

Estyn - listening, learning and changing together

Public consultation with hard to reach groups on Estyn's inspection arrangements from September 2021

A report presented to Estyn by Arad Research

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This document is also available in Welsh.

1. Introduction

Arad Research was commissioned in September 2019 to lead on a consultation with hard to reach groups on proposed changes to Estyn's inspection arrangements. This report presents the findings of the consultation exercise that was conducted between October and December 2019 and focused specifically on collecting the views of a number of target groups identified by Estyn.

1.1 Aims of the study

The aim of this commission was to carry out a public consultation with hard to reach groups who are often under-represented in consultation exercises. The research brief defined a hard to reach group as any group or section of the community who it is difficult to access for any reason such as physical inaccessibility; language (e.g. first-generation immigrants to the UK); cultural perceptions and traditions (e.g. disadvantaged young people); or social expectations.

The following groups were targeted as part of the consultation:

1. Immigrants - particularly if they have limited knowledge of English
2. People with physical disabilities
3. People with sight or hearing impairments
4. People with learning difficulties
5. Autism
6. People with mental health problems
7. Travellers
8. Rural/isolated communities

1.2 Methodology

Arad set out a proposed research plan, which was discussed with Estyn (the Client) at the project inception meeting. This section provides an overview of the methodology employed.

Our approach was based on four broad principles, namely:

- i. The need to tailor approaches to engage with each of the hard to reach groups identified, exploring options to reach members of the public by securing the support and cooperation of gatekeeper organisations;
- ii. Providing options for consultees to respond, including online (e-survey), paper-based, by telephone or face-to-face;
- iii. Targeting networks and representative groups proactively in order to encourage responses;
- iv. Planning the engagement in such a way as to ensure a geographic spread across Wales.

Arad drew up a **long list of organisations**, which was shared with the Client, and from which 103 organisations were selected who work with the targeted hard to reach groups. This list included a mix of larger and smaller organisations and in some cases, individual

projects. The research team ensured that groups from across all parts of Wales were included.

Arad made **initial contact with organisations** by email (followed up with phone calls), outlining the purpose of the public consultation exercise and Arad's role in facilitating the engagement of a number of key groups. Emails included quick-share links to the bilingual surveys, whereby organisations could easily share the links with their networks.

Consultation responses were collected **through an online survey** that replicated the easy-read version of Estyn's main consultation. Most responses were received through the electronic survey, with some phone interviews conducted. During phone consultations, consultees also raised a range of wider issues relating to standards in education.

Our analysis is structured according to the themes and headings set out in the consultation document:

- Estyn's common inspection framework
- Overall judgement grades and descriptions
- Follow-up activity in maintained schools
- Inspecting A level / vocational learning in sixth forms
- Notice period for inspections
- General comments on how Estyn carries out its inspections

We have collated all responses and analysed data overall (i.e. across all groups collectively) and by sub-group (i.e. individual hard to reach groups as defined in the specification) identifying areas where there are significant variations in responses by sub-group.

2. Profile of consultation respondents

The consultation elicited a positive response from individuals representing hard to reach groups, exceeding the target achieved during the previous engagement exercise in 2015. This was always anticipated to be a small-scale consultation exercise, intended to supplement the main Wales-wide consultation which took place concurrently. In view of the limited scale of the research, it is important that the findings are approached with caution: the views cannot be said to be representative of the views held by the constituent hard to reach groups and are not generalisable. The findings do, nonetheless, provide insights into issues of importance to various groups whose voices are often not heard during consultation exercises.

Table 1. Consultees who contributed to the research, by hard to reach group

HTR group	Target sample	Completed survey responses / interviews
1. Immigrants - particularly if they have limited knowledge of English	10-12	9
2. People with physical disabilities	10-12	16
3. People with sight or hearing impairments	10-12	12
4. People with learning difficulties	10-12	15
5. Autism	No target set	33
6. People with mental health problems	4-6	14
7. Gypsy and traveller community	4-6	3
8. Very rural/isolated communities	14-16	19
TOTAL	62-76	133*

* This figure exceeds the total number of unique survey responses (109, see below) due to some respondents self-identifying as representing more than one hard to reach group

Of the 109 who completed the survey in full, 48 per cent noted that they were responding as a parent/carer, and 36 per cent responding as a teacher or education professional. A further 9 per cent of respondents identified as members of the public and the remaining 7 per cent as learners.

