	51
7 Wider implications	55
8 Conclusions	63
9 Recommendations	69
References	73
Terms of reference	76

Letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and HMCI

June 2018

Dear Cabinet Secretary and HMCI

In September 2017, I was commissioned by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, supported by the Cabinet Secretary for Education, to conduct an independent review of school inspection in Wales in the context of the ambitious educational reforms that are currently in train. I am pleased to present the report arising from that Review for your consideration.


I want to express my appreciation for the very positive and helpful response there has been to the Review. I am particularly indebted to the open and constructive engagement of staff in Estyn.

I have heard the views of headteachers, teachers and other practitioners, children and young people and parents and carers, and have engaged more widely with a very broad spectrum of experience and opinion. The excellent response to my call for evidence has made an important contribution to my thinking. I have also drawn on leading international experience and research in determining recommendations for Wales. Taken as a whole, I believe that this very strong body of evidence provides a secure foundation for my conclusions and recommendations.

My proposals are designed to allow Estyn and its school inspection work to contribute directly and constructively to the ambitious reforms currently under way in Wales. They are intended to ensure that inspection continues to provide assurance about the performance of the system while also contributing to your ambition to have schools at the heart of reform and improvement. They build on the many existing strengths of inspection in Wales.

The title of the report, *A Learning Inspectorate*, signals the vital role that Estyn can play in both enhancing the learning of the young people in Welsh schools and in our collective learning about how to achieve success in that endeavour.

Yours sincerely



Professor Graham Donaldson CB

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who engaged with the Review and contributed so constructively throughout. I am particularly indebted to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) Meilyr Rowlands, who initiated the Review, for the open and constructive lead he gave to the process. I was impressed by the positive engagement of the staff in Estyn throughout. Their helpful and insightful contributions were a real source of strength in my work.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Kirsty Williams (Cabinet Secretary for Education) who, together with Meilyr Rowlands, saw the need for a review, and who jointly respected my independence and facilitated my work.

I am also indebted to all the headteachers, teachers and other practitioners, children and young people, parents and carers and the extensive range of organisations, groups and individuals who gave up their time either to share their views in writing or to meet with me. Officials in national and local government were unstinting in their support throughout.

I would particularly like to thank The Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) who undertook the online process and analysed the responses to my formal call for evidence. WISERD's resulting report formed an important part of my considerations.

I am very grateful for the vital support given to the Review by Melanie Ehren, Ann Keane, Anne Looney and Sir Alasdair Macdonald, who offered insightful advice and comment at key stages of the process. In particular, Dr Gill Robinson's contribution to finalising the report was invaluable.

Special thanks go to those who have supported me in undertaking the Review. I am indebted to Sarah Fulthorpe and Claire Habberfield in the Welsh Government and to Michaela Benjamin in Estyn who coped wonderfully with the logistical and other demands that are a feature of this type of work.

All of those mentioned bear no responsibility for the content of this report but have been invaluable in its development.

Graham Donaldson

Foreword

Since devolution in 1999, Welsh education has seen some dramatic shifts in fortune and policy. After an initial period of optimism, a disappointing performance in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey and other worrying evidence led to a stronger emphasis on driving improvement through accountability measures.



In line with an OECD report¹ in 2015 and recommendations in *Successful Futures*², Wales has now embarked on a further radical transformation of education built round a clearer articulation of purpose expressed through the development of a new national curriculum.

The new national curriculum and assessment arrangements aim to set higher standards and to make learning more relevant and engaging for the young people of Wales. The curriculum will be developed in relation to four broad purposes relating to lifelong learning, creativity, citizenship and wellbeing. Literacy, numeracy and digital competence will be developed across the curriculum and throughout the period of compulsory education.

Wales is wisely recognising that to achieve such a radical ambition a number of interlinked components of the wider education system will have to change. There will be less central direction and greater trust in schools, accompanied by a stronger focus on professional and organisational learning and a more constructive approach to accountability.

This report explores the implications of this change agenda for one critical component of this interlinked system: the education inspectorate, Estyn, and its approach to school inspection.

The case for inspection rests heavily on its ability to provide an explanatory narrative that cuts through complexity and highlights where improvement is needed. However, the concept of inspection is defined differently in different cultural and policy contexts. In particular, the purposes and the diverse forms that school inspection can take have varied over time and in different countries. Even in the various jurisdictions of the United Kingdom, the nature and role of inspection have become increasingly divergent.

Perceptions about inspection and the practice of inspection itself are influenced by the wider context within which it works. In its 2013 *Bratislava Memorandum*,³ the

¹ OECD (2014), *Improving Schools in Wales*, OECD Paris

² Donaldson G. (2015) *Successful Futures*. Welsh Government

³ SICl (2013) *Bratislava Memorandum on Inspection and Innovation* <http://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/getattachment/ae886cf8-33b3-457d-a90a-d06ae4af5954>

Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) recognises that the nature and purpose of inspection inevitably reflect the traditions and policies of a country and changes over time. The prime focus of the inspection process also varies. Some countries have individual teachers as their main focus, while others adopt approaches that centre on the school and its overall effectiveness.

Given that the role and nature of inspection are strongly culturally and politically dependent, evidence gathered in the course of the Review suggests a number of characteristics that should define the purposes and characteristics of school inspection in Wales as the country embarks on its educational reforms. These are outlined in chapter 5 of this report.

Estyn is an organisation with a long tradition and strong track record of inspecting schools. It became clear from the evidence presented to this Review that there is broad support for its work. There is also a belief that it can play an important role in the new educational landscape. The emerging context for Welsh school education has significant implications for Estyn's future role and operation. In particular, the interplay between assurance and support for improvement needs to be revisited.

Taken together, the recommendations in this report propose significant differences to Estyn's role and ways of working. Their implementation will require careful planning and phasing as the reforms take shape in schools across Wales. The focus throughout must be to enhance Estyn's contribution to raising standards and improving the quality of the learning for the young people of Wales.



1 Introduction

HM Chief Inspector of Education, supported by the Cabinet Secretary for Education, commissioned this Review of key aspects of Estyn's role and operation. The Review's prime purpose was to analyse the implications of the Welsh educational reform agenda for the work of Estyn, with a particular focus on school inspection. Although the Review was not asked to look at the entirety of Estyn's work, it has also identified a number of wider implications.

The Review engaged with a wide range of individuals and organisations across Wales. In addition to examining an extensive body of documentation, interviews were held with Estyn staff, groups of headteachers and teachers, pupils and parents, and staff in local and national government, including from the regional consortia. Schools that had been inspected recently were visited and aspects of current inspection practice were observed. More widely, research and other evidence of trends and practice internationally were analysed. A formal Call for Evidence, undertaken by WISERD from Cardiff University⁴, received 505 valid responses through an online questionnaire.

While much of the evidence is drawn from present and immediate past experience of inspection, the thrust of this report is forward looking. This report first considers key features of current educational reforms in Wales and their implications for inspection, accountability and improvement. It then examines the nature of Estyn's approaches to its various roles and identifies relevant issues to be addressed. Sections 5 and 6 recommend ways in which Estyn's contributions to providing assurance and improvement can be further enhanced. Finally, the report identifies wider implications for the work of Estyn and Welsh education.

⁴ Taylor C., Power S., Powell R., (2018) *Independent Review of Estyn's Contribution to Wales's Education Reform Programme* WISERD, Cardiff University

2 The current context of education in Wales

Wales has traditionally had a strong commitment to education and a belief in the importance of realising the potential of all of its young people. Currently, it has 1,547 maintained and 70 independent schools serving around 467,000 school and pre-school students. The school system has 11 nurseries, 1,287 primary schools, 10 all-age schools, 200 secondary schools, 23 pupil referral units and 39 special schools.⁵

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) 2014 policy review of Welsh education⁶ identified the comprehensive nature of its school system and the emphasis on equity and inclusion as clear strengths. Encouragingly, it highlighted student performance as being less dependent on a student's school and socio-economic background than the OECD average.

The OECD report also identified positive learning environments and good teacher-student relations as good features of Welsh education. It referred to the rich amount of assessment and evaluation data available at different levels of the system to improve policy and practice. However, it saw a lack of coherence in the totality of assessment and evaluation arrangements and commented that, '...Wales has struggled to strike a balance between accountability and improvement'.⁷

Hitherto strong confidence in the quality of Welsh school education was dented following a relatively poor performance in the OECD 2009 PISA survey. The performance of Welsh 15-year-olds was significantly below the OECD average, in particular for reading and mathematics.

In 2011, in response to these disappointing PISA results, together with concerns about performance in GCSE relative to England and inspection evidence, Wales embarked on a major programme of school reform. A number of significant initiatives⁸ in assessment and accountability were set in train as part of a stronger policy focus on school improvement. Changes to assessment included the introduction of National Reading and Numeracy Tests and a statutory requirement to report on pupils' progress in relation to expectations set in a national Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF). Annual appraisals of teachers and school leaders became part of performance management. School banding (now categorisation) arrangements were introduced to inform identification of schools to receive support.

A further initiative was the establishment by the Welsh Government of Schools Challenge Cymru in 2014 to address concerns about underperforming schools, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition to promoting improvement in the 40 schools involved, the programme was also intended to identify wider implications for the system more generally. The evaluation report published in

⁵ Welsh Government (2017) School Census

⁶ OECD (2014), *Improving Schools in Wales*, OECD Paris

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Welsh Government (2012) *Improving Schools Plan*

2017 cited, ‘...the value of careful diagnosis of individual schools’ trajectories and needs, and highlighted the importance of tailored support that specifically helped to meet those needs’.⁹

The 2014 OECD report¹⁰, written as these reforms were still bedding in, highlighted a number of challenges for policy in Wales. It cited issues associated with differentiation and formative assessment meaning that schools were unable to respond to all students’ learning needs. It also commented on the need for greater attention to be given to, ‘...recruitment, professional development and career progression policies for teachers, school leaders and support staff’. In particular, it said that, ‘... the pace of reform has been high and lacks a long-term vision, an adequate school improvement infrastructure and a clear implementation strategy all stakeholders share’. Partly in response to the OECD report, the Welsh Government outlined a new reform programme in 2014, *Qualified for Life*.¹¹

Pressures were also building to include fresh content and expand the core in the national curriculum. In response to these pressures, Graham Donaldson (author of this Review report) was asked by the Welsh Government to undertake an independent review of its national curriculum and assessment arrangements. His 2015 report, *Successful Futures*,¹² echoed the OECD finding that there was a need for a renewed sense of purpose for school education in Wales. Its 68 recommendations presented a reform path that was radically different from the one that had been followed in the recent past. In particular, Donaldson recommended that the curriculum should seek to develop young people as: successful, capable learners; ethical, informed citizens; enterprising, creative contributors; and healthy, confident individuals. Following a period of consultation, the Welsh Government accepted the recommendations in full¹³.

In addition to recommending the four overarching purposes for the curriculum and a number of structural features, *Successful Futures* made a strong case for related reforms to teacher education, leadership and accountability. It also made the case for a less centralised approach to the reform and management of school education in Wales. It recommended an approach to reform which would involve less prescription from the centre and more direct engagement of teachers and school leaders in shaping the curriculum.

Pressure for reform was given further impetus when the 2015 PISA results showed Welsh students still performing below the OECD average. The most recent evidence from Estyn’s inspection programme¹⁴ shows that, while almost eight out of ten primary schools had good or excellent provision, only around 50% of the secondary schools inspected have good or excellent outcomes. Estyn cited

⁹ Welsh Government (2017) *Assessing the contribution of Schools Challenge Cymru to outcomes achieved by Pathways to Success schools*. Social Research Number: 38/2017

¹⁰ OECD (2014), *Improving Schools in Wales*, OECD Paris

¹¹ Welsh Government (2014) *Qualified for Life*

¹² Donaldson, G. (2015) *Successful Futures*. The Welsh Government

¹³ Welsh Government (2015), *Qualified for Life: A curriculum for Wales – A curriculum for life*, Welsh Government, Cardiff,.

¹⁴ Estyn (2018) *HMCI Annual Report 2016-2017*

concerns about the quality of teaching or assessment as important factors in the less good outcomes for secondary schools.

Following a further OECD review in 2017,¹⁵ the Welsh Government outlined a 'transformational' reform programme in its publication, *Education in Wales: Our national mission, Action Plan 2017-21*¹⁶. The programme was designed as a response to the 'challenging environment' described above and informed by *Successful Futures* and the reviews undertaken by the OECD.¹⁷¹⁸ Covering the period 2017-2021, its planned educational reforms centre on the development of radical curriculum and assessment arrangements to be supported by four 'enabling objectives'. These enabling objectives involve:

- developing a high-quality education profession
- inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards
- strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and wellbeing
- robust assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system

Drawing on research evidence about the impact of educational reform, the reform programme recognised the need to address radical change systematically. The *Action Plan* therefore outlined the factors that would be likely to lead to successful realisation of the government's aspirations. The professional learning and leadership implications arising from the new curriculum were identified and ways in which they would be addressed detailed in the plan. New professional standards and the establishment of a Welsh Leadership Academy are both examples of this interlinked approach to reform. The plan also explicitly recognised the need to review accountability and assessment arrangements.

In addition to the systematic identification of interdependencies, the reforms in Wales have another important and innovative feature. In line with the recommendations in *Successful Futures*¹⁹ and research evidence about successful educational change, the reforms have proceeded on the basis of subsidiarity whereby '...power stays as close as possible to the action'²⁰. That means retaining a significant measure of decision-making about the curriculum, teaching and learning in schools and classrooms. The subsidiarity principle is intended to improve responsiveness to the local context and to increase ownership of reform at the school level.

The subsidiarity approach has been applied to the development of the new national curriculum framework. In 2015, schools across Wales were invited to volunteer to become 'Pioneer Schools' to engage directly in the design and elaboration of the new curriculum. The resultant network of around 180 schools was charged with designing and developing the new curriculum. A particular strength on this 'co-construction' model is the inter-relationship of development and implementation. The closeness of pioneer schools to the contexts within which the curriculum would

¹⁵ OECD (2017) *The Welsh Education Reform Journey: A Rapid Policy Assessment*, OECD Paris

¹⁶ The Welsh Government (2017), *Education in Wales: Our National mission, Action Plan 2017-21*

¹⁷ OECD (2014), *Improving Schools in Wales*, OECD Paris

¹⁸ OECD (2017) *The Welsh Education Reform Journey: A Rapid Policy Assessment*, OECD Paris

¹⁹ Donaldson G (2015) *Successful Futures*, Welsh Government

²⁰ *ibid*, page 99

be realised in practice means that they should be strongly positioned to identify and support the resource and professional learning implications of the new curriculum. Pioneer schools are not only central to development; they also have the potential to be growth points to support its realisation in schools and classrooms across Wales.

The success of the subsidiarity principle rests on the capacity and confidence of schools and teachers to take full advantage of the opportunities it offers. The *Action Plan 2017-2021* therefore envisages all schools in Wales developing into ‘learning organisations’ and the Welsh Government is working with the OECD and regional consortia to explore ways of supporting this goal. It sees the creation of a culture of learning, not just in schools but also more generally, as being integral to the vision in *Curriculum for Wales* becoming a reality for young people across the country. Effective self-evaluation, with schools actively identifying the factors that affect the quality of their children’s learning, needs to be a vital component of that learning culture.

Existing approaches to self-evaluation in Welsh schools are informed by guidance from the Welsh Government²¹, Estyn²² and regional consortia as well as particular approaches deployed in individual schools. These various approaches have been developed separately and there is potential for confusion about what should be the core characteristics of self-evaluation as part of a broader learning culture. In recognition of the importance of effective self-evaluation to organisational and professional learning, the Welsh Government has invited the OECD and Estyn to develop national guidelines, following the same broad co-construction principle being used to create the new curriculum framework. That work began during the period of this Review.

The educational reforms are also set in the context of changing relationships between different levels of government. Significant powers, including education, were devolved to the new Welsh Assembly in 1999. The Welsh Government’s Education Directorate (formerly Department for Education) maintains the key role in steering the system but, since around 2014, its strategic role has shifted from one of direction towards a greater emphasis on facilitation.

