



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

School improvement guidance: impact assessment

An integrated impact assessment and a children's rights impact assessment for school improvement guidance.

First published: 6 July 2022

Last updated: 6 July 2022

Contents

Section 1: what action is the welsh government considering and why?

Section 8: conclusion

A. Children's rights impact assessment

Section 1: what action is the welsh government considering and why?

The issue

The Welsh Government has worked with stakeholders in schools and the middle tier of the education system to develop new evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements for schools, local authorities, regional consortia and Estyn. The new arrangements set out the Welsh Government's expectations for how school improvement should be delivered in the context of the Curriculum for Wales. The arrangements are designed to ensure that a school's performance is evaluated using a wide range of contextualised evidence and information, covering the breadth of school activity, with a focus on learner progress and well-being. Effective self-evaluation is the starting point for all evaluation and improvement work, and should result in improvement planning which supports the best possible learning experiences and outcomes for all learners, whatever their background or circumstances.

The guidance emphasises the centrality of progression to the realisation of the Curriculum for Wales, and therefore to school improvement. Self-evaluation under the new arrangements should be informed by the principles of progression, which include both overarching principles and principles specific to each Area of Learning and Experience. They therefore provide a framework for school leaders to use to design their processes for collecting and analysing evidence about learner progress, both over time and at a group level. This should ensure that schools are helping learners to progress in a way that will support them to develop towards the four purposes. The four purposes are the starting point for all teaching and learning, and provide expectations for learners to develop skills, knowledge and approaches to learning that will form the basis for what they need throughout their lives.

Actions proposed

The school improvement guidance sets out how the evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements as a whole should operate, including the Welsh Government's expectations of schools, local authorities, regional consortia and Estyn.

Central role of robust self-evaluation by schools

A key principle of the new arrangements is that schools' self-evaluations and improvement priorities should be the starting point for work with local authorities and regional consortia.

School performance will be considered in its widest sense, with schools evaluated in their own context, supported by a broad range of evidence, bespoke improvement planning and support. The progression, attainment and well-being of all learners should be key in all school evaluation and improvement planning. Lines of enquiry for self-evaluation should be informed by a wide range of evidence on learner progression, including collaborative work with other schools on shared understanding of progress.

The self-evaluation processes will identify areas of strengths and priorities for improvement, which will be drawn together in a single, strategic school development plan. Schools will publish a summary of their plan which includes priorities, actions, milestones and planned support for the current academic year, as well as a report on progress against the previous year's priorities.

Building on their own self-evaluations and development plans, schools will work with local authorities and regional consortia to agree the additional support they need to improve.

End the national categorisation system

The new evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements will see the ending of the national categorisation system, with its published categories. Whilst the core purpose of the categorisation system was to establish the level of support needed by schools to improve, it had a number of negative consequences. Most significantly, the category in which a school was placed did not reflect on the quality of education delivered by the school, but was rather an assessment of the support it needed to improve. However, for many schools, it was perceived to be an accountability measure, while parents also used it as an indicator of quality.

This led to the consequential risk of some schools feeling incentivised to aim for a 'better' colour in their engagement with regional consortia, instead of being open about their support needs and thereby ensuring they access the high quality support they need to improve.

OECD reports to Welsh Government ([Developing Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales](#) and [Achieving the curriculum for Wales](#)) both highlighted the negative impact of public colour coding of schools. For example, 'Achieving the new curriculum for Wales', published in October 2020, referred to ways in which perceptions of the national categorisation system 'have tempered schools' confidence and even their capacity to engage in enquiry, experimentation and innovation.

In place of categorisation, the guidance proposes that School Development Plans summaries should include a short summary of the school's self-evaluation, including strengths and areas for development. This will form part of the wider school development plan summary, which is published on the school's website and will therefore be accessible for the wider community and will continue to provide parents and learners with up to date information about their school.

In addition, regional consortia should support schools' self-evaluation activity and engage in professional dialogue with governing bodies, to support them in fulfilling their accountability function. This will draw attention to any particular issues and strengths. They will also provide the governing body with a report outlining how they propose to support and/or broker support to address its improvement priorities, and more widely.

The new approach will retain the best features of categorisation, while removing its unintended, negative consequences. Regional consortia and local authorities will continue to work closely with schools, as a professional partner in their improvement.

Through the publication of a summary of schools' improvement priorities and development plan, parents will have access to more detailed information about their children's school than was previously provided by its colour category.

Strengthen and provide clarity about the separation and distinction between evaluation and improvement activities and the accountability and transparency systems

The guidance provides clarity about where accountability resides in each level of the education system. It emphasises that accountability and transparency should be seen as separate, if related, to evaluation and improvement activities. It makes clear that whilst local authorities have the power to intervene in 'schools causing concern', in the majority of cases governing bodies, as the accountable body for their school, should be free to oversee the evaluation and improvement process, supported by advice, resources and services from local authorities and regional consortia.