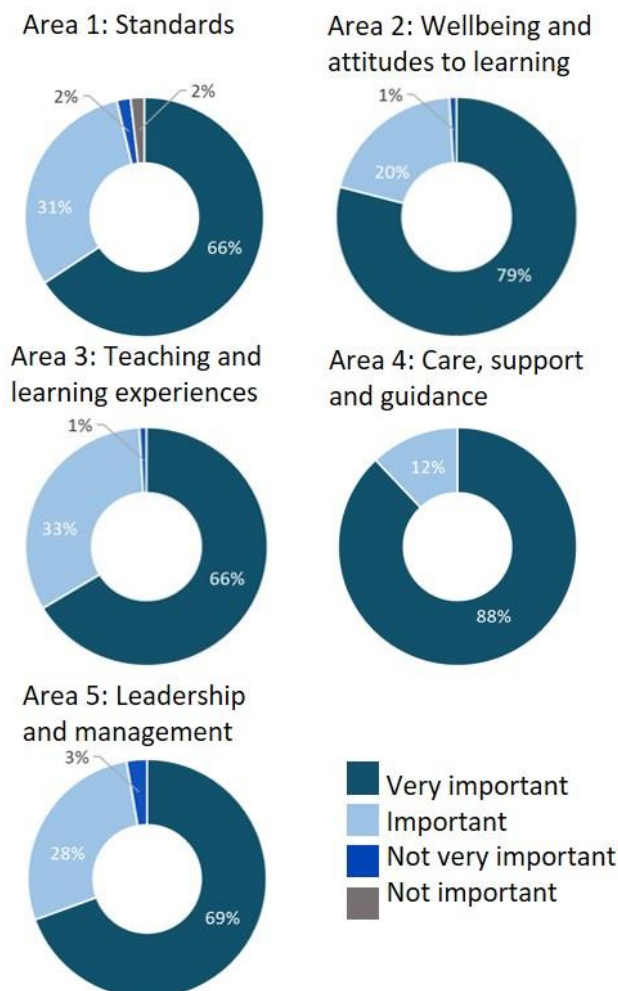
Fourteen **organisations were represented in the consultation** and mentioned by individuals stating they had passed the survey on to them through their networks. 24 organisations and individuals shared the survey link via social media and online networks. Telephone interviews were conducted with 4 representatives from hard to reach organisations. An analysis of postcode data provided by consultees reveals a good geographic spread across Wales with a mix of urban and rural areas well-represented across the sample.

3. Consultation data

Currently, Estyn’s inspections are structured around five broad inspection areas (IAs). Inspectors who visit schools, colleges and other settings evaluate each of these five areas separately, report their findings in relation to each area and provide a summative grading for each one. Respondents were asked to note the importance of each using the following scale: [Very important, Important, Not very important, Not important, Don’t know].

A majority of survey respondents indicated that they felt each inspection area was ‘very important’ (see Figure 4). Inspection area 4, *care, support and guidance*, was deemed to be ‘very important’ by 88 per cent of respondents, higher than the corresponding figure for other inspection areas. 79 per cent of respondents felt that Inspection area 2, *wellbeing and attitudes to learning*, was ‘very important’. *Standards* and *teaching and learning experiences* were viewed as being ‘very important’ by two-thirds of respondents.

Figure 4. How important is it that Estyn continues to inspect these areas?



Source: Estyn/Arad survey with hard to reach groups 2019, n=109

Differences between Arad’s hard to reach consultation and the main Wales-wide consultation

Overall, responses from the hard to reach consultation mirrored that of the main Wales-wide consultation. The only notable difference between the two datasets in relation to this question is that a higher proportion of hard to reach (HTR) respondents stated that *Care, support and guidance* was ‘very important’ (88 per cent), compared to corresponding figure in the wider public consultation (68 per cent).