Twenty-two local authorities in Wales are responsible for funding maintained schools and for supporting students with additional learning needs. Four regional consortia were established in 2012 as part of the *Improving Schools* reforms, to extend the school improvement functions of local authorities. The intention was to provide more co-ordinated use of local government resources to drive improvement. In 2014, a National Model for Regional Working that strengthened the consortia’s challenge and support roles was established, with a strong focus on implementing the national system for banding (now categorising) schools. The national model also introduced the role of challenge advisers to support and challenge schools to improve and to determine levels of ongoing support based on the categorisation process. After

²¹ Welsh Government (2016), *National School Categorisation System Guidance document for schools, local authorities and regional consortia, Guidance*, Welsh Government, Cardiff,

²² Estyn (2017) *Supplementary Guidance: self-evaluation*

some initial difficulties, recent Estyn monitoring reports on the consortia present an improving picture, with three of the four consortia given positive reports.

Inspection

Inspection of schools in the United Kingdom, in common with many European countries, dates back to the early 19th century. National school inspections have been undertaken separately in Wales since 1907 by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMI). In line with civil service recruitment principles and processes, inspectors are appointed through open competition but their independence from the government of the day is signalled through their distinct status as Crown appointments, approved by the monarch in the Privy Council.

Since their creation, the role of HMI has swung between the inspection of individual schools and other providers and the provision of policy and advice to government. In the period immediately before 1983, inspection was mainly focused on monitoring the quality of the system, identifying systemic concerns and advising government. Reports of formal inspections were provided only to central and local authorities and to the school itself. Schools were formally inspected only infrequently although informal visits were common. In that year, formal or full inspection reports on individual schools were published for the first time. The motivation for this move lay in growing political concern about education standards, fuelled by the belief that the United Kingdom's economic performance was being hampered by a school system that lacked sufficient focus on economic realities. Politicians spoke openly about opening up the 'secret garden' of the school curriculum to greater public scrutiny. Although not yet undertaken on a systematic or cyclical basis, this move towards more formal school inspection and reporting represented an important initial shift towards more direct institutional accountability and transparency.

The next key change in the approach to inspection and accountability took place as a result of the 1992 Education Act, which established the Office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Training in Wales as a non-Ministerial department of the civil service. The Act also introduced legislative requirements for cyclical inspection and reporting at the level of individual schools and outsourcing of school inspections to individual companies who would tender for contracts. Initially funded by Westminster, the inspectorate became the responsibility of the Welsh Government in 1999. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) and his staff remained Crown appointments.

Initially called the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, the inspectorate in Wales is now called Estyn, a Welsh language name meaning "to reach (out), stretch or extend". In 2000, Estyn's statutory duties were to inspect and report on the quality and standards of education and training provided in Wales, including pre-school education, both maintained and private schools, further education institutions, and local authorities.

The 2005 legislation²³ outlines the duties of HMCI in relation to schools as follows.

The Chief Inspector has the general duty of keeping the government and the public informed about:

- (a) the quality of the education provided by schools in Wales,
- (b) how far that education meets the needs of the range of pupils at those schools,
- (c) the educational standards achieved in those schools,
- (d) the quality of the leadership in and management of those schools, including whether the financial resources made available to those schools are managed efficiently,
- (e) the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at those schools, and
- (f) the contribution made by those schools to the well-being of those pupils,
- (g) actions taken at maintained schools to promote healthy eating and drinking].

In pursuit of these duties and of those laid down in other legislation and by the National Assembly for Wales, Estyn is now responsible for inspecting and reporting on the following²⁴:

- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities (LAs)
- primary schools
- secondary schools
- all-age schools
- special schools
- pupil referral units
- independent schools
- independent specialist colleges
- further education
- adult community learning
- local authority education services for children and young people
- teacher education and training
- work-based learning
- careers companies
- offender learning

²³ UK Parliament Acts/E/EA-EG/Education Act 2005 (2005 c 18) Chapter 3 School Inspectors and School Inspections: Wales

²⁴ Estyn (2016) *Estyn's Corporate Governance Framework*

<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/document/estyn%E2%80%99s-corporate-governance-framework>

According to the HMCI Annual Report 2016-2017, Estyn carried out some 2,700 inspections in the 2010-2017 inspection cycle.²⁵ All education and training providers in Wales were inspected at least once, together with 1,000 follow-up visits and 100 national thematic reviews.

New inspection arrangements have been introduced from the start of the 2017-2018 session. These new arrangements are in part a response to the emerging reform programme.

Schools, independent specialist colleges, pupil referral units and work-based learning providers:

- receive **15 working days'** written notice of an inspection
- are judged under 5 inspection areas:

1 Standards

2 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

3 Teaching and learning experiences

4 Care, support and guidance

5 Leadership and management

- are judged using a 4 point scale:

Excellent – Very strong, sustained performance and practice

Good – Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement

Adequate and needs improvement – Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement

Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement – Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

Estyn Common Inspection Framework 2017

²⁵ Estyn (2018) *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2016-2017*

3 Estyn's current work: findings and issues

Inspection can be a highly charged process that divides opinion. The Review has had to give particular attention to separating perception from fact in order to draw out areas where school inspection in Wales is already strong and areas where it is thought to need to improve. The prevalence of myths about the inspection process and even about individual inspectors is a constant challenge for all inspectorates. Indeed, Estyn felt it necessary to mount a myth-busting campaign to allay fears and address misconceptions.

The balance of different types of evidence gathered in the Review points to Estyn as an efficient organisation that meets its targets²⁶ and is generally well respected for its objectivity and professional expertise. Its internal culture and structures are impressive as seen, for example, in its first place in the 2016 civil service people survey²⁷ and in the careful process of consultation and piloting undertaken prior to the introduction of its new inspection arrangements.

The evidence gathered during the Review highlights and endorses Estyn's ability to provide a national, independent picture of school education, draw out lessons from current practice nationally, share good practice and promote school improvement. Estyn's evaluation questionnaires show that 98% of providers were satisfied with the reliability and independence of inspection judgements following publication of a report²⁸.

Concerns raised during the Review often elided the work of Estyn and the wider culture and processes of accountability, notably the annual categorisation process of regional consortia whereby schools are classed as red, amber, yellow or green. These general concerns related to the perceived negative effects of the current 'high-stakes' accountability culture in Wales and about schools being subject to multiple and potentially competing accountabilities. Specific issues were raised about the inspection cycle and the reliability of the process.

From the evidence there was a recurrent theme relating to the optimum relationship between scrutiny/assurance and support in school inspections.

The remainder of this chapter explores these strengths, areas for improvement and issues. The proposals for the future of school inspection outlined later draw on this analysis.

Current strengths of Estyn

In the Call for Evidence,²⁹ 71.5% of all stakeholders, including 63% of school practitioners, said that Estyn is important for improving the quality of education in

²⁶ Estyn (2017) *Annual Report and Accounts*, Estyn

²⁷ *ibid*, page 7

²⁸ *ibid*, page 8

²⁹ Taylor C., Power S., Powell R., (2018) *Independent Review of Estyn's Contribution to Wales's Education Reform Programme WISERD*, Cardiff University, page 5

Wales. Governors, parents, higher and further education representatives and other members of the public were more likely to say Estyn is important for improving the quality of education in Wales than school practitioners.

The following quote given by a teacher in the Call for Evidence reflects the general view about the importance attached to Estyn's role in quality assurance and consistency in the setting of expectations.

*"I believe they (Estyn) are best placed to observe and scrutinise practice across Wales comparing various institutions, highlighting good practice and pointing out weaknesses in provision and/or leadership"*³⁰

Estyn reflects, and has in some aspects pioneered, much of current thinking internationally about effective inspection. For example, the involvement of peer and lay inspectors, the introduction of a nominee from the school to participate in an inspection and the significant changes in its new inspection arrangements were all bold moves to open up inspection and encourage schools to engage more constructively with the process. Similarly, the introduction of improvement conferences following local authority inspections aimed to establish a coherent and agreed way forward. Within a tight legislative framework dating back to 2005, Estyn has sought to adapt its approaches to inspection to meet the changing needs of the school system in Wales.

Views on school inspections presented to the Review were somewhat polarised but around 65% of those responding to the Call for Evidence³¹ saw school inspection as important for improving the quality of education in Wales. Supportive views about school inspection cited their contribution to improvement and sharing best practice and commented positively on the constructive approach of inspectors.

Two quotes from the Call for Evidence reflect such positive views.

"The recommendations made to the school as a result of the inspection drove the school's improvement plan for the following two years and it continues to be important in the school's efforts to continue to improve and raise standards." (Teacher)

"I have been the Headteacher of two different schools who have been inspected within the last five years. On both occasions the inspection team put a great deal of effort into understanding the context of the schools and the progress that pupils made from their starting points. Estyn validated our self-evaluation in a way that was rigorous and fair." (Headteacher)

Estyn's Annual Report also cites a compliment in similar vein³².

"I would just like to put on record how supportive I found our most recent Estyn inspection. The inspectors were challenging and thorough, whilst proving themselves fully approachable and keen to indulge in professional dialogue at all times."

³⁰ *ibid*, page 7

³¹ *ibid*, pages 19-21

³² Estyn (2017) *Annual Report and Accounts*, page 17

Estyn's new inspection arrangements, introduced in the current session, represent a further shift towards a more responsive model of inspection. The principles upon which the new arrangements are based stress the need to adopt a 'positive mindset' and to encourage school staff to see the inspection as a constructive contribution to their own learning. The number of graded judgements was reduced from fifteen to five to allow the inspection to focus more explicitly on key aspects of a school's performance.

The emphasis on the interests of learners and the quality of learning and teaching has been further enhanced. Inspectors are asked to tailor inspection activities to the context being evaluated, using an increased range of tools and approaches. In particular they should seek out well-considered innovative practice and report on key strengths and weaknesses.

The new inspection arrangements were still in the early stage of introduction as the Review was being conducted. However, it was already evident that there was a general welcome in principle for these arrangements and recognition that they represented a significant shift in approach by Estyn. Instances were reported where particular inspections were perceived not to reflect the principles of the arrangements. This may be due in part to inspectors not yet being fully familiar with the new requirements. Equally, it may reflect more deep-seated challenges for particular members of staff to accept and adopt what Estyn describes as the 'new mindset' associated with innovation. Established beliefs and habits are hard to change and the organisation is aware of the need to maintain close monitoring of implementation and to address such issues as they arise.

Discussions with HMCI and senior staff confirmed that they are planning further changes to the arrangements as the new curriculum and associated reforms begin to take shape in the school system. The ways in which schools are taking forward the curriculum purposes will receive a stronger focus, further reinforcing the place of inspection in the reform process. HMCI's *Annual Report 2017* provides a helpful insight into Estyn's constructive approach to the reform of the curriculum. In the Foreword he comments that 'Overall, a coherent education reform programme exists for compulsory education, which addresses our main challenges and avoids the dangers of unintended consequences arising from piecemeal reform'.

Very positive views were also expressed in the course of the Review about Estyn's national role in identifying and sharing best practice from across Wales. It promotes the spread of best practice in a number of ways including: thematic reports; national and sector stakeholder events; the publication of case studies on its website; and the dissemination of relevant information through its newsletter. In the period 2016-2017 it published 12 thematic reports and 58 best practice case studies and held 36 training events and 19 best practice events. In March 2017, Estyn held its first Awards Evening to celebrate the success of providers judged to have 'excellent' current performance or prospects for improvement in 2015-2016.³³

The importance of such activities was frequently cited in the course of the Review. In particular, schools valued the opportunity to engage with and learn from inspectors

³³ *ibid*, pages 20-24

without what they saw as the distracting pressures associated with cyclical school inspections and reports. Again, quotes from the Call for Evidence reflect such views.

*“The wealth of knowledge regarding best practice...is shared through their (Estyn’s) thematic reports. Schools can access this information as part of their improvement journey.”*³⁴ (Educational professional)

*“Having received a thematic inspection, the feedback was worthwhile – very positive experience.”*³⁵ (School)

*“They can often give good advice and guidance in a pertinent area. This can lead to developments in your own school’s practice as they can give you a ‘way in’.”*³⁶ (Teacher)

WISERD’s report³⁷ reflects the wider body of evidence gathered in the Review about the value placed on Estyn’s independence. Its role in providing an external perspective about the quality of a school, region or local authority was seen as an important safeguard against complacency or self-interested reporting. A parent sums this up as follows.

*“An objective, external view of public services, education in this case, is pivotal to any robust accountability system.”*³⁸

HMCI has ensured that Estyn has been actively involved in the development of the new curriculum. In addition to seconding two inspectors to the curriculum review that led to *Successful Futures*, Estyn staff are represented on the key development groups and senior staff sit on the main overarching decision-making groups. Such extensive involvement has the reciprocal benefits of helping to ensure that the expertise and experience of inspectors can contribute directly to development while at the same time providing necessary insights for inspectors into the essential characteristics of the reforms.

The annual HMCI reports were less familiar to some practitioners but were seen as important in providing an overview of performance and the communication of key messages about Welsh education. A teacher described them as providing,

*“A very clear and attractive summary of key messages and evidence. Very accessible.”*³⁹ (Teacher).

A strong theme permeating all of the evidence was positive appreciation of the extensive involvement of peer inspectors. Peer inspectors are existing practitioners in senior leadership roles who are trained by Estyn and join inspection teams away from their own immediate geographical area. They are seen to add an important

³⁴ Taylor C., Power S., Powell R., (2018) *Independent Review of Estyn’s Contribution to Wales’s Education Reform Programme* WISERD, Cardiff University page 8

³⁵ *ibid*, page 28

³⁶ *ibid*, page 30

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ *ibid*, page 8

³⁹ *ibid*, page 32

dimension of current experience to inspection teams. Peer inspectors themselves frequently referred to the value of such involvement for their own professional growth.

*“Peer inspector model very valuable to share good practice and help schools to become more reflective.”*⁴⁰ (Headteacher)

*“Opportunity to be a peer inspector provides a really good training and helps our own school to develop.”*⁴¹ (Primary school)

Estyn’s aim is to have at least one peer inspector in every school. Peer inspectors are currently drawn from around 90% of secondary schools, 50% of primary schools and 80% of special schools.

As mentioned earlier, perceptions about inspection and accountability vary widely and are often coloured by hearsay and particular experience, good or bad. However, the strengths of Estyn as a professionally respected and highly influential part of the Welsh educational landscape came through strongly in the evidence to the Review. These strengths provide a good basis for further enhancement of its work and contribution to education in Wales.

Areas for improvement for Estyn

Specific concerns about school inspections tended to focus on issues associated with frequency and reliability.

Limitations associated with a cyclical approach to inspection were identified frequently in the Review evidence. The case for a cyclical approach to inspection rests partly on balancing the available inspection resources against the number of schools to be reported on. It also means that there are significant gaps between inspections, allowing schools a ‘breathing space’ to concentrate on meeting the needs of their pupils. The 2010-2017 inspection cycle moved away from a fixed gap between inspections, making the timing of inspections less predictable. An element of predictability in a cycle however remains and may also lead to an uneven pattern of development in schools that are not committed to their own improvement, with bursts of intense activity just before an inspection is due punctuating longer ‘steady state’ periods.

The fact that inspection reports remain extant throughout the period of a cycle, irrespective of how far the school has changed in the interim, was cited as being potentially unfair and misleading. This can be a particular issue for schools that improve substantially in the years following the inspection. Equally, however, very positive reports may also be misleading over time as a school’s quality can go down as well as up.

There were also comments about inspections either being too frequent or not frequent enough. Where the gap between inspections is perceived to be too long,

⁴⁰ *ibid*, page 42

⁴¹ *ibid*, page 42

then the report's utility from a parent's perspective quickly diminishes. In the words of one parent responding to the Call for Evidence:

*“The content of the report may well be outdated within a very short period of time – changes to staff, different cohorts of children can obviously influence the performance of the school and so the findings of an inspection report are only a snapshot in time.”*⁴²

On the other hand, too frequent inspections can place undue stress on staff and divert attention from meeting the needs of pupils in a constant process of trying to satisfy the requirements of inspectors. A challenge for all inspectorates is to strike the right balance so that the needs of the various stakeholders are met without creating constant pressures on schools and teachers.

Issues were also raised about the reliability of the inspection process. Some respondents felt that inspectors varied in what they saw as good or bad practice. Examples were given of schools trying to customise their evidence and behaviour during the inspection to meet the assumed preferences of the lead inspector. The main perceived differences amongst inspectors related to interpersonal skills and style and to the extent to which their evaluations appeared to be driven by quantitative data at the expense of context, more qualitative evidence and professional judgement.