The new arrangements emphasise the continuing key role for Estyn in delivering

consistent, comprehensive and accurate inspections of schools. Schools will be inspected, on average, twice within a six year inspection cycle, which will provide more regular information and assurance for parents from the independent inspectorate. Inspection reports will have greater explanatory narrative about the performance of schools, supporting schools' improvement planning, without including summative judgements.

Clearly assign the roles and responsibilities of different bodies in the education system

Within a self-improving school system, it is important that the different bodies – principally schools and governing bodies, local authorities, and regional consortia – understand their own roles and responsibilities, those of others, and the relationship between them. The guidance therefore sets out Welsh Government's expectations of the role and responsibilities of the different bodies, in relation to evaluation, improvement and accountability, in order to help the self-improving system to function efficiently and effectively.

National Resource: evaluation and improvement and Data Research project

Schools' ability to carry out effective self-evaluation and improvement planning effectively is fundamental to the success of the evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements set out in the school improvement guidance. The school improvement guidance does not attempt to cover the practical detail of how schools should self-evaluate or carry out improve planning, as this is a matter for individual schools to decide, based on their own context and informed by their consideration of factors such as the principles of progression and statutory national priorities. Schools will be supported in this process by their improvement adviser.

However, the Welsh Government has worked with schools, Estyn, regional consortia and local authorities to develop the National resource: evaluation and improvement to support schools when undertaking robust, evidence-based, self-evaluation. The resource, which is published on Hwb, provides a range of approaches and prompts, as well as practical case studies produced by schools, and links to further resources to support effective self-evaluation.

Whilst the use of the national resource is not obligatory, schools are encouraged to make use of support it provides to develop their approaches to self-evaluation.

In addition, The Welsh Government has commissioned research to establish an evidence base on the data and information that is used and needed to support effective evaluation, improvement and accountability throughout the school system. The research, which will report in September 2022, will consider how all parts of the system have access to the most appropriate and useful data for the purposes they need it, looking at what is already available, what else is required or would be beneficial for each function, and how to access or source it.

Five ways of working

We consider the new evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements are consistent with the five ways of working:

Long term

The evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements set out in the school improvement guidance set out the Welsh Government's expectations of how school improvement should be delivered in the context of the Curriculum for Wales. The curriculum has been developed to prepare learners for a rapidly changing world, and to reflect the potential needs of business and the economy

in the future. Key to this are the realisation of the four purposes, the emphasis on learner progression (as set out in the principles of progression for each area of learning and experience).

Prevention

The new arrangements continue the move away from schools being evaluated with a disproportionate emphasis on a small number of performance measures, based on external qualification outcomes, which can lead to behaviours and choices by schools that are not necessarily in the best interests of all learners.

For example, the use of uncontextualised external qualifications data for accountability purposes sometimes led to an excessive focus by schools on the attainment of year 11 learners on the GCSE C/D boundary. This could result in the progress of learners either below or above that threshold not being prioritised, and their achievements not being recognised. In addition, such a narrow focus could mask significant issues in the outcomes, learning and teaching of learners other than in year 11.

In addition, the incorrect but widely held interpretation of the categorisation system, in which schools were assigned a category based on their development and improvement needs, as an accountability measure could also drive unintended and perverse consequences. Most notably, the reluctance of some schools to be open about their improvement needs and to seek support from regional consortia, for fear of this affecting the category they were assigned.

These consequences were generally recognised; 'Education in Wales: Our National Mission' (2017) noted that it was necessary to develop "flexible and responsive accountability models which hold schools to account and support children's learning, without inhibiting innovation and effective sharing of good practice". The OECD's report to Welsh Government, 'Achieving the new curriculum for Wales', published in October 2020, referred to ways in which the

existing evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements, especially perceptions of the national categorisation system, 'have tempered schools' confidence and even their capacity to engage in enquiry, experimentation and innovation'.

Whilst qualifications outcomes will continue to be published for transparency purposes (although exactly in what form will be guided by information ecosystem research), the outcome of a school's self-evaluation provides more meaningful transparency about its areas of strength and priorities for improvement than a colour category.

More broadly in relation to prevention, an important feature of the support system defined in the guidance is that regional consortia and local authority engagement with schools should facilitate the early identification of schools that are declining and in need of support to prevent them becoming a 'school causing concern'. While in the majority of cases, issues should be identified and addressed by schools themselves through their own evaluation and improvement processes, enhanced by collaboration with other schools.