Estyn’s common inspection framework: summary of qualitative comments

Survey respondents were asked to comment on any areas that Estyn should prioritise or focus on during inspections. Responses were received covering a range of issues.

- **Estyn should ensure they place a greater emphasis on inspecting how effectively schools support and respond to the needs of learners with ALN and disabilities.** (Raised by people with experience of physical disability; people with experience of learning difficulties.)

“In particular how well [schools] respond to yet to be diagnosed young people and how well they consider reasonable adjustments for all learners with significant needs. I would suggest a dedicated questionnaire surrounding ALN disability and mental health including anxiety [as part of inspections].”

- **Respondents raised wider issues relating to workforce development and the need to ensure that teachers are able to access professional development opportunities to enable them to provide appropriate and effective support for learners with ALN.** (Raised by people with experience of learning difficulties; people with experience of autism)
- Inspections should focus on **children’s wellbeing and mental health, particularly vulnerable learners and those with learning difficulties.** (Raised by people with learning difficulties; people with experience of mental health problems)
- **Hate crimes, bullying and discrimination on the grounds of race or sexuality has been increasing in schools** and Estyn should examine the effectiveness of school processes to identify and address discrimination. (Raised by immigrants and organisations representing the views of BAME communities and immigrants; people with mental health problems.)

“As an anti-racism charity, wellbeing is at the heart of what we do. From our own survey, we found that 25% of over 1000 teachers surveyed across Wales had responded to a racist incident in school. We would like Estyn to be aware of this and have inspectors bearing this in mind when visiting a school.”
- Respondents suggested **the need for more targeted engagement with families whose voices and experiences may not always be heard during inspection processes.** It was suggested that actively seeking to engage and train parents from hard to reach groups to be lay inspectors is one idea to consider pursuing.

Other points raised by respondents included:

- **How can schools strengthen relationships and links between school leadership teams and families from minority groups.** This was raised by representative organisations in relation to the families of children from BAME communities or Gypsy and Traveller families.
- **Avoid focusing too much on early academic achievement among the youngest learners,** which some respondents felt can have a detrimental effect on children.
- **A greater focus on inspecting Welsh-medium provision** for learners with additional learning needs.

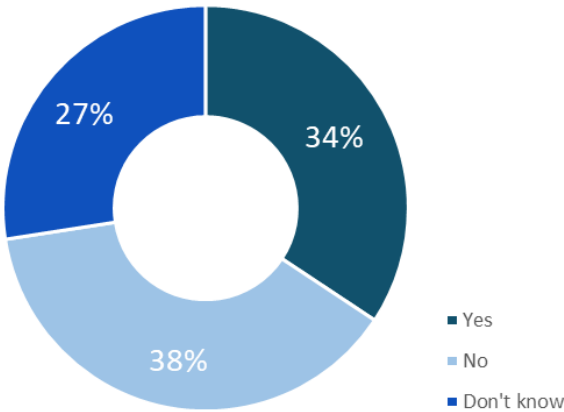
3.1 Overall judgement grades and descriptions

Estyn are proposing to stop using the four judgements below from September 2021.

Judgements	What the judgement means
Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

Survey respondents were asked whether Estyn should stop using the four words in the table above using the scale [Yes/No/Don't know].

Figure 5. Do you think Estyn should stop using the four judgement words?



Source: Estyn/Arad survey with hard to reach groups 2019, n = 102

The highest proportion of respondents (38 per cent) disagreed that Estyn should stop using the four judgement words. The data reveals a broadly even split between those who answered 'yes', 'no' and 'don't know'.

It is interesting to compare the above data with findings from the previous consultation with hard to reach groups in 2015. The previous consultation asked 'Should we keep these four

judgement words?: at the time 67 per cent noted that Estyn should keep the four judgement words, 11 per cent said they should not, and the remaining 22 per cent did not know. There are important caveats to bear in mind when examining the two sets of data side by side: the questions were phrased differently; sample sizes are small; different respondent groups; changes in context and the nature of the proposal set out in the current consultation. Nonetheless, the data does provide some indication of a **shift in support away from using the four judgement words** among hard to reach groups.