*“There is a distinct lack of consistency in how inspections are carried out with providers. In many cases this inconsistency is not addressed sufficiently through the annual update training.”*⁴³ (Local authority)

The relatively short length of time inspectors spend in a school was also a source of some concern. The trend internationally has been to reduce the length of inspections to meet concerns about stress and workload and to make more effective use of inspectors' time. However, reducing the overall length of an inspection potentially means less direct evidence can be gathered about practice, particularly in relation to the quality of learning and teaching. One of the key elements of added value in an inspection is first-hand evaluation of learning and teaching. Inspectors' long-established legal right to observe teaching highlights its central place in assuring the quality of the experience of children and young people. One of the challenges is to devote sufficient attention to learning and teaching such that there is a strong evidence base about quality without becoming obtrusive and potentially distorting the true picture.

The new inspection arrangements give greater prominence to learning and teaching through lesson observation, learning walks and discussion with pupils and examination of their work. However, despite this welcome emphasis, there is consistent concern about the credibility of inspection evidence arising from the perceived artificiality of the observation process and the limited coverage that is possible within the inspection window. A response to the Call for Evidence reflected such concerns:

⁴² *ibid*, page 10

⁴³ *ibid*, page 14

“The success of an inspection depends solely on the headteacher’s ability to prepare for an exam.”⁴⁴

Inspectorates, therefore, have to seek to achieve the right balance between evidence gathering and the intensity of the experience for schools. Evidence following inspections gathered by Estyn, and supported in comments to the Review, suggests that most schools are surprised by the accuracy of the picture of a school gathered in a relatively short time and would suggest that experienced and expert inspection teams can reach credible conclusions from this evidence base.

A recurrent issue for inspection internationally is the extent to which inspectors should support improvement as well as giving assurance. This theme featured strongly in the evidence to the Review. The WISERD report reports that, “A large number of stakeholders were interested in Estyn taking on a more advisory, supportive role...”⁴⁵ While there was a recognition that inspectors had to be careful not to become directive in offering advice, there was nonetheless a strong feeling that more could be done in school inspections to support improvement.

“It [inspection] should be more about supporting schools than naming and shaming.”⁴⁶ (Headteacher)

“I believe that the quality of education in Wales would be better improved and have more of a long-term impact if inspections were carried out in a more advisory and supportive rather than a judgemental way.”⁴⁷ (Teacher)

“I think Estyn needs to be helping schools to plan and implement the new curriculum. I think schools are very nervous about taking risks because of a lack of confidence as to how Estyn will receive innovative or creative approaches. I think this is also true of exam boards for secondary schools.”⁴⁸ (Teacher)

Sixteen point five per cent of respondents to the Call for Evidence said they think that Estyn can inhibit improvement. Although this is a relatively small proportion of the overall responses, the areas identified were also cited in some of the wider evidence gathered through visits and interviews. A concern raised by a number of those interviewed was the belief that inspections can inhibit creativity and innovation in teaching and learning. These concerns centred round the belief that, if schools are seeking to anticipate and respond to the requirements of inspectors, then they are less likely to risk innovating in ways that they perceive might not be evaluated positively.

“It makes schools and teachers scared to try new things and forces them to do things that are not right for the pupils.”⁴⁹ (Teacher)

⁴⁴ *ibid*, page 14

⁴⁵ *ibid*, page 46

⁴⁶ *ibid*, page 11

⁴⁷ *ibid*, page 10

⁴⁸ *ibid*, page 45

⁴⁹ *ibid*, page 13

“Schools are too focused on jumping through hoops to please Estyn and less focused on child development.”⁵⁰(Parent)

Such concerns are echoed in international research about the effects of inspection. The OECD, for example, in its comprehensive overview of evaluation and assessment internationally comment that,

‘There is a risk that external evaluation may be predominantly associated with compliance to procedural requirements, instead of with school improvement... This means that the external school evaluation process sends ambiguous signals about what matters...’⁵¹

The strong focus on learning and teaching in Estyn inspections mitigates this risk but there were nonetheless instances reported of schools ‘playing safe’ or trying to ‘game’ the inspection. In the context of reform, the risks that these kinds of response to inspection could hinder the kinds of changes signaled in *Curriculum for Wales* need to be considered carefully.

Inspections lead to published reports that grade school performance on a four-point scale and evaluations of adequate or unsatisfactory have very significant implications for the future of a school and its staff. It was clear from evidence to the Review that grades have come to dominate inspections, both for those being inspected and for inspectors themselves. Estyn has recognised the need to shift the focus towards the implications for the work of the school of the evidence that underpins grades. However, there remains an issue about the ‘high-stakes’ nature of grading.

The wider system for accountability in school education in Wales

More general issues were raised during the course of the Review about the role of inspection within a wider accountability culture.

Frequent concerns were raised about the number/range of the accountability mechanisms currently used in Wales and about perceived duplication amongst them. The components of this potentially disjointed system for holding schools to account for their performance and providing challenge and support for improvement were:

- inspection
- school categorisation
- school self-review
- the role of governing bodies
- performance measures by the Welsh Government

The WISERD report concludes that, ‘...a number of stakeholders thought that Estyn’s role in the accountability of schools already duplicates the function of other accountability measures...’⁵² Equally, of course, the other measures may be duplicating activities best undertaken by a national inspectorate.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, page 13

⁵¹ OECD (2013). *Synergies for Better Learning*. OECD Publishing, Paris page 397

⁵² Taylor C., Power S., Powell R., (2018) Independent Review of Estyn’s Contribution to Wales’s Education Reform Programme WISERD, Cardiff University, page v

This set of accountability arrangements does not combine to form a coherent set of complementary components with consistent expectations and purposes. Without such coherence, schools are subject to potentially conflicting messages about what matters and may divert effort from learning and teaching towards gathering and retaining, often considerable, quantities of evidence to satisfy different requirements. A further feature of this accountability landscape, within which schools are categorised publicly, is its ‘high stakes’ nature where public categorisation of a school in relation to its need for support becomes associated with failure. Potential effects of high stakes accountability are discussed below.

High stakes, accountability and inspection

The evolution of education policy in Wales since devolution has seen significant shifts in the prominence given to externally driven accountability. From an initial period where considerable trust was placed in schools and teachers, concerns arising from poor PISA results and other worrying evidence led to the introduction, from 2010, of a wide range of measures designed to address perceived underperformance. The then Minister for Education and Skills identified a lack of urgency in the government department and a ‘soggy consensus in the Assembly’.⁵³ He outlined a programme of ‘twenty clear actions’ including the establishment of a new School Standards Unit in the department, new school tests and a national system for the grading of schools. He made it clear that he would close schools deemed to be irredeemably failing by Estyn.

In his 2018 Annual Report, HMCI highlights concerns about accountability pressures.

*‘Banding and categorisation arrangements introduced during this period, the ‘challenge’ role required of the newly-formed regional consortia, and new performance indicators, all contributed to an accountability system linked strongly to examination results. The danger of this approach is that examination entry policy and the advice given to pupils on which qualifications to study may be driven by accountability pressures.’*⁵⁴

Inspection is an integral part of the drive to improve Welsh education. However, there are consequences for the nature and effectiveness of inspection arising from its being part of a ‘high-stakes’ approach.⁵⁵ In particular, the extent to which inspection is seen as having direct implications for the reputations, professional identities and even the future livelihoods of those being inspected will to a large extent determine responses to the work of Estyn. Evidence presented to the Review indicates that the summative grading scale within inspection reports and its consequences make inspection a central part of a ‘high-stakes’ culture.

Grades have a number of benefits. They allow the conclusions of an inspection to be communicated in the form of simple evaluative words or phrases, helping to avoid interpretation issues arising from longer text. Thus those who are not part of the professional community, particularly parents, may find grades helpful in giving a jargon-free picture of quality. Grades can give focus to an inspection, helping to

⁵³ Andrews, L. (2014). *Ministering to Education*. Parthian books.

⁵⁴ Estyn (2018). *HMCI Annual Report 2016-2017* page 8

⁵⁵ Klerks, M (2013) The Effects of School Inspections: A Systematic Review quoted in Ehren et al 2015

avoid the pursuit of less important aspects of provision and practice. They also allow simple forms of analysis and reporting through aggregation, comparison and benchmarking. And their sharp nature gives an edge to the process that commands attention.

However, there are also a number of very significant drawbacks to grade-based evaluations. A grade can over-simplify and fail to reflect the complexities of a school and of the learning process. In that way a grade may mislead in its attempt to balance out a variety of different aspects of a school. Describing a school as 'excellent' or 'adequate' inevitably involves weighing both strong and less strong aspects, and can mask areas that are nonetheless important.

One challenge in using graded judgements is about how to achieve a shared, fair lens among those who scrutinise. That means establishing a common set of expectations based on an understanding of what children and young people should be able to understand and do at various stages of schooling in different contexts. Inspection should not favour or reward orthodoxies in delivery but instead have a focus on standards of achievement among students, across the range of their work and activities.

It is the high-stakes nature of grades that are most troublesome, however. One major potential implication of headline grading is summed up in Campbell's law of performance measurement which states that "*...the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor*".⁵⁶ When you hold people accountable using a single measure, some do things you don't want them to do and the measure itself tends to become distorted. And that means the grades lose their value and they distort the educational process in undesirable ways.⁵⁷ Inspection grades are not based solely on quantitative data but as a scale they assume similar characteristics.

In particular, high-stakes accountability systems can lead to significant, negative unintended consequences. In addition to the stress that these systems inevitably place on schools and their pupils, such cultures can divert attention from meeting the needs of young people as individuals as schools seek to disguise weaknesses and present themselves in as good a light as possible. Undue attention may be given to those pupils whose marginal improvement will affect performance figures or attempts may be made to select the school population at the expense of young people with the greatest needs. At its worst it can inculcate a culture of fear, inhibiting creativity and genuine professional analysis and discussion. Pupils can come to serve the reputation of a school rather than the school serving the needs of the pupil.

*"Ensure that the children are not actually forgotten in the process, and that children are not just numbers and data to track."*⁵⁸(Teacher)

⁵⁶ Campbell, Donald (1975) *Assessing the Impact of Planned Social Change*, Dartmouth College

⁵⁷ Koretz (2017) *'The Testing Charade'* University of Chicago Press

⁵⁸ Taylor C., Power S., Powell R., (2018) *Independent Review of Estyn's Contribution to Wales's Education Reform Programme*, WISERD, Cardiff University page 48

Where the consequences flowing from accountability measures are unduly high, schools may be driven largely by their interpretation of the criteria used by external agencies to judge their performance. While this can have positive effects in cases where schools themselves have limited motivation, expertise or capacity for improvement, it can also narrow the curriculum, inhibit creativity, and lead to a formulaic approach to addressing the complexities of learning.

Unintended consequences of the high-stakes culture in Wales reported to the Review included narrowing of the curriculum to focus on subjects that are thought to be valued by inspectors and performance measures. There were also many references to an undue focus on pupils thought most likely to affect performance criteria, potentially to the detriment of other pupils. The desire to achieve a high grade or to avoid a low one can also lead to significant opportunity costs as resources are devoted to amassing evidence for inspection at the expense of time spent on teaching and learning.

It is sometimes argued that inspection-driven changes in behaviour may have benefits where a school itself does not know what is best for its pupils. However, changes in practice designed to get through an inspection but untypical of the school's normal behaviour are often superficial and short lived. They may lead to false assurance and undermine the reliability of inspection findings.

Evidence to the Review from both inspectors and those being inspected consistently pointed to the pressure to arrive at grades and the consequences that can result from that pressure dominating an inspection. In addition, the indiscriminate nature of the approach means that all schools are subject to the same pressures to conform irrespective of their capacity.

Requirements to report publicly on performance in the form of headline grades may be seen as a necessary part of transparent accountability. However, in a high-stakes environment, there is a huge responsibility on inspection teams to arrive at fair and accurate grades and the need to be consistent across schools can lead to a narrowing of the focus of what is reported to that which can be most reliably measured. The purpose of the inspection can become wholly dominated by the need to arrive at fair grades. Inspection teams can spend considerable time debating grade boundaries, detracting from deeper discussions about how the school might move forward. Feedback sessions to senior staff can also be dominated by the communication of grades. Both inspectors and schools reported that the overwhelming focus in feedback sessions was on grades with the issues that lie behind those grades often receiving insufficient attention as a result.

The case for inspection rests heavily on its ability to provide an explanatory narrative that illuminates and tackles complexity. Public reporting in the form of grades can hamper this important contribution when inspectors have to boil down issues too far in order to arrive at an evaluative grade or numerical scale. Evidence to the Review from both inspectors and those inspected consistently pointed to the pressure to arrive at grades detracting from the potential of inspection to influence practice.

To sum up, there are real strengths in established practice in inspection in Wales. It is difficult to separate out concerns which relate to the broader accountability

landscape in Wales, from inspection generally and from the particulars of Estyn's own operation. The WISERD report notes that few concrete examples were provided to illustrate critical comments about inspection, suggesting that at least some of the concerns might be more anecdotal than substantive. Looking forward, the Review seeks to address both the specific and general concerns, at the same time building on the established strengths in the work of Estyn, in the context of the reforms.



4 Estyn, inspection and reform

As we have seen, the educational reforms in Wales place schools and teachers in the driving seat of change. It was clear throughout the Review process that, while there was strong support for the curriculum reforms, there was also anxiety about how they could be made a reality in schools across the country. Estyn was seen as potentially very important in making this happen. This is particularly the case in the absence in Wales of any national curriculum body (in contrast to some other countries which have embarked on radical curriculum reform).

A series of reports^{59 60 61} have examined the relationship between the type of external accountability in an education system and the maturity of that system. In particular, a 2010 report by the McKinsey Corporation, *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, suggests that education systems that are already 'good' and aspire to be 'great' should seek to engage teachers and school leaders more directly in raising the quality of education. Beyond that stage, it posits a 'great' to 'excellent' journey within which schools are the central drivers of improvement.

The underlying principle is articulated in a 2007 McKinsey report which suggests that the intensity of external pressure and interventions are '...inversely proportional to the capacity of individual schools to improve by themselves'. In the case of Wales, which is seeking to become a self-improving system, this would argue for a lower intensity of external pressure and intervention while retaining the need to maintain the focus on seriously underperforming schools.

In its 2014 report on Welsh school education, the OECD⁶² summed up the accountability challenges facing Wales as the post-2011 reforms were implemented.

“Striking the right balance between accountability and improvement in an assessment and evaluation framework is a challenge both internationally and for Wales. Prior to the [2011] reforms, the balance in Wales was described to the review team as one of high trust, with assessment and evaluation systems being primarily for developmental purposes with little accountability. They have now shifted to greater accountability. Increased accountability and a focus on evaluation and assessment can risk distorting how and what students are taught.”

The reforms outlined in *Education in Wales: Our National mission, Action Plan 2017-21*⁶³ represent a coherent model of educational reform that includes further

⁵⁹ Barber, M (2004). *The Virtue of Accountability: System Redesign, Inspection and Incentives in the Era of Informed Professionalism* Journal of Education 85 (1):7-38

⁶⁰ McKinsey 2007 *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top*

⁶¹ Barber, M., Chijioke, C., & Mourshed, M. (2010). *Education: How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better*. London: McKinsey & Company.

⁶² OECD (2014) *Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective*, page 31, OECD Paris

⁶³ The Welsh Government (2017), *Education in Wales: Our National mission, Action Plan 2017-21*

significant changes in both the culture and the practices of accountability in Wales. The OECD report pointed to clear tensions between, on the one hand, the 'high-stakes' nature of the post-2011 reforms and, on the other, the aspirations for greater local and school decision-making and the creation of a dynamic context for young people's learning. These tensions will need to be resolved as part of the changes to the culture and practices of accountability in Wales.

The aim is to have a self-improving system, committed to its own learning and continuous improvement. There will be less central prescription and more autonomy for schools. Moves towards the development of schools as learning organisations, currently being explored with the support of the OECD, will further entrench these characteristics. Greater autonomy will require high quality leadership at all levels in the system. Success will require increased levels of practitioner commitment, confidence, knowledge and expertise. Success will also require the various levels of governance to align in pursuit of an agreed agenda.

If Wales is to have a self-improving education system, inspection and other forms of support and accountability must be tested in relation to their compatibility with this aspiration.

Implications for Estyn

Estyn occupies a unique place in Welsh education. A recurring theme in evidence to the Review was that the nature of Estyn's engagement with the reform agenda could make or break the ultimate success of that agenda. It enjoys high credibility for its independence and professionalism and, in common with fellow inspectorates in the United Kingdom and beyond, occupies the middle ground between policy and practice. Its evaluations are at both the system-level and the level of individual institutions. Evidence from inspection can help set the policy agenda while at the same time having a significant impact on what happens in schools and local government.

Given its influential and pivotal role, the further evolution of Estyn in general and school inspection in particular has to strike a difficult balance between scrutiny/accountability and improvement. In doing this, Estyn needs to reformulate its strategic role in the context of the reforms to school education in Wales. So what should be the prime purpose of Estyn in general and inspection in particular in the reformed Welsh education system?

The 2005 Act⁶⁴ provided the statutory answer to the purposes of Estyn as determined by the government at that time. Inspection was seen then as a prime agent of accountability, charged with evaluating and reporting on the quality of the education provided by schools, the quality of leadership and management, the standards achieved and the ways in which spiritual, moral and cultural development and the wellbeing of pupils were being addressed. The context was one of a centrally led system with a fairly detailed, nationally prescribed curriculum.

⁶⁴ UK Parliament Acts/E/EA-EG/Education Act 2005 (2005 c 18) Chapter 3 School Inspectors and School Inspections: Wales

The WISERD report on the Call for Evidence summarises views about Estyn's future role as follows⁶⁵:

'Overall, the identification of good practice, followed by Thematic Reports were generally regarded as being the most important activities Estyn currently undertakes for meeting future needs ... The least important of Estyn's activities for meeting future needs were the HMCI's Annual Reports, followed by school inspections and local authority and regional consortia inspections. Nevertheless, 41.6% of responses still indicated that school inspections would be very important for meeting the future needs of the new education reform programme in Wales.'

The various strands of evidence pointed to a strong desire for Estyn's professional expertise to be used for support as well as scrutiny.

Implications for school inspection

In different settings internationally, the ways in which inspection evidence and evaluations can have an impact fall into three broad categories:

- providing evaluative reports for parents and the public, sometimes to inform school choice
- giving assurance nationally, locally and at school level about the quality of education being provided
- promoting improvement and building capacity either through direct engagement or through the provision of evidence and advice to inform policy and practice

These categories are not mutually exclusive. However, it is essential to be clear about their relative importance if inspection is not to become undermined by internal contradictions and competing external expectations.

Unlike its near neighbour, school choice is not seen as a main driver of improvement in Welsh schools. Estyn's school inspection reports are intended to inform parents and families about the quality of a school but their use for school selection is more a by-product rather than a main purpose of the reports. WISERD comments in its report on the Call for Evidence⁶⁶ that only one parent cited the importance of inspections in determining their choice of school for their child. That finding was reflected in the wider set of evidence gathered in the Review whereby school choice was very rarely raised as significant.

Perhaps the most common expectation of inspection is that it will give assurance to all those with a stake in the school about the quality of education being provided; identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Thus parents can be assured that their children are being well educated; or governors that they can have confidence in the work of practitioners; or local and national government that schools in general are providing a good standard of education. In that sense they are about building public confidence. However, there are many ways in which such assurance can be arrived at and communicated.

⁶⁵ Taylor C., Power S., Powell R., (2018) *Independent Review of Estyn's Contribution to Wales's Education Reform Programme*, WISERD, Cardiff University page 42

⁶⁶ *ibid*, page 52

Estyn's cyclical inspection and reporting programme is explicitly about assurance. Its thematic work and the annual reports of HMCI embody a strong element of assurance as well as advice. The ambiguity in inspection lies in the extent to which its independent evaluations may become compromised if it has been explicit in its earlier improvement advice leading to a possible conflict of interest. Hitherto, the balance in school inspection has tended towards assurance with improvement as a by-product rather than a direct strategy. However, its thematic and good practice roles have a much stronger focus on capacity building.

Within the context of a school system which is redirecting itself towards new purposes and becoming self-improving, how should Estyn direct its influence, expertise and resources?

External evaluation will remain important in providing assurance and encouraging the behaviours needed to make the new approach a success. There will be significant implications for how external evaluation, including inspection, is conducted and reported. Aspects of the reforms that will need to be addressed in rethinking evaluation and inspection include in particular:

- the extent to which changes in curriculum, assessment and pedagogy are being realised in practice
- their impact on standards
- the renewed emphasis on wellbeing
- the nature of subsidiarity and the greater variation in practice which will arise as a consequence
- forms of collaboration
- alignment of accountability-related expectations and responsibilities
- the role of self-evaluation in a self-improving system
- schools' readiness and capacity to engage with reform

Curriculum, assessment and pedagogy

The aim of the reforms is to create better learning and higher standards within a self-improving system. The new *Curriculum for Wales* will seek to develop young people as successful, capable learners; ethical, informed citizens; enterprising, creative contributors; and healthy, confident individuals. These purposes will govern decisions about content, progression, pedagogy, and assessment.

The scope and depth of the changes both in curriculum and assessment arrangements will pose fresh challenges for schools, inspectors and school inspection. Estyn's new inspection arrangements strengthen the focus on learning and teaching, but they have been developed in the context of a degree of predictability about the school curriculum and its delivery. The significant changes arising from the reforms will require further consideration of how inspectors can evaluate how well the new arrangements are operating in practice and their impact on learners.

Changes in how teachers teach and assess and what and how children learn will lie at the heart of successful realisation of the new curriculum. The elaboration of the four curriculum purposes in each school will lead to changes in pedagogy and assessment, and there will be new structural features in the shape of Areas of Learning and Experience and the three cross curriculum responsibilities.

New inspection criteria and processes will have to examine in some depth the extent to which these changes in curriculum, assessment and pedagogy are reflected in the work of a school in ways that improve the learning and achievement of its pupils. That suggests a deeper and longer engagement with learning and teaching than currently exists, even in the new inspection arrangements. The mix of class observation, learning walks and examination of pupils' work is likely to remain but the depth of analysis of practice will be greater. Existing concerns about the 'snapshot' nature of inspections are likely to be magnified in the emerging context.

Standards

The ultimate tests of the reforms to Welsh education will be the extent to which they lead to higher standards of attainment and more relevant learning for all pupils. At present the definition of 'standards' varies according to who is asking the question. In some cases 'standards' take on a highly specific meaning, focusing on literacy and numeracy and performance in a defined range of national qualifications. PISA is also often cited as a measure of a country's 'standards'. And sometimes the term is used in an omnibus sense to convey a general impression of how well young people are learning.

If the move to a self-improving system is to lead to real improvement for young people then there is a need for agreement on what standards will be used to gauge success. The agreed description of standards needs to reflect the breadth of the four purposes of the new curriculum without losing necessary focus on literacy, numeracy, digital competence and qualifications. Quantitative, qualitative and proxy evidence will have to be agreed as credible indicators of progress. Such agreement and shared understanding will be essential if both internal and external evaluations are to provide a valid 'measure' of that progress.

Wellbeing

The 2015 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act requires public bodies to take into account the impact they could have on people living their lives in Wales in the future. It expects them to:

- work together better
- involve people reflecting the diversity of our communities
- look to the long term as well as focusing on now
- take action to try and stop problems getting worse – or even stop them happening in the first place ⁶⁷

Curriculum for Wales also gives a more prominent place to wellbeing both in its purposes and structurally as a separate and equal Area of Learning and Experience.

This recognition in legislation and in the curriculum reforms of the centrality of wellbeing to children's capacity to learn will have implications for inspection. Current legislation⁶⁸ already requires Estyn to report on the wellbeing of pupils. Estyn's pupil questionnaires are in part a reflection of this duty and the new inspection

⁶⁷ Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/future-generations-act/?lang=en>

⁶⁸ UK Parliament Acts/E/EA-EG/Education Act 2005 (2005 c 18) Chapter 3

arrangements make reference to monitoring of student wellbeing. However, there remains a degree of uncertainty about appropriate levels of expectation in relation to wellbeing across the various organisations involved. There is, for example, a question about how far staff wellbeing should be recognised explicitly in evaluation criteria. The need to be clearer about what is meant by wellbeing is recognised in the government's *Action Plan 2017-21*. There is likely to be a need to develop inspection methodology further to reflect any further guidance on expectations about wellbeing.

Subsidiarity

As indicated earlier, the reform programme is based on the principle of subsidiarity whereby the direct engagement of practitioners is critical to the development of the new curriculum framework and to its subsequent elaboration in schools and classrooms across Wales. The significant implications of this approach to reform for professional learning, leadership and accountability are explicitly recognised in the Welsh Government's *Action Plan 2017-21*.

Estyn's new arrangements have already moved towards a more responsive approach to inspection. Inspectors are asked to take greater account of a school's context and its own self-evaluation in reaching their conclusions. However, there is currently a fairly high degree of predictability in the ways in which schools operate. The reformed system is likely to exhibit greater variability, posing challenges for inspectors who will now have to understand and respond to the particular ways in which schools are making the new curriculum a reality.

Collaboration

The OECD rapid policy assessment report in 2017 stressed the importance of collaboration for the success of the reforms – '*...greater collaboration and trust among stakeholders are essential for realising the country's objective of a self-improving school system*'.⁶⁹

The government's *Action Plan 2017-21* explicitly promotes a 'community of educators' that is 'collaborative and supportive of each other'.⁷⁰ The policy envisages peer-to-peer collaboration within, amongst and beyond schools. The co-construction approach to curriculum reform is a good example of such collaboration. Pioneer schools work together in the design of the new curriculum framework and are also encouraged to engage with 'partner' schools that are not part of the pioneer network.

In addition, transition between stages of education and institutions represents a particular but vital area of collaboration. One of the issues addressed in *Successful Futures* was the interruption to progression in learning across stages and, in particular, between primary and secondary education. Currently, schools are inspected as separate institutions and the inspection process, therefore, does not

⁶⁹ OECD (2017), *The Welsh Education Reform Journey: A rapid policy assessment*. OECD Publishing; Paris page 49

⁷⁰ Welsh Government (2017), *Education in Wales: Our National mission, Action Plan 2017-21*

explicitly evaluate progression across transitions and encourage collaboration across schools or stages.

Estyn commented directly on progress towards collaboration in the HMCI Annual Report 2017⁷¹.

'In each regional consortium there is a strategic approach to changing culture and to making sure that there is a strong commitment to and understanding of what it means to be part of a self-improving system. They have set up structures to encourage and support schools to work in partnership...Another finding in the initial inspections of consortia was that school-to-school learning is not monitored or evaluated carefully enough to ensure that the support provided is having the intended impact and does not have a detrimental impact on the school providing the support.'

Collaboration is therefore one of the central planks of the Welsh Government's reforms. External evaluation and, particularly, inspection should evaluate and promote collaboration, both through its processes and its reports. Cluster or area inspections should be part of any new framework.

Alignment with other forms of accountability

Inspection operates within a wider context of accountability and support. In addition to Estyn's cyclical inspection programme, schools are evaluated through annual categorisation operated by regional consortia and performance measures from the Welsh Government. While serving different purposes, these various forms of public reporting on performance create a pressurised environment for schools.

The Welsh Government's guidance about categorisation makes it clear it 'is not purely data-driven but also takes into account the quality of leadership and teaching and learning in our schools'.⁷² The three-step approach to determining a school's 'category' is described in the guidance.

- **Step one** (no longer published) uses a broad range of performance information from the Welsh Government to inform schools' self-evaluation of their capacity to improve in relation to teaching and learning. It will also form the starting point of discussions between schools and their regional consortium challenge adviser about their performance and areas for improvement.
- **Step two involves** challenge advisers from regional consortia evaluating the school's capacity to improve, taking account of evidence about the standards achieved and the quality of leadership and learning and teaching.
- **Step three sees** the outcomes from step two used to decide on each school's final support category.

The final categorisation is a colour code that shows the level of support a school needs and triggers a tailored programme of support, challenge and intervention. The support categories are green, yellow, amber or red (with the schools in the green

⁷¹ Estyn (2018) *HMCI Annual Report 2016-2017* page 45

⁷² <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/schoolcategorisation/?lang=en>

category needing the least support and those in the red category needing the most intensive support).

The Cabinet Secretary for Education has made it clear that categorisation is intended as a mechanism for determining levels of support for individual schools. In the press release accompanying the 2017 results of categorisation she said, "*This system is not about grading, labelling or creating crude league tables but about providing support and encouraging improvement in our schools*".⁷³ However, it was clear from evidence to the Review that the colour rating of the categorisation process has come to be seen as much as a rating of performance as of support. It can also be compared with published inspection findings, giving rise to possible confusion.

The Welsh Government also compiles and publishes key stage 4 performance measures for secondary schools. These measures can have a significant impact on policy and practice, including a backwash effect into the current key stage 3 that can contribute to a lack of challenge and engagement for pupils. The government has recently recognised some unintended consequences including a narrowing of subject choice as schools focus on those subjects appearing in the measures. In addition, the focus of curriculum planning by schools on a single measure contrasts with the direction of curriculum reform towards its four purposes of education.

It was clear in evidence to the Review that these various sources of accountability lacked coherence. There is considerable scope to establish a more coherent and constructive framework of accountability for schools.

The role of self-evaluation in a self-improving system

The Welsh Government's *Action Plan 2017-21* places a strong emphasis on its desire to develop a learning culture across Welsh education as an essential condition for the full benefits of the new curriculum to be realised for young people in Wales. The essence of that culture will be the capacity of organisations to adapt flexibly and quickly to changing circumstances without the need to wait for external direction, permission or support.

As part of the reform programme, the OECD has been working with schools in Wales to explore the extent to which the key characteristics of learning organisations already exist and the implications for further development. The approach to development has, as with the curriculum, been one of co-construction. The pilot schools are drawn from the set of pioneer schools, working with the new National Academy for Educational Leadership, the Education Directorate and Estyn. A Welsh model of a learning school has been developed that includes implications for self-evaluation and development planning. Establishing self-evaluation as a 'built in' rather than a 'bolt on' will be integral to success.

Research evidence suggests that the combination of internal and external evaluation can be a powerful component in successful school improvement.⁷⁴ For all Welsh schools to be learning organisations there will need to be a common understanding about self-evaluation and its role in organisational learning. Equally, external

⁷³ <https://gov.wales/newsroom/educationandskills/2017/latest-categorisation-figures-show-school-improvement/?lang=en>

⁷⁴ OECD (2013). *Synergies for Better Learning*. OECD Publishing, Paris

evaluation criteria and approaches should form part of a common language of quality, understood and embraced at all levels in the system.

Success will depend on establishing the nature of the relationship between external and internal evaluation. Alvik⁷⁵ distinguishes between three forms of that relationship:

- parallel – in which the two systems run side-by-side, each with their own criteria and protocols
- sequential – in which external bodies follow on from a school's own evaluation and use that as the focus of their quality assurance system
- co-operative – in which external agencies co-operate with schools to develop a common approach to evaluation

The logic of the self-improving system policy in Wales points to a co-operative relationship. Parallel and sequential approaches give primacy to external evaluation with the attendant consequences for compliance and conservatism.

In the co-operative approach, external evaluation should provide a different and more objective perspective on the work of a school together with an assessment of its capacity to improve. Where internal evaluation is robust and has integrity and focuses on learning and development, it will provide a deeper and more developed evidence base for determining priorities than can be derived from the relatively short window available to inspection. It should also secure commitment to act, rather than (sometimes reluctant) compliance with external prescription. Such approaches are already in operation in a number of countries, including in New Zealand and Scotland.

In New Zealand, school self-review and external school review are complementary. The Education Review Office (ERO) guides schools towards continuous improvement within which they systematically evaluate their practice, using indicators as a framework for inquiry and employing a repertoire of analytical and formative tools.

In Scotland, the inspectorate has promoted self-evaluation since the early 1990s based on a set of quality indicators⁷⁶ used for both internal and external evaluation. External inspections build from school self-evaluation and report on four quality indicators: Leadership of Change; Learning, Teaching and Assessment; Raising Attainment and Achievement; and Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion. The results of the inspection are communicated to parents in the form of a letter rather than a formal report.