Differences in responses between HTR groups

A higher proportion of respondents with experience of hearing and visual impairment (8 out of 12, 66 per cent) stated that they **did not** think that Estyn should stop using the four judgement words. Across the sample as a whole, 38 per cent did not agree with this question was over a third.

- A higher proportion of respondents with experience of mental health problems (8 out of 13, 61 per cent) also stated that they **did not** think that Estyn should stop using the four judgement words.

Differences between the HTR consultation and the main Wales-wide consultation

As part of the main consultation, respondents were asked to what extent they agree with Estyn's proposal to stop using summative gradings by responding with strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree. Of the 766 respondents that provided an answer, 50 per cent strongly agreed and 30 percent agreed that Estyn should stop using the judgement words. It is important to bear in mind that the questions were phrased differently, nonetheless, only 34 per cent of respondents agreed that Estyn should stop using the judgement words.

Those who responded 'no' to this question raised the following points:

- The wording **provides an accessible way to communicate** a school's overall performance in relation to the inspection areas to some parents and guardians. (Raised by immigrants/immigrant advocacy organisations; people with experience of physical disability; people in rural areas).

"Generally, the overall judgements are the only part that the wider community of a school refers to when looking at the inspection."

- They **provide a framework** to enable teachers and parents to understand when a school requires improvement and to **draw comparisons between different schools**. (Raised by people with experience of mental health problems)

Those who responded 'yes' raised the following points:

- **The judgements are too general and do not provide specific insight into strengths and weaknesses**, with greater emphasis on development and support. (Raised by people with experience of learning difficulties; people with experience of physical disabilities)

"For SEN, they should actually list the interventions used, how many staff are trained and what qualifications they have, etc."

- **There is not sufficient attention given to social and school context when arriving at inspection judgements.** (Raised by people with experience of physical disabilities; people in rural areas)

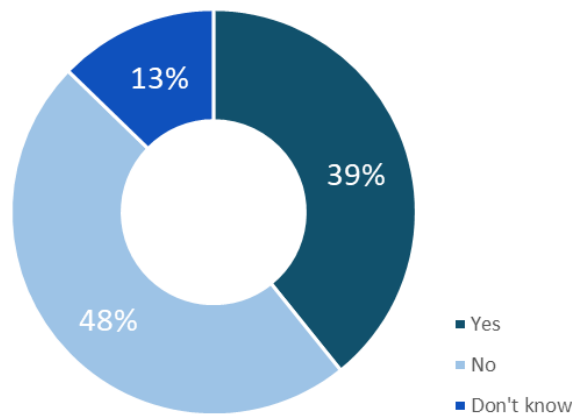
“The strengths and weaknesses of educational settings vary. Comments should reflect individual circumstances. [Translation]”

- **There should be a greater focus on the wellbeing of children.** (Raised by people with experience of mental health problems; parents of children with autism)

3.2 Follow-up activity in maintained schools

Respondents were provided with information regarding follow-up activity in maintained schools after an inspection. The questionnaire noted that after an inspection is completed, some schools receive follow-up support known as Estyn review. Respondents were asked if they think stopping Estyn reviews is a good idea. [Yes, No, Don't know].

Figure 6. Do you think stopping Estyn reviews is a good idea?



Source: Estyn/Arad survey with hard to reach groups 2019, n = 102

Almost half of the respondents (48 per cent) stated that Estyn reviews should not be stopped. A lower proportion, 39 per cent, agreed that Estyn reviews should be discontinued.

Differences in responses between HTR groups

- A higher proportion of respondents with experience of mental health problems (9 out of 13, 69 per cent) and respondents with experience of hearing and visual impairment (8 out of 12, 66 per cent) stated that they **did not** think that stopping Estyn reviews was a good idea.
- In comparison, a lower proportion of respondents that live in rural areas (9 out of 19, 47 per cent) supported stopping Estyn reviews.

Differences between the HTR consultation and the main Wales-wide consultation

As part of the main consultation, respondents were asked whether the inspectorate should remove Estyn review. Of the 751 responses in the main consultation, 32 per cent of respondents stated that Estyn **should not stop** Estyn Review. The same question was posed as part of the hard to reach consultation. A considerably larger number, nearly half, 49 per cent of respondents stated that Estyn **should not stop** Estyn Review.