Scotland has also introduced a form of validated self-evaluation (VSE) in its inspections of local authorities. In VSE, inspectors work alongside local authority staff, seeking to:

- build the capacity of education authorities to evaluate their own performance
- improve the quality of services and outcomes for learners

⁷⁵ Alvik, T. (1996) *School Self-Evaluation: A Whole School Approach* quoted in OECD (2013) *op cit*

⁷⁶ Education Scotland (2015) *How Good Is Our School*

- promote and develop good practice and best value in education authorities
- provide information to Scottish Ministers and the public on the quality of provision in education authorities
- offer independent evaluation and validation
- contribute to a reduction in external scrutiny at service level where possible, taking account of risk, and provide high quality and robust information for shared risk assessment

Estyn has also been promoting self-evaluation and giving it an increasingly prominent place in its inspection framework. The new inspection arrangements represent a further significant move in this direction. Estyn's guidance on self-evaluation, although not compulsory, is seen as being particularly important by schools.

The Welsh Government has recognised the potentially significant implications for self-evaluation inherent in its aspirations. It is committed to clarifying the roles of external and internal evaluation in an assessment and evaluation framework for the entire education system. It has therefore asked Estyn and OECD to jointly explore the creation of a national framework of self-evaluation.

Schools' readiness and capacity to engage with reform

The reforms will pose significant challenges for all levels of the Welsh education system. Current evaluations of school leadership in Estyn's inspections suggest that secondary schools in particular will need to 'up their game' if they are to make a success of the reforms.

*"In a quarter of primary schools and four-in-ten secondary schools, leadership requires improvement. In these schools, there is a lack of strategic direction that focuses on improving outcomes for pupils. Leaders have not established a culture of professional learning where staff have open and honest discussions about their own practice and its impact on pupil learning and outcomes. Leaders in these schools do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of what good quality teaching and professional practice look like. As a result of these shortcomings, leaders are not well prepared for their role in supporting teachers to improve their practice."*⁷⁷

Leadership and readiness for reform should therefore be an important point of focus for both internal and external evaluation in Wales. Estyn's findings on school leadership also have significant implications for the kind of support, guidance, professional development and capacity building that will be necessary to underpin the reform process.

⁷⁷ Estyn (2018) *HMCI Annual Report 2016-2017* page 49



5 Future school inspection

As discussed in the previous chapter, the characteristics of the reform agenda in Wales have major implications for the role and purpose of school inspection. This section draws together these factors and identifies criteria for designing future inspection models. It then outlines possible changes to school inspection in the short, medium and longer term. The proposals take account of strengths and perceived shortcomings in current inspections and also the characteristics of the reform.

The main questions relating to the reforms that need to be addressed by Estyn and wider accountability arrangements include the following.

- What differences are the new curriculum and assessment arrangements and their implications for pedagogy making to the quality of the experience of and the standards achieved by young people in Wales?
- To what extent are teachers and school leaders exercising / being allowed to exercise the level of decision making promoted in the reforms?
- How far is there a real culture of learning, collaboration and self-evaluation in Welsh school education?
- And, most important, is Welsh school education getting better as a result of the reforms?

To help to answer these questions, inspection should:

- evaluate the extent to which the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales are being realised
- set high expectations and evaluate the standards achieved
- focus on the quality of the curriculum and learning and teaching in relation to all pupils
- evaluate pupils' wellbeing and how well all pupils are included in the life and work of the school
- build confidence and capacity and affirm good practice
- promote professional and organisational learning
- evaluate and facilitate collaboration
- evaluate and support well-judged innovation
- build capacity for self evaluation and ultimately be founded upon secure self-evaluation in schools
- have both a quantitative and a qualitative evidence base

And so:

- leave a positive way forward that signals improvement
- give parents and wider stakeholders assurance about the quality of the school their children attend
- give the different levels of government assurance about the quality of schools and the impact of policy, including readiness for and progress with reform

Evidence gathered in the course of the Review highlights a number of aspects of the current approach to inspection that already reflect the emerging context. School inspection provides independent assurance in the form of straightforward judgements by inspection teams about the quality of a school and the standards being achieved. Inspection processes also provide important insights into the factors influencing the learning of the pupils. In particular, a vital strength of inspection is its focus on learning and teaching through direct observation of practice and examination of pupils' work. The direct involvement of peer and nominee inspectors both enhances the collective expertise and experience of the inspection team and helps to build capacity across the system.

The Review envisages a way forward for the evolving context of the reforms, one that extends the thinking of Estyn itself in its new arrangements while also addressing some of the perceived current shortcomings of inspection. Any new approach to inspection will require a radical shift in both philosophy and practice to establish inspection firmly at the heart of the more dynamic educational culture envisaged in the national education reform programme. However, changes to inspection will be undermined without complementary, aligned changes in the wider accountability culture.

The essence of the new approach lies in the goal of a self-improving system. Such a system implies reciprocal accountability^{78 79} whereby both the schools and those who set the context for the work of schools have inherent rights and responsibilities. If inspection is to contribute positively to such a system it needs to combine scrutiny/assurance with capacity building.

The Welsh Government needs assurance that the system as a whole is meeting policy expectations, is itself continuing to improve, and that the various levels of delivery are working well. Local authorities and regional consortia need assurance that their schools are serving young people well and areas of concern are being identified and remedied. Schools need assurance that they are meeting national, local and parental expectations well and that those expectations are matched by appropriate external conditions for their achievement. Parents, families and the young people themselves need assurance that the school is providing a high quality learning experience geared to high achievement. And all stakeholders need to be assured that inspection will also be able to identify where a school is failing to meet the needs of its pupils so that it can improve.

As we have seen, if assurance is translated into 'high-stakes' consequences then many of the essential elements of self-improvement may be compromised. Accountability in general and inspection in particular must exercise their assurance functions in ways that encourage the providers of education to take direct responsibility for their own quality improvement while retaining necessary safeguards where schools prove unable or unwilling to take such responsibility.

⁷⁸ Elmore, R (2007) *School Reform from the Inside Out* Harvard Education Press pages 244-253

⁷⁹ Leeuw F. (2002) *Reciprocity and Educational Evaluations by European Inspectorates: assumptions and reality checks*. Quality in Higher Education, Vol 8, No. 2

Experience in Ireland provides some insights into how the assurance/improvement balance can be addressed. The Irish Inspectorate's functions are similar to those of Estyn. It provides an assurance of quality and public accountability in the education system; carries out inspections in schools and centres for education; conducts national evaluations; and publishes inspection reports on individual schools and centres for education. However, it has a more explicit advisory role to promote best practice and school improvement by advising teachers, principals and boards of management in schools. Its inspection reports use a continuum of descriptions of quality in the text, not headline gradings, reducing somewhat the focus on these as the 'high stakes' outcome of the process.

If schools are to be the prime movers in their own improvement, there needs to be a greatly strengthened role for self-evaluation within the context of schools developing as learning organisations. The challenge is to establish an approach to self-evaluation that does not become bureaucratic and 'paper' intensive. The approach must also encourage a focus on learning and improvement. Self-evaluation should, therefore, be about seeking to understand the school and its pupils, using evidence of practice to identify existing strengths and areas for development. It should employ the language of learning and of priorities. It is essential that it does not become a process of self-grading or even self-justification.

Self-evaluation requires an element of external perspective if it is to benefit from necessary challenge and not be compromised by the interests and experience of those most directly involved. That external perspective could come from three sources.

- From a pool of peer reviewers, trained by Estyn with support from the regional consortia. Unlike the current requirements for peer inspectors, schools could work with locally based peer reviewers on a collaborative basis. They could bring specialist knowledge beyond that which resides in a school alone as well as acting as a sounding board and critical friend.
- From regional consortia challenge advisers or their successors who could provide regular support and challenge to the process.
- Estyn inspectors could play both a formal and an informal part in the process. The formal role would be as part of a form of validated self-evaluation process, described below. In addition, inspectors could relate to regional groupings of schools along the lines of the District Inspector role that was an established feature of HMI work in the past. Less formal engagement by inspectors would probably mean that Estyn would have to move to a more dispersed workforce model.

Fundamentally, however, the school needs to be in the lead if self-evaluation is to become established within the self-improving system.

Proposals for the development of school inspection

A major concern expressed to the Review related to the potential impact of inspection as schools engage with reforms. Staff in schools and more widely

frequently indicated that confusion between the aims of the reforms and the perceived focus of inspection would inhibit them from engaging fully with reform. The proposals below, including a substantial shift of Estyn activity from the existing inspection programme for an initial period, would help to address these concerns and reinforce the need for schools to concentrate on reform.

The Review envisages a three-phase approach, designed to reflect and support the maturation of the reform. Each of the phases would retain Estyn's role of providing credible independent assurance. At the same time, the proposals recognise that schools will be working through different stages of a fundamental change process and will differ in how they approach change as well as in their capacity to carry out the changes. Each phase would also seek to address the risks associated with 'high-stakes' accountability.

Importantly, the moves from one phase to the next would be informed by evidence from Estyn about schools' response to the reforms.

Phase 1

Estyn's activities during this phase would recognise the scale of the expectations being placed on schools by the reform agenda, and would therefore focus on both supporting and evaluating the reform process. It would also allow Estyn inspectors to develop their own understanding of the reforms in greater depth.

During this phase:

- Inspectors would visit and engage with development in clusters of schools as part of a broader strategy of collaboration and professional learning, to support the curriculum reforms as they move from design to realisation. A co-ordinated programme of engagement could be agreed at the level of the regional consortia.
- Inspection activity should allow evidence about progress with the reforms to be gathered quickly to inform decisions about any necessary adjustments.
- Estyn would support the shift towards a self-improving system by supporting the development of new approaches to self-evaluation, including professional development for peer inspectors and school staff.
- Estyn would ensure that inspectors themselves develop the necessary understanding and expertise that the reforms are seeking to promote.
- To release the necessary resources for all of these activities, the existing cycle of inspection would be suspended, so enabling the necessary learning and adjustments to procedures.
- An appropriate form of inspection would still be carried out in cases where there were identified concerns about the quality of education or safeguarding in a school. These inspections would be designed to diagnose and help to address the issues of concern. Schools currently in follow-up would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

- Thematic inspection activity would continue in order to ensure ongoing system monitoring. Themes would be selected to allow inspectors to gather first-hand evidence and report on progress with the reform programme and emerging practice in the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.
- The timing and length of the redirection of inspection would be aligned with the planned rollout of the reforms. On the current plans, the proposed redirection would probably last throughout the 2019-2020 school session.
- The underlying message would be that significant progress would be expected when a full programme of inspection resumed, albeit in a new form, more fully aligned with the intentions of the reforms.

Phase 2

In this phase, an inspection cycle would resume, building on the new inspection arrangements introduced in 2017 but with a number of significant adjustments. In the detailed planning for this phase, Estyn would continue to gather evidence on the standards and quality of school education but with a stronger focus on progress with the reforms. There would be raised expectations about self-evaluation.

Estyn would take account of the evidence gathered during phase 1 to tailor the inspection activities during this phase, enabling it to adjust the balance of its inspections in response to emerging issues.

In significant change from existing procedures, evaluations would be embedded in the narrative of the text, not in the form of headline gradings.

Inspections (and school self-evaluation) should be designed to address the following questions:

- How well is the school engaging with the purposes of the Curriculum for Wales?
- How well are pupils progressing in their learning and achieving appropriately high standards?
- How well developed are the fundamental building blocks for learning?
 - the breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum
 - the quality of learning and teaching
 - the wellbeing of all pupils
- How well does the school use self-evaluation and professional learning to identify its current strengths and set priorities for development?

During this phase:

- Inspections would relate more directly to the new national model of school self-evaluation currently in development and, through professional dialogue between staff and inspectors, would be designed to help to build schools' capacity for self-evaluation.

- Reporting would broadly follow the responsive approach of Estyn's new inspection arrangements, but with a stronger focus on progress with the reforms and on schools' capacity to undertake self-evaluation, as outlined in the questions above.
- Evaluations would be described in the text with no headline gradings, to seek to reduce the negative effects of current 'high-stakes' reporting. Descriptions in the text would better reflect the trajectory of improvement. Learning is a dynamic process, not fixed at a particular point in time as implied by headline gradings. The move would also encourage greater attention to vital underlying factors contributing to the quality and impact of the school's activities.
- The report narrative should identify strengths, issues and areas for development and improvement clearly. Such an approach is consistent with the policy goals of promoting a self-improving and learning system.
- The ways in which evaluations are described in the text will need careful consideration. The approach currently employed by the Irish inspectorate of a 'quality continuum' that allows a fuller, more balanced description to be given, might offer a model for consideration. However, a challenge will be to be clear about evaluation without simply relocating headline gradings into the text.
- The removal of headline grading in inspection reports would be reflected in changes to the role of regional consortia and, in particular, to methods of determining support through a reformed categorisation model.
- Thematic inspection activity would continue as in phase 1, to ensure ongoing system monitoring and specific evidence relating to themes of particular relevance and interest.
- The evidence gained during this phase would enable Estyn to gain an overview of schools' capacity for self-evaluation to inform phase 3, particularly decisions about 'earned autonomy' proposed below.

Phase 3

This phase represents the full operation of the self-improving system principles, building from phase 2 and allowing inspections to predominantly operate on the basis of validated self-evaluation. It would represent a major change to accountability and inspection, consistent with a self-improving system.

As schools mature in their capacity to engage openly and constructively in self-evaluation, the role of external individuals and bodies should be to provide perspectives that probe and extend internal judgements. Not all schools will arrive at this point at the same time and this phase should therefore be introduced at a pace that matches confidence in progress towards a self-improving system. Its early stages should be based on 'earned autonomy' principles meaning that schools in phase 2 that demonstrated that they were progressing very well towards being learning organisations with appropriate self-evaluation should move to a validated approach from Estyn. Adoption of the approach universally is likely to take some time.

In this phase the new approach would have the following elements.

- Each school would have a duty to evaluate itself according to a nationally agreed framework that would sit within the wider context of schools as learning organisations.
- Estyn would formally work alongside schools in their self-evaluation process on an agreed cycle, enabling it to validate (or not) the school's self-evaluation process. This would allow Estyn to give assurance to parents and the wider community about the integrity of the self-evaluation process, about the standards being achieved and about priorities for further improvement.
- Estyn's activities during the validated self-evaluation would, in addition to analysis of relevant documentation and questionnaires, be based on first-hand evidence whereby inspectors would assess learning and teaching and other key aspects of a school's work in line with the phase 2 questions outlined above. It would require new, flexible inspection methods and might, for example, include an inspector and member of the school's staff jointly observing learning and teaching and/or exploring evidence for pupil assessment.
- Self-evaluation would relate directly to the four national curriculum purposes and include areas that Estyn is statutorily required to report on. The main focus of the self-evaluation would be the learning, experience, achievement and wellbeing of the pupils.
- Schools would have a duty to report publicly, in an agreed form, on the findings of their self-evaluation. The self-evaluation would not grade in terms of existing evaluative labels but would determine where the school is currently strong and where there is a need for change or improvement.
- Estyn would report publicly on an agreed cycle on its confidence in the self-evaluation process and the school's findings. That confidence would be expressed in the form of degrees of confidence, similar to those used in financial audit: fully confident; partially confident; not confident.
- Schools would be expected to work with peer reviewers, trained by Estyn with support from regional consortia, in reaching their view about strengths, the issues the school is facing, and areas for development.
- Regional consortia staff would engage routinely with the school in its self-evaluation and support the school in the pursuance of its priorities for development.
- Where the quality of school's provision and outcomes for its pupils, or its self-evaluation process, gave cause for significant concern, the school would receive a diagnostic inspection with the option of instituting targeted procedures similar to current special measures.
- Inspections could also be initiated following substantiated and substantial complaints.
- Estyn thematic inspections and reporting would continue as previously.

The advantages of the recommended approach would be:

- 1 It would reaffirm the responsibility of the school to know itself and to engage proactively in its own improvement. There would be a significantly reduced incentive to be driven by perceived external requirements.
- 2 It would place a much greater professional focus on the learning and experiences of young people and away from simple grading. The overall goal would be to learn from evidence and take action to improve rather than to seek to present the school positively to external evaluators.
- 3 It would provide a more continuous and timely form of reporting to parents and the wider community.
- 4 It would encourage greater alignment with the reform agenda, allow a more comprehensive approach to professional and organisational learning and encourage collaboration amongst schools and external bodies, including regional consortia and Estyn.
- 5 It would allow Estyn to combine its assurance role with a more direct contribution to improvement. Assurance would be more reliable because it would derive from a more developed body of evidence less liable to the distorting effects of grading.
- 6 It could release resource within Estyn to undertake more thematic work in pursuance of the national reform agenda.

While the recommended approach has the potential to locate Estyn more centrally in the national reform programme, it also carries a number of risks.

- 1 It requires a shift in culture away from one in which all schools are driven extensively by external pressure to one in which the schools themselves take greater ownership of improvement. Necessary changes in culture and practice would not necessarily happen quickly. The principle of 'earned autonomy' would provide an important incentive to demonstrate effective self-evaluation.
- 2 The changes could prove difficult to communicate to a non-professional audience. In particular, parents and others have become used to graded evaluations and may be concerned that the changes will disguise weakness. The message that this process provides more robust evidence and is more likely to lead to real improvement would need to be communicated clearly.
- 3 Self-evaluation could become bureaucratic and/or an end in itself, absorbing energy and detracting from the mission of the school and actions that might yield greater benefits for its pupils. Self-evaluation should be integral to successful improvement and not an add-on.
- 4 The process will require significant investment in building professional expertise and understanding of self-evaluation amongst all staff, at a time when they will also be building their professional expertise in curriculum development, pedagogy and assessment.

- 5 The external inputs could prove either ineffectual or too dominant, depending on the approach adopted by those involved and the leadership and culture of the school. The involvement of Estyn and the regional consortia in training peer reviewers should take note of such concerns.

It would be essential to plan and monitor mitigating actions to address these and other risks before moving fully to phase 3. Estyn would have an important role in identifying any emerging issues of concern and advising on actions in response.

Underperforming schools

Under any new system of inspection, the need to identify and act in relation to schools that give cause for serious concern will remain. The proposed changes to school inspection will require a modified approach to the identification of and requirements placed on underperforming schools.

Estyn's August 2017 guidance outlines the current approach to follow up.⁸⁰

There are currently three types of follow-up activity:

- 1 Estyn review (formerly Estyn monitoring)
- 2 Significant improvement
- 3 Special measures

The 'Estyn review' in its former guise as 'Estyn monitoring' required continued engagement, including visits, with a significant number of schools after they had been inspected. However, the arrangements from the 2017-2018 session have been modified to allow a more flexible response to schools in this category. Twenty-two per cent of primary schools and 20% of secondary schools were followed-up in this way in 2016-2017.⁸¹

'Significant (or focused) improvement' and 'special measures' are statutory categories that apply to schools causing concern as defined by the Education Act 2005 and associated circulars. Around 5% of all inspections lead to statutory follow-up, ranging in 2016-2017 from 4% of primary schools to 23% of secondary schools.⁸² The Estyn guidance specifies that, during all core inspections, the inspection team will consider whether the school needs any follow-up activity. Decisions about a category are based on the judgements in the five inspection areas. The team is required to consider whether the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and if the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

⁸⁰ Estyn (2017) Follow-up Guidance for schools and inspectors August 2017

⁸¹ Estyn (2017) *Annual Report and Accounts*, page 15

⁸² *ibid*, page 15

If a school is judged to be in need of significant improvement, the school should work with the local authority to address the weaknesses. Estyn inspectors will visit the school in the term after publication of the report to evaluate the school's post-inspection action plan (PIAP) and the local authority's statement of action. About 12-18 months after the publication of the report, Estyn will undertake a monitoring visit to the school to evaluate progress and determine what, if any, further action may be needed.

Schools identified as in need of special measures during a core inspection are likely to have many areas of their work requiring improvement. In particular, inspectors must judge whether the school leadership is thought to be capable of securing the necessary improvement in the school.

“Inspectors must give particular consideration to identifying the school as needing special measures when the judgement for inspection area 5, leadership and management, is ‘unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement’.”⁸³

When a school is placed in special measures, a detailed set of procedures is set in train. The PIAP remains a main point of focus throughout. Requirements for reporting and the timing and length of inspection visits are specified in detail together with related activities.

The proportions of schools requiring some form of follow-up after an inspection vary by sector but are very high. Over the 2010-2017 period⁸⁴ only 50% of primary schools and 34% of secondary schools were not in some form of monitoring post-inspection. In terms of statutory categories, 3% of primaries were in need of significant improvement and 3% were in special measures. The secondary figures were significantly higher with 10% in need of significant improvement and 8% in special measures while, in special schools, the figures were 4% and 2%.

In the schools placed in special measures, serious shortcomings have usually been identified in the quality of leadership and management. Schools that move out of a follow-up category often have significant improvements in teaching and learning, ‘...supported by the strengthening of leadership at all levels to ensure robust self-evaluation, improvement planning and line management arrangements’.⁸⁵

Evidence of current performance across the education system in Wales does not suggest that the rigour of the current follow-up process should be lessened. Indeed, the reform programme will place additional demands on schools, particularly those judged already to be in need of improvement. The principle of following-up schools giving concern should therefore be retained.

The form of the follow-up process is, however, likely to need to be reviewed. While much of the existing guidance will continue to be relevant, the proposal in the Review to move away from headline grades will require a different basis for determining

⁸³ *ibid*, page 6

⁸⁴ Estyn (2018) *HMCI Annual Report 2016-2017*

⁸⁵ *ibid*, page 91

follow-up. There will also, for example, be scope for less extensive direct involvement of Estyn as the more collaborative self-evaluation process takes root.

The nature of any revised follow-up process will need to relate to the validation process or other indicators that suggest significant shortcomings. For example, where the validated self-evaluation process gives rise to evidence of serious concern the inspectors involved could then ask HMCI to order a diagnostic inspection. In line with the need for tailored support highlighted in the Challenge Cymru evaluation⁸⁶, diagnostic inspection should be more developed and deeper than current inspection arrangements in order to allow a clear agenda for improvement to be established.

Improvement conferences, a relatively new feature of the local authority inspection process, could enhance the effectiveness of follow up. Their purpose is to support a local authority to improve its education services with a focus on the authority's improvement plans. During the improvement conference, barriers to progress are identified and possible ways forward and attendant risks explored.⁸⁷

*'Inspectors...seek assurance from senior officers and members that the authority and its consortium understands and takes shared responsibility for the issues that are resulting in poor performance. During the conference, we check that the authority has coherent plans to improve, has sufficient resources to implement its plans and has rigorous processes in place to monitor and evaluate their impact. The implementation of the plans is then monitored by the local authority link inspectors during their visits to the local authorities.'*⁸⁸

An approach similar to local authority improvement conferences could enhance the effectiveness of follow-up of schools identified as underperforming in the proposed new school inspection process.

In the evidence to the Review, there were concerns that the current school follow-up process was too mechanistic and did not allow sufficient flexibility in helping schools to improve. One of the responses to the Call for Evidence echoed concerns about the process expressed directly during the Review.

*"As a teacher in a school in special measures having had 10 Estyn visits in 7 years I am pondering the impact they have had in the education of our children. This number of visits has caused nothing but work-related stress resulting in a very transient staff, which does not have any positive impact on our children's education."*⁸⁹ (Parent/Governor/Teacher/Other Educational Professional)

Decisions about the precise nature of follow-up will require serious consideration in the moves to a self-improving system, particularly if the recommendations in this

⁸⁶ Welsh Government (2017) *Assessing the contribution of Schools Challenge Cymru to outcomes achieved by Pathways to Success schools*. Social Research Number: 38/2017

⁸⁷ Estyn (2016) Improvement Conference Guidance

⁸⁸ Estyn (2018) *HMCI Annual Report 2016-2017* page 142

⁸⁹ Taylor C., Power S., Powell R., (2018) *Independent Review of Estyn's Contribution to Wales's Education Reform Programme*, WISERD, Cardiff University page 10

Review are accepted. Such consideration should seek to reduce the formulaic nature of the existing process, build on validated self-evaluation and create a better balance between Estyn and local government engagement in the process.

Summary

The proposed new model of school inspection and follow-up would have the following features.

- All schools would have a responsibility to self-evaluate in line with national guidance.
- Self-evaluation would be supported, as appropriate, by peer reviewers, regional consortia staff and/or local inspectors from Estyn.
- Estyn and regional consortia would train the pool of peer reviewers.
- Estyn would formally undertake activities with schools to validate (or otherwise) their self-evaluation process on an agreed cycle and publish its conclusions on the quality of the school's self-evaluation process.
- Follow-up of schools giving cause for serious concern would remain. The nature of that follow-up would change and become more flexible and tailored to reflect the new context.
- Schools currently in the categories of significant improvement and special measures would continue to be directly monitored by Estyn.
- Schools giving cause for concern in the new process would be subject to a diagnostic inspection prior to being put into special measures.

Wider implications for system evaluation are covered in the next chapter of this report.



6 System-level evaluation

In line with an OECD recommendation, the Welsh Government is committed to developing an '*evaluation and assessment Framework for the entire system, showing what each component part of the system is responsible for, ensuring that responsibilities are appropriately distributed and accountabilities clearly identified in order to embed collaboration and raise standards for all our learners*'.⁹⁰ System-level evaluation will be an important part of such a framework.

Current system-level evaluation

The Education Directorate currently gathers performance data that are published on the All Wales Core Data Sets, on My Local School and in statistical reports. Wales participates in the OECD's PISA surveys, providing international comparisons of performance in language, mathematics and science on a three-yearly cycle. In addition, the Welsh Government has engaged directly with the OECD, inviting it to undertake two policy evaluations in 2014 and 2017 and to investigate the extent to which Welsh schools were developing as learning organisations.

Wales also participates in international conferences and collaborations, notably in the recent Atlantic Rim Collaboratory involving Ministerial and senior policy officials in exchanges with leading academics around issues of equity, excellence, wellbeing, inclusion, democracy and human rights.

The Welsh Government has also from time to time commissioned system-level reviews in response to specific policy issues. In addition to this review of Estyn, Robert Hill's review of the future of the delivery of education services in Wales and the *Successful Futures* report on the curriculum would both be examples of this approach to system-level evaluation.

Estyn currently makes a number of important contributions to the evaluation of Welsh education at the system level. The most obvious contribution is through annual HMCI reports that give an overview of inspection evidence in the previous year together with a commentary from the Chief Inspector. These reports are laid before the Assembly and discussed by Assembly members, notably in the Education and Skills Committee. HMCI also meets periodically with the Cabinet Secretary for Education.

Estyn's thematic reports address system-level issues, providing both policy feedback and insights into good practice in the areas selected for investigation. In addition, Estyn staff, particularly senior staff, contribute to policy discussions and participate in educational conferences and events.

Taken together these various forms of system evaluation provide important insights into the performance of Welsh education. However, they operate largely

⁹⁰ Welsh Government (2017), *Education in Wales: Our National mission, Action Plan 2017-21*, page 37

independently of each other and there is no regular comprehensive overview that establishes a picture of the 'state of the nation educationally'. As a result there can be a rather disjointed, episodic response to evaluation, running the risk of short-term political responses that could undermine the longer-term improvement strategy.

Enhanced contribution from HMCI Report

The OECD, in its 2013 international overview of evaluation and assessment⁹¹, identifies a number of 'pointers' for a national evaluation and assessment framework, including that it should:

- embody a broad concept of what should be included with a varied set of qualitative and quantitative evidence
- lead to an annual report on how far system objectives are being met
- include a national strategy to monitor student learning standards
- monitor equity issues
- promote the development of evaluation capacity
- ensure objectivity and credibility in education system evaluation

Estyn already satisfies to varying degrees all of the 'pointers' listed above and is well placed to make an important contribution to the framework. Its annual HMCI report provides an overview of institutional, area and thematic inspection evidence, both qualitative and quantitative. Its questionnaires issued as part of inspections provide broader stakeholder information. The HMCI commentary provides a highly credible professional view of implications for policy and practice. The report is independent of the Education Directorate, local government and schools. It routinely covers issues of equity. And the inspection process and the training of peer inspectors promote the development of evaluative capacity in the system.

While HMCI reports do not impact widely on teachers and schools, there was strong support from some quarters⁹² for their value.

'Identifying trends, key messages, areas of concern.' (Headteacher)

'Find it extremely helpful, focuses on current issues' (Headteacher)

'A very clear and attractive summary of key messages and evidence. Very accessible.' (Teacher)

'This report is very useful as it identifies 'hot topics' – the areas of strength and weakness from all primary inspections. We use the report as Senior Leaders to self-check our own processes. A good example would be the focus on the impact of professional development and teacher research in the 2015/16 report. We made some changes our CPD offer and we know that we need to support staff in a more structured way around a small-scale research projects.' (On behalf of school)

⁹¹ OECD (2013). *Synergies for Better Learning*. OECD Publishing, Paris. Pages 640-648

⁹² Taylor C., Power S., Powell R., (2018) *Independent Review of Estyn's Contribution to Wales's Education Reform Programme*, WISERD, Cardiff University, pages 32 & 33

'This report highlights what is good and what is wrong with education. It gives school leaders and others the right messages pointing them in the right direction.' (Interested member of the public)

The most recent HMCI report looks at messages from the cycle as a whole, providing an insight into the potential for a more comprehensive approach. The role of the HMCI Annual Report could be further enhanced if its range of evidence was extended.

- At present the report is constrained by an annual sample that is conditioned to a significant extent by the cyclical approach to inspection. However, the proposals for school inspection made by the Review create the possibility for a more representative body of evidence to be deployed.
- The evidence in the report could be further strengthened if it went beyond inspected schools and thematic reviews. Inspection evidence could be complemented by research findings and could also draw on experience elsewhere in the United Kingdom and internationally. Estyn's membership of SICI, the international organisation of education inspectorates, could contribute to such an international perspective.
- The report could also draw on the sample test programme proposed in Successful Futures and accepted by the Welsh Government as an essential component of an intelligent approach to accountability. This is likely to involve a rolling programme of sample-based testing across different schools, stages and aspects of the curriculum and allow system-level evaluation of standards without the distorting effects of 'high stakes' testing of the cohort as a whole. Estyn's overview of system performance should include an explicit commentary on the implications of such sample test evidence.
- HMCI reports already make reference to the implications of PISA results for Wales. However, the power of PISA lies more in the detail of what it can reveal about the factors influencing performance than in its high-profile comparative rankings of countries. Estyn is very well placed to draw out such messages and to set them alongside its other evidence of performance.

Hitherto, HMCI reports have been comprehensive in their coverage of a year's evidence but Estyn is already considering a more focused approach to these reports. As the nature and purpose of the proposed evaluation and assessment framework becomes clearer the future pattern of reporting should be considered. The frequency of comprehensive reporting could be reduced to match the rhythm of the evidence cycle. A three-year 'state of the nation' report, for example, could provide a very substantial evidence base that included the latest evidence from PISA. Annual reporting could then be more targeted towards key current matters of policy and practice. In the next few years, for example, reports that focused on progress with the reforms could make an important contribution to their success. These findings, including findings from research, could act as a powerful feedback loop for those who are orchestrating the various interlinked components of the reforms, including decisions about the implications of the different phases of reform for inspection. In particular, they could inform priorities in initial teacher education and continuing professional development for teachers.

Thematic reports

Estyn's thematic reporting provides evaluative overviews of key aspects of policy and practice in Wales. These reports were commented on very positively to the Review. In the Call for Evidence, "...most of the responses mentioned that thematic reports are important because they enable good practice to be shared between education providers".⁹³

*"Having received a thematic inspection, the feedback was worthwhile – very positive experience. Thematic reports are regularly used e.g. to identify best practice which can be shared with staff."*⁹⁴ (On behalf of school)

*"These are very useful and give an insight into best practice. These provide useful information as part of a school's research into school improvement. These allow improving schools to link with high performing schools to share good practice. It supports self-improvement through school to school working."*⁹⁵ (Other Education Professional)

At present the programme of thematic reviews is agreed with the Education Directorate and confirmed in the form of a 'remit letter'. This process appears to work well. However, given the importance of these reviews the process by which the programme is finalised should fit within a longer-term, strategic view of priorities. Such a strategic approach could be facilitated with a more inclusive consultation process. The Review therefore recommends that Estyn and the Education Directorate should explore ways in which greater stakeholder engagement could be developed within a longer-term programme of thematic reviews.