Those who responded 'no' to this question raised the following points:

- **Follow-up is a major driver of change for schools that require additional support**, this ensures that schools are aiming to meet the required standards by the inspectorate. (Raised by people with experience of hearing and visual impairment; people with autism; people with experience of mental health problems).
- Respondents noted that schools that struggle to improve following an inspection should be supported by a **professional that has experience of working in a similar school setting**. Support could come from their **local authority, regional consortia or another school** that has shown good progress or practice in a similar inspection area. (Raised by people with experience of physical disability; people with experience of hearing and visual impairments).

“A regulatory body is not necessarily the best provider of support to a school in need of significant improvement or in special measures. Support is indeed needed, but not necessarily from an inspectorate.”

Those who responded 'yes' and therefore supported stopping Estyn reviews mentioned:

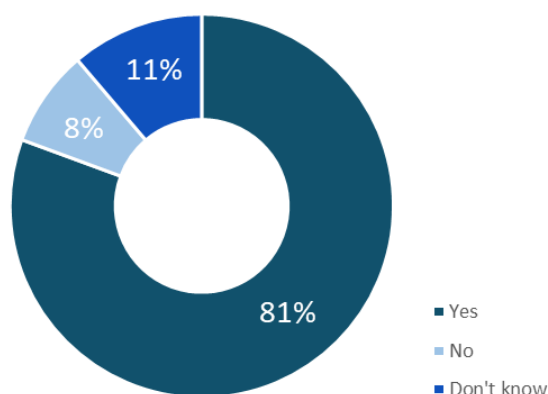
- **Support and resources should be focussed towards those schools that have been placed into special measures**. (Raised by people with experience of visual and hearing impairment.)

3.3 Inspecting A-level / vocational learning in sixth forms

Currently, Estyn inspects sixth forms during their visits to secondary schools. However, this information is not reported separately. Respondents were asked whether Estyn should include a separate section in secondary school inspection reports on standards and provision in the sixth form [Yes, No, Don't know].

The majority of respondents (81 per cent) indicated that they agreed with the proposal to report on standards and provision in the sixth form separately. A small minority, 8 per cent indicated that they disagreed with this proposal.

Figure 7. Should Estyn include a separate section in secondary school inspection reports on standards and provision in the sixth form?



Source: Estyn/Arad survey with hard to reach groups 2019, n = 98

Those who agreed with the separate section on sixth form standards raised the following:

- **Standards of provision could be different in sixth form** and therefore should be given separate attention. (Raised by people with experience of mental health problems; people with experience of physical disabilities; people in rural areas.)
- Having a separate section on sixth forms will enable parents, learners and other interested parties to **compare post-16 provision in schools with post-16 provision in colleges and inform decision-making**. (Raised by people with experience of visual and hearing impairment.)
- **Estyn should focus on wellbeing and inclusion, ensuring that schools are inspected in relation to how inclusive and flexible post-16 learning opportunities are to all learners**. (Raised by parents of learners with autism; people with experience of mental health problems)

“Sixth form inspection should ensure that pupils still complete A levels and are allowed to take fewer A levels, where this would enable them to continue accessing education. Inspection should not only judge success in terms of numbers of exams taken...but also in terms of pupils enabled to continue education despite challenges.”

Very few respondents who disagreed that Estyn should include a separate section on sixth form provision included supplementary comments. These noted that the sixth form is a core part of the school and that any inspection report should reflect and acknowledge this.

Differences in responses between HTR groups

- A higher proportion of respondents with experience of hearing and visual impairment (8 out of 12, 66 per cent) stated that they **did not** think that Estyn should stop using the four judgement words.

- A higher proportion of respondents with experience of mental health problems (8 out of 13, 61 per cent) also stated that they **did not** think that Estyn should stop using the four judgement words.