⁹³ *ibid*, page 28

⁹⁴ *ibid*, page 28

⁹⁵ *ibid*, page 28

7 Wider issues

A number of wider issues stem from the evidence to the Review and from its recommendations. These relate to:

- governance and independence
- funding
- synergies across Estyn's responsibilities
- implications for other forms of accountability and support
- future staffing
- inspection of sixth forms
- local authority and regional consortia inspections
- Estyn's self-evaluation

Governance and independence

Estyn is a non-ministerial civil service department that is independent of but funded by the Welsh Government under section 104 of the Government of Wales Act 1998. HMCI is responsible for the overall organisation, management and staffing of Estyn and for its procedures in financial and other matters, including conduct and discipline. HMCI has the general duty of keeping Welsh Ministers informed about the discharge of his responsibilities and has the right to provide advice to Welsh Ministers on any matter connected with activities within his or her remit.

A governance framework describes the '...systems, processes, culture and values by which Estyn is directed and controlled and by which Estyn monitors the achievement of our strategic objectives and engagement with our stakeholders'.⁹⁶

Internally, Estyn has a Strategy Board and an Executive Board. The Strategy Board has two sub-committees: the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee and the Remuneration Committee. An Annual Plan outlines Estyn's overarching vision, sets out its principal aims and objectives and is subject to approval by the First Minister.

The Strategy Board is chaired by HMCI and its membership consists of Estyn's two Strategic Directors, the Corporate Services Director and three non-executive directors (NED). The NEDs do not have a decision-making role. They are not employees of Estyn and are accountable to HMCI, as the Accounting Officer.

The purpose of the Strategic Board is to establish and monitor Estyn's strategic agenda, to promote effective corporate governance and to advise on Estyn's development so as to ensure its wellbeing and continued improvement as an employer and as a high-profile public service.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Estyn (2016) *Estyn's Corporate Governance Framework*

⁹⁷ *ibid*

The Executive Board is also chaired by HMCI and, in addition to the Strategic and Corporate Services Directors, is attended by an assistant director on a rotational basis. Its purpose is ‘to support and assist HMCI in leading and managing Estyn in accordance with the principles of good corporate governance, internal control and risk management’.⁹⁸

Estyn is subject to external audit review by the Wales Audit Office (WAO). In addition to auditing the Annual Report and Accounts, the WAO also has the right to conduct value for money examinations into aspects of any activities as appropriate.

These governance arrangements provide a good basis for the internal management of Estyn. Sound governance includes balancing the contributions of executive and non-executive roles. In particular, main boards are often chaired by someone outside the permanent staff of an organisation. Discussions with non-executive directors suggest that the current arrangement whereby HMCI chairs the Strategy Board is working well. However, such arrangements should not be subject to the particular personalities and circumstances of the day. Consideration should therefore be given, in due course, to having a non-executive chair of the Strategy Board.

Equally, the nature of Estyn’s relationship to ministers in the Welsh Government is not defined and is therefore also subject to the particular circumstances of the day. In particular, the relationship between HMCI and senior civil servants will strongly affect the ways in which Estyn can contribute to the development of policy.

Estyn’s status as a non-ministerial department leaves a degree of ambiguity about its link to ministers. Evidence-informed policy-making in government should mean that the wealth of evidence and advice emanating from Estyn has a secure place in the policy process. It was clear to the Review that, while existing procedures and relationships were positive, that need not always be the case. There is therefore a strong case for a Framework Agreement to be developed that sets out the basis on which the place of such independent professional advice to ministers can be secured.

Funding

Current funding arrangements are designed to help safeguard the independence of Estyn. Its funding is currently not provided from the department with which it is most closely associated (Education Directorate). While it was not possible to pursue the implications of this arrangement in any depth in the Review, it could lead to funding decisions being less well informed about the relative importance of Estyn’s work than might otherwise be the case.

Hitherto, Estyn has been expected to balance its overall resources to allow it to undertake the thematic inspection work detailed in the remit letter from the Welsh Government. Given the importance of thematic activity to the steering of the reform programme, there is a case for a more customised approach to be adopted for the funding of this aspect of Estyn’s work. The resource implications of necessary

⁹⁸ *ibid*

thematic work should be agreed with the department and the implications for the budget should be recognised. In that way, priorities could be determined more directly and partly governed by their financial implications.

Synergies across Estyn's responsibilities

The wide range of Estyn's current responsibilities are outlined in Chapter 2. The extent of these duties has expanded over time as policy has developed and the need for external evaluation has grown. While each inspection aspect has its distinct features, Estyn has been able to establish important synergies across them.

Its school inspections, including special schools, represent the most substantial proportion of Estyn's work programme but there are significant synergies between that programme and other areas of activity. For example, its joint inspections with Care Inspectorate Wales (previously the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales) of non-maintained nursery settings allow it to introduce specialist expertise in relation to the foundation phase into these settings. The inspection of pupil referral units (PRUs) crucially allows expectations from mainstream to be brought to a context where the education of the young people concerned could easily lack challenge. Equally, its work in further education can be undertaken in the knowledge of articulation issues with work in schools.

Joint working with other inspection bodies also presents opportunities to blend expertise. Inspection Wales is a programme of joint and collaborative working between: the Auditor General and [Wales Audit Office](#), Care Inspectorate Wales ([CIW](#)); Healthcare Inspectorate Wales ([HIW](#)) and Estyn. By working together effectively, the impact they can have can be increased.

There are efficiencies to be gained from Estyn having a range of responsibilities beyond school education. In addition to logistical benefits, inspectors can develop a broader repertoire of expertise, allowing efficient deployment across sectors. In any future consideration of the accountability landscape, the benefits to be gained from such synergies should not be underestimated.

Implications for the broader support and accountability landscape

Unlike other UK countries such as Scotland and Ireland, Wales, since 2006, does not have a national body to support curriculum development nationally and locally⁹⁹. Responsibility for support is therefore spread across a range of national and local bodies with the Education Directorate usually in the lead. Given the implications for schools of the scale and scope of the current reforms, there is a need for all of those organisations that relate to schools to ensure that they are playing their full part in supporting the reform process. Extensions to Estyn's role recommended in this report are in part a reflection of this necessity.

⁹⁹ ACCAC: Awdurdod Cymwystrau, Cwricwlwm ac Aesu Cymru (the Qualifications, Curriculum, and Assessment Authority) was absorbed into the Education and Skills Department of the Welsh Government in 2006.

The development of an evaluation and assessment framework together with the proposals in this Review would, if accepted, have broader implications for the accountability and support landscape.

There would be particular implications for regional consortia. The current colour-coded categorisation system has come to be seen as an integral part of a high-stakes culture. Consistent references were made in the evidence to the Review to the ways in which categorisation was affecting behaviour in schools. The demands of colour coding also seemed to dominate the work of challenge advisers, reducing their potential contribution to supporting improvement. As with inspection grading, there is a need to review the appropriateness of such coding. The triage approach to determining levels of support does not need to be reflected in a coding system of this nature.

If Estyn were to move to an approach based on validated self-evaluation, then closer working with consortia would be needed. The potential exists to create a much more coherent framework of support and challenge that would avoid some of the negative effects of the current high-stakes culture.

Future staffing

Inspectors need to have high levels of professional expertise, personal authority and credibility as well as the status that derives from being appointed as an HMI. They must combine highly effective interpersonal skills with the skills of an evaluator and the necessary depth of understanding of what to look for in high quality learning contexts. In the absence of such expertise there is a real risk that their judgements will be superficial and even misguided. And false assurance is worse than no assurance.

Given salary differentials, it is difficult for Estyn to recruit the most senior staff from secondary schools to its permanent workforce. Current staffing models allow a helpful mix of permanent HMI with practitioners who support inspection as peer inspectors, additional inspectors or school nominees. Peer inspectors, in particular, not only enhance the expertise on inspection teams but are themselves professionally enhanced by their participation in the process. Given the focus on curriculum and learning and teaching in the proposed new context, the range of expertise in the peer inspector cohort should be expanded to include those with direct experience of curriculum and pedagogical reform at classroom level.

Estyn has continued to involve lay inspectors in inspection teams. Lay inspectors are members of the general public who, following open recruitment, are trained by Estyn to take part in a school inspection. They are intended to provide an objective and impartial assessment on the provision of education. Given the development of schools as learning organisations, such lay involvement might be better incorporated as part of school self-evaluation rather than through inspection teams.

There are also some complexities in Estyn's staffing deriving from previous inspection models that remain in force in statute. As any legislative implications arising from this Review are addressed, it would be helpful to revisit and remove such anomalies.

Inspection of sixth forms

The Welsh Government was undertaking a review of its post-compulsory education provision at the same time as this Review. While the terms of reference for this Review relate to school education, I have been mindful that there may also be wider implications for the post-compulsory sector.

The advantages of synergies across Estyn's areas of responsibility are discussed above. In particular, inspectors can develop wider perspectives from working across sectors that extend their expertise. Similarly, the organisation gains resource benefits from the ability to deploy staff flexibly across sectors.

Sixth forms are an important part of the overall school community. Estyn's inspection of sixth forms should clearly focus on preparation for qualifications but there are other important features of provision that should be included in its evaluations. The four purposes of Curriculum for Wales do not cease to be relevant at age 16 and Estyn is well placed to evaluate how schools are supporting their realisation for all young people. Its reach across education also allows wider transition issues for young people to be analysed and reported on.

Inspection and other accountability expectations should ensure that sixth forms are seen as an integral part of the school community and are not subject to competing expectations and priorities.

Local authority and regional consortia inspections

In addition to school inspections, Estyn also undertakes inspections of local authorities and regional consortia. In the six-year inspection cycle from 2010, each local authority received a core inspection in the first three years of the six-year cycle. Many local authorities required follow-up activity after initial inspection.

The purposes of local authority inspections¹⁰⁰ are to:

- provide accountability to the users of services and other stakeholders through our public reporting on providers
- promote improvement in education and training
- inform the development of national policy by Welsh Assembly Government

The results of local authority inspections have been worrying.

*'Overall, the inspection outcomes for local authorities during the cycle were weak. Fifteen of the 22 local authorities required follow-up activity as a result of these inspections. Of these, six required special measures, the most intensive level of follow-up, and another two were in need of significant improvement. The follow-up work was completed in 2016. A common shortcoming in nearly all local authorities that required follow-up was a lack of leadership capacity to bring about improvement.'*¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Estyn (2010) *Guidance for the inspection of local authority education services for children and young people* from September 2010

¹⁰¹ Estyn (2018) *HMCI Annual Report 2016-2017* page 140

Estyn has also undertaken two rounds of inspection of the four regional consortia. The 2018 HMCI Report presents an encouraging picture of their progress.

*'After a relatively uncertain beginning when the long-term future of the consortia was unclear, the last year has seen the regional consortia become a more stable feature of the education system in Wales. The Welsh Government has directed more responsibilities and resources towards the regional consortia, and at times consortia have struggled to deliver on all of these new areas. An example is support for curriculum development, which is an additional strand to the consortia's work.'*¹⁰²

The policy intentions associated with moves to a self-improving and learning education system will depend heavily on the performance of the middle tier of government and the value that they add to the performance of schools. In that context, Estyn's inspections of this tier should continue with a focus on their contribution to the realisation of the reforms and an approach that reflects the need for self-evaluation to apply at all levels of the system.

Estyn's own self-evaluation

Estyn is robust and transparent in its own self-evaluation. It has a number of ways in which it evaluates its own operations and impact.

Systematic procedures are in place to evaluate an inspection and the report prior to publication. A set process is used internally to challenge findings and judgements, check that guidance has been followed, make sure that the evidence supports the evaluations and check on the internal consistency of the report. Information from quality assurance visits to a sample of schools post inspection and questionnaires issued after an inspection report is published are used to inform changes to inspection guidance, training needs and, for Registered Inspectors, the awarding of contracts.

Middle managers and designated sector HMI track inspection data across their sectors and managers receive reports from the regular collation of issues arising from the process of quality assuring inspections. Issues raised relating, for example, to inconsistencies in approaches or judgements across different inspections are addressed to sector teams who are then expected to make any necessary adjustments.

A panel with representation from all sectors meets regularly to identify matters of concern and to agree changes to inspection guidance and practice as appropriate. In addition to annual adjustments, a more comprehensive review of the inspection process takes place towards the end of an inspection cycle before another framework or new guidance is produced. Guidance is also checked annually against changes to legislation and education policy and practice.

Self-evaluation on a larger scale across the whole organisation is mostly undertaken in documentation prepared every three years for visits from Investors in People (IiP). Frequent exchanges with other inspectorates, including as part of SICI events, can lead to refinements in Estyn's practice.

¹⁰² *ibid*, page 142

Senior managers and middle managers also consider the outcomes of complaints as a focus for improvement. Any relevant matters arising from this broad base of information are also used in performance management.

Estyn holds regular meetings with representative stakeholders where feedback on practices and possible changes to inspection are discussed. Estyn has also in the past commissioned external reviews of stakeholder views prior to the planning of new inspection arrangements in a new cycle.

Estyn's attention to the evaluation of its own practice and performance is impressive. A further development in its approach would be to engage an external organisation to issue and analyse its questionnaires. That additional element of transparency would ensure confidence in the openness of questionnaire returns.



8 Conclusions

Wales has embarked on a radical transformation of school education. Schools are, and will continue to be, at the heart of the development of a new national curriculum which is designed to address four broad purposes. These purposes signal the ways in which the young people of Wales can best be prepared for the future. The introduction of the new curriculum will depend upon achieving a culture of collaboration and trust alongside a stronger focus on professional and organisational learning and a more constructive approach to how schools are accountable, including inspection. **Taken together, these developments have major implications for systems of accountability and the role of Estyn and school inspection.**

Estyn enjoys high credibility for its independence and professionalism. Evidence gathered in the course of the Review reinforced its continuing importance for improving the quality of education in Wales. Its independent role in monitoring performance, setting high expectations and identifying and sharing best practice were highly valued. Estyn has also proved itself to be an efficient, flexible and innovative organisation, leading the way in some aspects of inspection internationally. Its involvement in inspections of peer inspectors and nominees from the school were both cited in the Review evidence as real strengths of its current approach. **These important strengths in its existing work provide a strong platform for necessary future changes to its role and practices.**

The scope of the educational reform programme will place very significant additional demands on all levels of the system for the foreseeable future. Unlike other UK countries such as Scotland and Ireland, Wales no longer has a national body to support curriculum development nationally and in schools. There is therefore a need for all of those organisations that relate to schools to ensure that they are playing their full part in supporting the reform process. **It will be essential, therefore, for relevant national and local bodies, including Estyn, to provide such external support wherever they can.**

The ultimate test of the reforms will lie in the extent to which the standards achieved by young people in relation to the four curriculum purposes and the quality of their learning are improved. To gauge success it will need to be very clear what is meant by 'standards' of achievement. A narrow definition in terms of measurements of literacy, numeracy and numbers of qualifications will not reflect the full implications of the four curriculum purposes for young people's learning and wellbeing. On the other hand, vague claims about progress in relation to the purposes would not allow necessary rigour in the evaluation of the impact of the reforms. **The development of a national evaluation and assessment framework will therefore require agreement and shared understanding about what successful reform will look like in terms of standards, valid measures and indicators.**

Estyn has contributed directly and constructively to the current reform programme. Its new inspection arrangements signal a more responsive model of inspection. Amongst other improvements, inspectors are giving greater attention to teaching and

learning and the school's responsiveness to innovation. The intention is to help schools to see inspection not just as an aspect of accountability but also as a learning experience. **The current inspection arrangements represent an important step towards re-imagining inspection in the reformed education system.**

The Review identified a number of specific issues about the approach to school inspection in Wales. The seven-year cycle of inspections, perceived inconsistency in inspectors' judgements and limitations arising from the short inspection window were themes that emerged from the evidence. **Although these specific concerns were by no means universal, nonetheless any new inspection arrangements should seek to mitigate their effects.**

Areas of concern about Estyn raised during the Review often related more to issues associated with the wider accountability context and culture. In recent years, Wales has introduced a number of measures designed to drive improvement in schools. These measures include the introduction and publication of test results, colour-coded categorisation of schools and targets relating to national qualifications. **This 'high stakes' approach can address specific shortcomings but it can also limit development and does not sit well with the kind of creative, self-improving system being promoted in the current reforms.**

Inspection has come to be an important element in this 'high-stakes' culture. There are concerns, supported by research evidence, that in such a culture inspection can inhibit improvement and innovation if schools try to 'second guess' what inspectors want to see. **Graded inspection reports and follow-up categories reinforce the association of inspection with an externally driven approach to improvement and can distort some schools' practices to the detriment of their pupils.**