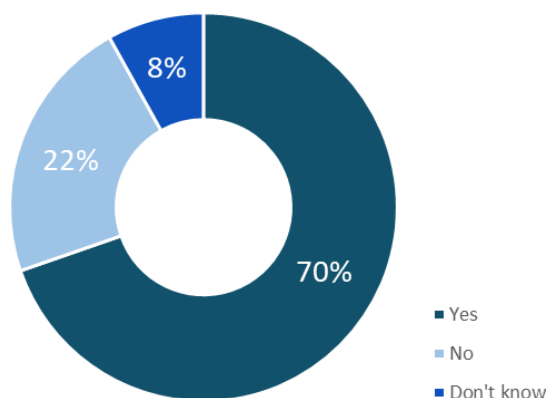
Differences between the HTR consultation and the main Wales-wide consultation

Both consultations asked respondents if Estyn should have a separate section on sixth forms in secondary school inspection reports. Of the 746 of respondents that provided an answer as part of the main consultation, 63 per cent **agreed** that having a separate section on sixth forms would be beneficial. A **much higher** proportion (81 per cent) of respondents **agreed with having a separate section** on sixth forms in school inspection reports.

3.4 Notice period for inspections

Estyn currently give schools 15 working days' notice (3 weeks) that an inspection is going to happen in order to allow them time to prepare. Respondents were asked if they think Estyn should reduce the notice period to 10 working days from September 2021.

Figure 8. Do you think Estyn should reduce the notice period to 10 working days from September 2021?



Source: Estyn/Arad survey with hard to reach groups 2019, n = 99

The largest proportion of respondents (70 per cent) indicated that they agreed with the proposal to reduce the notice period to 10 working days. Just under a quarter of respondents (22 per cent) answered 'no'.

Differences in responses between HTR groups

- Nearly all respondents with experience of hearing and visual impairment (11 out of 12, 91 per cent) **agreed** that Estyn should reduce the notice period to 10 working days from September 2021.
- A higher proportion of respondents with experience of mental health problems (12 out of 14, 85 per cent) also **agreed** that Estyn should reduce the notice period from September 2021.

- A lower proportion of respondents that have experience of physical difficulties (7 out of 16, 43 per cent) **disagreed** that Estyn should reduce the notice period to 10 working days from September 2021.

Differences between the HTR consultation and the main Wales-wide consultation

As part of the main consultation, respondents were asked to what extent they agree with Estyn’s proposal of reducing the notice period to 10 working days from September 2021 responding with strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree. Of the 742 respondents that provided an answer, 30 per cent **strongly agreed** and 31 percent **agreed** that Estyn should reduce the notice period. Within the main consultation, 13 per cent of respondents **disagreed** and 18 per cent **strongly disagreed** with the proposal.

It is important to bear in mind that the question on the proposal of reducing the notice period was phrased differently. Nonetheless, 70 per cent of respondents **agreed** that Estyn should stop reduce the notice period. Just under a third (31 per cent) **disagreed** with the proposal. A third of respondents in the main consultation were unsure or didn’t have an opinion on the proposal, in comparison to 8 per cent from the hard to reach groups’ consultation.

3.4.1 Notice period for inspections: summary of qualitative comments received

Those who responded ‘no’ and therefore agreed with reducing the notice period were as follows:

- **The 15-day notice period is sufficient and balanced for both inspectors and schools to fully prepare for an inspection.**
“There is sometimes a need for schools to get prepared and ten days is such a short amount of time.”
- **Maintain the current notice period, but use unannounced visits for further follow-ups with inspectors.** (Raised by people with experience of physical disabilities; people with experience of sight and hearing problems).
- **The current notice period of 15-days is not enough time for schools, teachers and staff to sufficiently prepare.** (Raised by people in rural areas).
“Teachers have a very difficult job and preparing for an extended visit can take a lot of the teacher’s free time. The warning time should be lengthened, not taken off.” [Translation]

Those who responded ‘yes’, disagreeing with reducing the notice period were as follows:

- **The notice period should be reduced or removed completely.** (Raised by people in rural areas).
“Yes, yes, yes! In fact, reduce it to 0 days’ notice. Walk in and see it as it really is... not what 3 weeks of furiously creating SoW and Lesson Plans and Wall Displays can do!”
- **Inspectors should be able to enter schools and lead inspections without any notice, in order to observe a ‘normal working day’.** Respondents stated that less notice provides a “clearer picture” and a “true reflection” of what the school is like on a day to day basis. (Raised by people with experience of physical disabilities; people with experience of Autism).

“They should be striving performing to a high standard regardless of whether they anticipate an inspection”

- **Staff and teachers place unnecessary stress and anxiety on themselves, other staff members and students due to feeling the need to satisfy the inspectors in this time period.** (Raised by people with experience of learning difficulties, people in rural areas, people with experience in mental health problems).

“In fact, I think you should give no notice. Go and see what is really happening. But you need to do it in a way that is compassionate towards staff and pupils as they are usually doing the best they can.”

3.5 General comments on how Estyn carries out its inspections

Respondents were invited to share their views on how Estyn carries out its inspections. The issues and proposals presented by two or more respondents are summarised below.

- **Move to a system of unannounced notice period ahead of inspections** which some respondents feel would provide a ‘*truer reflection*’ of the school in question.
- Ensure the inspection process **places a greater focus on inspecting the standard and suitability of support** provided to the learners who need help the most.
- **Ensure greater involvement of parents in the inspection process**, with more targeted approaches to reaching out to parents.

“Perhaps more involvement from parents in the process, through surveys etc. Parents would have opinions based on their child's experience rather than the school's view. Communication with the school is often an issue and this would give an opportunity for parents to feedback with honest opinions.”

- **Estyn should prioritise greater scrutiny of standards and provision for ALN.** Some parents of children with ALN noted that they felt that inspection reports provided insufficient information.
- **Estyn should scrutinise schools’ processes for supporting wellbeing and specifically mental health.**

“Using the attendance or behaviour policy to deal with children with mental health problems is causing a lot of suffering and unnecessarily punitive approaches that exacerbate these difficulties.”

- **The need for a more developmental and supportive inspection process.** Respondents felt that this would be beneficial in the longer term for teachers and for learner outcomes.

3.5.1 Other comments from representatives of specific hard to reach groups

Consultees raised a range of wider issues relating to inspection (and education provision more broadly). This short section provides an overview of the views expressed.

Gypsy and Traveller community

- 1. Is there enough care, support and guidance provided to Gypsy and Traveller pupils (and their families) in recognition of their particular support needs and circumstances?**

- Comments indicated that the community do not tend to feel safe or welcome in most mainstream schools; in particular disengagement with secondary schools. *'They feel judged and marginalised by systems which do not match their needs or cultural framework.'*
 - Gypsies and Travellers are vulnerable to under-achievement, prejudice and disengagement and struggle to integrate into the mainstream set-up.
 - One consultee felt that the education system still has an *'unconscious prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers.'*
 - Teachers need training on community issues and how to communicate with the GRT community, including the language they use with GRT learners.
- 2. Is there more that Estyn as the school inspectorate could do to improve the way schools support learners from the gypsy and traveller community?**
- Estyn could focus more on vulnerable groups during inspections, including GRT learners. It was noted that inspectors are unlikely to engage directly with GRT young people during inspections.

People with mental health problems and representative organisations

A number of additional comments were raised by people with mental health problems and advocacy organisations working with this group. These were:

- Good mental health is the foundation for good learning experiences for all learners. It is critical to good learner progress and learners' ability to reach their potential. However, it was suggested that mental health was not prominent in Estyn's recent report 'Healthy and Happy: School impact on pupils' health and wellbeing'.
- As it stands the quality of support available in schools to support learners' mental health and wellbeing is reported to be variable. More focused attention could be given to mental health as part of Estyn's inspection under Inspection Areas 2 and 4.
- It was suggested that Estyn could pose questions and report on whether the teaching workforce – at all levels – has received appropriate support to enable them to identify and respond to mental health and wellbeing issues that are present among learners.

4. Next steps

The purpose of this consultation was to feed into Estyn's wider evidence base and help inform inspection arrangements from 2021, which are planned to be piloted from summer 2020. The authors of the report hope that its findings provide a valuable insight into the views, experiences and priorities of a sample of individuals drawn from the under-represented groups targeted.