The Welsh Government's aspiration to have a self-improving system with a learning culture means less direction from the 'centre' and more freedom and responsibility for schools and practitioners. Collaboration within, between and beyond schools will be central to the new ways of working. **External evaluation, particularly inspection, will need to evaluate progress with the reforms and also, importantly, support these essential features of the reformed system.**

Inspection can both provide assurance and support improvement if it is part of a wider learning culture. Dynamic education systems are not driven solely or even largely by external forces of accountability. If improvement is to penetrate beyond defences put up against perceived external imposition then schools and teachers must themselves take greater control of and responsibility for the process. **Assurance and improvement are not alternatives but essential and complementary parts of a dynamic education system.**

Self-evaluation will play a major role in shaping the nature of the reforms school-by-school; in identifying how well the changes are progressing; and in providing evidence to build public confidence. It will be important to ensure that self-evaluation is not seen simply as an extension of accountability but as being integral to schools as learning organisations. Self-evaluation should be forward looking, using a blend of quantitative and qualitative evidence to identify and understand current areas of strength and priorities for development. National

developments in self-evaluation, led by OECD and Estyn, should allow a deeper and more consistent approach to self-evaluation to become established. **Self-evaluation must not become formulaic or burdensome and should fit naturally into the ways in which schools learn and improve.**

Estyn's findings on school leadership and capacity to improve and the high proportion of schools in follow-up processes are of concern in relation to the demanding agenda facing schools. **Many schools, particularly in the secondary sector, are currently some way from being able to engage in this type of self-evaluation and so become learning organisations.**

External evaluation should provide a different and more objective perspective on the work of a school and its impact on learning. External evaluation can come from peer reviewers who are fellow professionals acting as critical friends to a school or cluster of schools. Consortia 'challenge advisers' already fulfil this role and their contribution to supporting schools should be further enhanced in the new context. Estyn can play both formal and less formal roles as external evaluators. In addition to formal evaluation and reporting, inspectors could also operate more locally, thus allowing more regular contact with schools. **The logic of the policy of self-improvement and learning in Wales is for collaborative approaches to self-evaluation to be developed involving trained peer reviewers, consortia staff and inspectors.**

The success of the educational reform programme will be strongly influenced by Estyn's ability to use inspection to promote changes in practice and behaviour. Schools take careful note of what they perceive to be inspectors' priorities. In particular, inspection needs to evaluate the ways in which the new curriculum purposes are changing practice in schools, raising standards across the four curriculum purposes, improving the quality of the learning experience of all children and young people in all sectors and addressing children's health and wellbeing. The impact of new curriculum structures, changes in assessment and purpose-driven teaching and learning will all pose challenges for both schools and inspectors. **Changes to inspection will need to evaluate these and other changes, giving assurance about standards and the quality of the learning experience of all pupils.**

Estyn's established track record of reform, as illustrated by its new inspection arrangements, provides a strong basis for further, necessary changes to school inspection. The aim should be ultimately to establish an approach to accountability based on robust validated self-evaluation. Assurance about how well individual schools are serving their pupils should continue to be central to Estyn's mission but some of the unintended effects associated with the existing approach would be avoided in the changes to inspection proposed in this report. In addition, inspectors' constructive role in building capacity and supporting reform should be enhanced. **Inspection should build public confidence that schools and the education system more generally are performing well and committed to their own improvement.**

Moves towards validated self-evaluation proposed in this report need to take account of schools' confidence and competence in self-evaluation as well as the demands on the system stemming from the reform programme itself. They should therefore be phased over a period that is consistent with progress with the wider reform

programme. **The aim would be to remove some of unintended negative effects of ‘high-stakes’ inspection and reporting while retaining the level of robust assurance that is necessary for public confidence.**

A first phase should involve the redirection of cyclical inspection towards direct support for the reform programme. Nowhere else in the Welsh education system is there the concentration of professional expertise represented by Estyn staff. A temporary suspension of the current inspection and reporting cycle should be used to allow inspectors to engage with schools, individually and in clusters, without the requirement to produce graded public reports. The engagement would have as its prime purpose the building of capacity for school-by-school changes to the curriculum, learning and assessment. Benefits would accrue to both schools and inspectors. For schools, it would remove any distraction in their reform journey arising from inspection. They could also benefit from the support of inspectors during this period. For inspectors, it would allow a period to develop further their specialist curriculum expertise arising from the reforms and to engage directly with the reform process, both nationally and locally. **A temporary redirection of Estyn’s powerful resources would therefore allow schools and inspectors to concentrate on reform.**

The second, interim phase would re-introduce inspections which would retain many of the features of Estyn’s new inspection arrangements. The timing of the introduction of this phase would be decided on the basis of evidence of progress with the reforms during phase 1. There would be some significant differences from the existing inspection model: the focus of the inspections would be tailored to answer key questions about the school’s progress with the reforms and the impact on children’s experiences and outcomes; the evaluations would no longer be in the form of headline gradings but described clearly in the text. There would also be a stronger role for school self-evaluation in arriving at judgements, in line with guidance emerging from the joint work on self-evaluation involving OECD and Estyn. **This phase would initiate the move towards validated self-evaluation while retaining Estyn’s vital role in giving assurance.**

The third and final phase should be based on a validated self-evaluation model, consistent with the policy aspiration of moving to a self-improving system. As schools mature in their capacity to engage openly and constructively in self-evaluation, the role of external individuals and bodies should be to provide perspectives that probe and extend internal judgements. Schools with a proven ability to conduct and act on self-evaluation could move to a validation model of inspection on an ‘earned autonomy’ basis. Estyn would engage directly with such schools on an agreed cycle in order to report publicly on its confidence in the self-evaluation process and the integrity of reports from schools. That confidence would be expressed in Estyn’s validation (or not) of the school’s processes and findings, possibly described through a short narrative expressing the inspectors’ degree of confidence in the process. Although apparently radical in terms of recent approaches to inspection in the United Kingdom, such an approach has elements in common with aspects of inspection practice internationally. **A move to a validated self-evaluation model of accountability would reflect the broader aspiration to create a self-improving system based on professional and organisational learning.**

Over the course of the move to the proposed three-phase model, a number of features of Estyn's existing work would continue to be important. Schools that are currently in need of significant improvement or in special measures should continue to be subject to particular attention, although the nature of that attention will need to be reviewed. Estyn monitoring has already undergone some modification and its continuing implications for individual schools should be determined flexibly on a case-by-case basis. In addition, schools identified as giving concern during any of the phases would receive an inspection designed to diagnose and help to address the issues of concern. **The move to a new approach to school inspection should not detract from the current focus on those schools giving cause for serious concern. Diagnostic inspections of such schools would provide a more forensic basis for improvement.**

Estyn's extensive follow-up programme was generally recognised to be a necessary component of the assurance and improvement process. The current procedures for schools in need of significant improvement or in special measures follow tight guidelines. **While the need for robust follow up in cases of serious underperformance remains, the process should be reviewed to allow better diagnosis of problems and greater flexibility in providing both support and challenge. In particular, the process should take account of the additional expectations for change that will be placed on the school by the curriculum reforms.**

Estyn's thematic and good practice work should continue or be strengthened. This aspect of Estyn's work was highly valued in the evidence to the Review and should make a significant contribution to collective learning about reform and its implications. **As the reforms take shape, it will be even more important to establish a national picture of progress together with specific advice and examples of interesting practice.**

Estyn should make a stronger contribution to system-level evaluation. HMCI annual reports already inform a broad range of stakeholders about the performance of Welsh education as seen by inspectors. Estyn is itself considering a more focused approach to HMCI annual reports and their contribution to policy and practice would be enhanced if a wider body of evidence were brought to bear. A 'state of the nation' report could provide an enhanced evidence base if included a more developed analysis of relevant research findings, survey results and the latest evidence from international experience, including PISA. **System-level reporting by Estyn should be more targeted towards key current matters of policy and practice. In the next few years, for example, reports that specifically focused on progress with the reforms could make an important contribution to their success and inform the reform process.**

Estyn is a well-run organisation whose internal culture and structure are impressive. Its staff identify strongly with the organisation's values and its operations and performance are commendably transparent. **Estyn's already extensive self-evaluation procedures would be further strengthened if the administration and analysis of its quality assurance questionnaires were undertaken externally.**

Estyn's independence was highly valued in evidence to the Review. However, its status as a non-ministerial department leaves a degree of ambiguity about its link to ministers. Evidence-informed policy making in government should mean that the wealth of evidence and advice emanating from Estyn has a secure and valued place in the policy process. It was clear to the Review that, while existing procedures and relationships were positive, that need not always be the case. Estyn's funding can also be impacted on inadvertently through policy decisions relating to areas not obviously relevant to its work. A more secure and targeted basis for funding would facilitate necessary longer-term planning. **There is therefore a strong case for the establishment of a Framework Agreement to be developed that sets out the basis on which the place of such independent professional advice and related funding implications can be secured.**

Changes to Estyn's role and to school inspection will require a review of the wider implications for other aspects of accountability in the system. It is not for this Review to recommend specific contingent changes but the implications for categorisation and some national performance measures are clear. **It is essential that the accountability landscape captured in the proposed national evaluation and assessment framework should align purposes, responsibilities and procedures across national and local bodies. The framework should provide necessary assurance while avoiding the negative unintended consequences than can accompany high stakes measurement.**

9 Recommendations

General

- 1 Estyn should continue to provide independent assurance about the standards and quality being achieved by the school system in Wales.

In the light of the Welsh Government's aspirations for a new curriculum and a self-improving school system:

- Estyn's contribution to supporting improvement and building capacity should be enhanced
 - Estyn's system of school inspection should be adapted in a phased way, in line with the wider reforms, ultimately to one which is directed towards validation of schools' self-evaluation
- 2 The Welsh Government's proposed national evaluation and assessment framework should clearly define the standards and outcomes expected from the reforms together with relevant quantitative and qualitative measures and indicators.
 - 3 The 'high stakes' aspects of the current accountability arrangements that are likely to undermine the government's aims for a self-improving and learning culture should be replaced by other approaches, while still ensuring rigour.
 - 4 In recognition of the scale and significance of the educational reforms, all relevant national and local public bodies in Wales should prioritise the provision of appropriate support for schools.

School inspection and self-evaluation

- 5 The strategic purpose of inspection, self-evaluation (and wider accountability mechanisms) should focus on answering four main questions:
 - a How well is the school engaging with the purposes of the Curriculum for Wales?
 - b How well are pupils progressing in their learning and achieving appropriately high standards?
 - c How well developed are the fundamental building blocks for learning:
 - the breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum?
 - the quality of learning and teaching?
 - the wellbeing of all pupils?
 - d How well does the school use self-evaluation and professional learning to identify its current strengths and set priorities for development?

- 6 Inspection reports should provide a stronger explanatory narrative about the performance of the school in relation to these four questions, wherever possible drawing on the school self-evaluation process.
- 7 Evaluative judgements in school inspection reports should be described clearly and succinctly in the body of the text and not as headline gradings.
- 8 Estyn should continue to improve consistency in how school inspections are carried out and the judgements made by inspectors.
- 9 The national initiative on school self-evaluation being led by Estyn and the OECD should establish agreed national principles and a framework that will encourage schools to identify and understand their strengths and priorities for development. In giving its own account of its strengths and priorities its prime purpose should be about its own learning and improvement.
- 10 Once schools have made progress in developing their capacity for self-evaluation, the existing seven-year inspection report cycle should be amended such that Estyn would engage with a school on an amended cycle in order to be able to validate the school's self-evaluation processes and findings.
- 11 Inspectors' findings of the formal validation of school self-evaluation should be communicated through reports that indicate the inspection team's confidence in the quality of self-evaluation for the school's improvement.
- 12 Schools identified in the validation of self-evaluation process as being in need of urgent improvement should be subject to a diagnostic inspection intended to illuminate the areas of concern in the school, prior to a decision about placing it in a follow-up category.
- 13 In the context of follow-up, diagnostic inspections should be of sufficient length and depth to establish a comprehensive picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- 14 Improvement conferences, currently a feature of local authority inspections, should be incorporated into the follow-up process.
- 15 The follow-up process should be reformed to allow greater responsiveness to the school's progress and a stronger role for regional consortia.
- 16 A mechanism should be established to allow school governors, local authorities and regional consortia to request an inspection of a school.
- 17 Estyn should oversee the training of a wide pool of peer reviewers within the national self-evaluation framework.
- 18 Peer inspectors would be drawn from the peer reviewer pool and should include specialists in curriculum design, subject disciplines and learning and teaching as well as senior managers.

- 19 Consideration should be given to discontinuing the current involvement of lay inspectors on inspection teams while lay engagement with school self-evaluation should be strengthened.

Estyn's wider activities

- 20 Estyn should carry out inspections of area groupings of schools with a focus on the effectiveness of collaboration and transition.
- 21 Estyn should continue to inspect and report on regional consortia and local authorities, including their role in supporting the reform agenda.
- 22 Estyn should ensure that its inspections of sixth forms focus on curriculum purposes as well as national qualifications.
- 23 The role of Estyn's thematic reports should be strengthened in order to provide evidence of practice and progress in areas of priority. Thematic inspections should continue to include peer inspectors with relevant specialist expertise.
- 24 The determination of priorities for Estyn's thematic programme should include mechanisms that engage stakeholders in the process.
- 25 In addition to evidence from inspections, thematic reports should analyse and report on research and other valid evidence to provide comprehensive advice to inform both policy and practice.
- 26 HMCI should continue to provide annual reports but the nature of reporting should be modified. Annual reports should be more targeted towards progress with reform with a more substantial 'Quality of Education in Wales' overview report on a three-yearly cycle. Reports should draw on a wider range of evidence than inspection alone, including commentary on PISA and the national sample testing programme.
- 27 All HMCI reports should continue to be laid before the Welsh Assembly.
- 28 Estyn and the Welsh Government should agree a transition plan for a change in support and inspection arrangements that should include:
- arrangements that will allow inspectors to play a central role in Wales's educational reforms, both in relation to policy and to capacity building in schools and local authorities/consortia
 - co-ordination with the introduction of a national approach to self-evaluation
 - suspension of the formal inspection reporting cycle for a period while inspectors engage with schools both to learn about and support the realisation of the new curriculum
 - phased progress towards a validated self-evaluation accountability model at a pace consistent with schools' growing capacity for self-evaluation and the development of the new curriculum
 - structural and logistical implications arising from consideration of this report

Estyn governance

- 29 Estyn's governance, including arrangement to safeguard its independence and its relationship to the Cabinet Secretary for Education, should be defined in a Framework Document.
- 30 Consideration should be given to a non-executive director taking on the responsibility of chairing the Strategy Board.
- 31 Building from current local authority lead inspector arrangements, Estyn should consider how best to enable its staff to take on territorial responsibilities for engaging with schools in particular areas, with teams that relate to the regional consortia.
- 32 Estyn's reviews of its own performance should be strengthened by incorporating external elements, including the administration and analysis of evaluation questionnaires.
- 33 Estyn's funding arrangements should be reviewed to allow longer-term planning of resources and to recognise more explicitly the resource implications of additional activities associated with the reform.

Wider implications

- 34 The development of a national evaluation and assessment framework and review of the national model of school improvement should take full account of the recommendations of this Review.

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Terms of reference

Purpose

To identify the implications for Estyn of the educational reform programme in Wales and to make recommendations for its future role and operation.

Objectives

- To outline the existing and potential contributions of the work of Estyn to the enhancement of quality in Welsh education within the context of a constructive accountability culture.
- To establish ways in which Estyn's contribution to improving the quality of Welsh education could be further enhanced.
- To outline implications for the future operational requirements of Estyn.
- To identify implications for the Welsh education system more widely.
- To consider whether an interim report could be provided by October 2017.
- To provide a report and make recommendations for the future role and operation of Estyn by early 2018.

Conduct of the Review

The review will be undertaken by Graham Donaldson with support from a small professional and administrative team.

A Reference Group will be formed to act as a sounding board for the review although the content of the final report will remain the sole responsibility of Graham Donaldson.

The Review will

- gather and analyse current evidence from research and practice beyond Wales on inspection, quality enhancement and accountability
- draw evidence from relevant stakeholders, including observation, interview and survey techniques as appropriate
- analyse data and other evidence about the impact of inspection and policy advice
- prepare a report (and possibly an interim report) for the Cabinet Secretary and HMCI by early 2018

Reporting

The Review will report jointly to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales.

Timescale

The Review will start in August 2017 and report early in 2018. An interim report may be provided in October 2017.