Integration

The evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements set out in the school improvement guidance align with the Ambitious and Learning chapter of Taking Wales Forward: the Welsh Government's Programme for Government, supporting young people to reach their potential.

The arrangements also align with wellbeing goals set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, including:

A prosperous Wales which develops a skilled and well-educated population

The arrangements are designed to drive behaviours and a culture that align to and support the curriculum for Wales. The curriculum aims to ensure learners develop skills, knowledge and approaches to learning that will form the basis for what they need throughout their lives and will meet the potential needs of business and the economy in the future.

A more equal Wales, which enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances

Under the arrangements, a wide range of evidence will be used schools to evaluate the progress and well-being of all learners and groups of learners. Successful self-evaluation will lead to the identification of more focussed and contextualised improvement priorities and actions, informed by the progression and wellbeing of its all learners, no matter what their background or circumstances. This should contribute to the achievement of high standards and aspirations for all.

Collaboration

Key partners with an interest in the new evaluation, improvement and accountability framework, include schools and other education providers, regional consortia, WLGA, local authorities, Qualifications Wales and Estyn, learners, parents and carers.

Co-production has been key to the development of the evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements and the associated 'national resource: evaluation and improvement'. Welsh Government has worked with stakeholders

throughout the development of the arrangements. In autumn 2020 the school improvement guidance was the subject of an informal consultation which included middle tier stakeholders, including regional consortia, local authorities, Qualifications Wales and Estyn. We have continued to engage with and seek the advice of these stakeholders on our proposals, following the formal consultation period in 2021.

The Welsh Government co-constructed the national resource with Estyn, regional consortia and teaching practitioners, and colleagues from Estyn and regional consortia are represented on the national resource steering group. Teaching practitioners have also played a key role, for example in the production of playlist case studies showing best practice in self-evaluation.

Involvement

A formal consultation on the new evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements took place between January and March 2021. The purpose of the consultation was to gather views on the clarity and usefulness of the school improvement guidance and the framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability.

Whilst the majority of the eighty two responders generally agreed with the proposed evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements, particular concerns were raised about the then proposed replacement for categorisation. These concerns were considered and the arrangements have been subsequently amended to address these concerns.

The national resource was the subject of a publicised three month national pilot at the beginning of 2022, and feedback will continue to be invited via the Hwb; while the resource itself will continue to evolve, with more materials being added subject to user feedback.

The guidance subject to this impact assessment is non-statutory, The Welsh Government intends to replace this guidance with statutory guidance in September 2024. In advance of this, we will carry out further consultation, including with young people.

Section 8: conclusion

8.1. How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?

The proposed changes to the evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements presented in the non-statutory school improvement guidance will most significantly impact those directly involved in school improvement planning and accountability processes: school leaders and practitioners, governing bodies, regional consortia, local authorities and Estyn. The proposed changes will also affect learners and parents and carers.

The Welsh Government has worked with stakeholders in schools and the middle tier of the education system to develop new arrangements (initial consultation). The school improvement guidance was the subject of a public consultation, which received 82 responses from amongst others, practitioners and school leaders, school governors, regional consortia and Estyn. Consultation feedback has been carefully considered when finalising the non-statutory guidance, while we have continued to engage with and seek advice from stakeholders on its content.

The Welsh Government has also worked with school leaders, regional consortia and Estyn to develop the national resource: evaluation and improvement, which provides support, such as prompts and case studies, to schools when carrying out self-evaluation and improvement planning. In November 2021, the resource was published on Hwb and was subject to a widely publicised national pilot with

feedback sought from practitioners. The national pilot was accompanied by virtual roadshows and events with school leaders and practitioners.

8.2 What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

It is considered that the most significant identified impacts will be positive. The evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements set out in the non-statutory school improvement guidance will:

- set out Welsh Government's expectations on how school improvement should be delivered in the context of the Curriculum for Wales. It supports the successful implementation of the curriculum for Wales, by aligning the evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements to the principles and aims of the curriculum, including supporting learners to realise the four purposes and principles of progression
- continue the move away from schools being evaluated with a disproportionate emphasis on a small number of performance measures, which can lead to behaviours and choices by schools that are not necessarily in the best interests of all learners
- make each school's own self-evaluation, the starting point for all evaluation and improvement work. This is supported by the development of the national resource: evaluation and improvement
- articulate a system in which schools' performance is evaluated using a wider range of evidence and information, covering the breadth of school activity with a focus on learner progress and wellbeing
- enable the identification of tailored school support needs based on robust self-evaluation and school improvement priorities and the allocation of bespoke support for schools wherever they are on their improvement journey
- maintain the importance of robust accountability within the school system, delivered through effective governance and more regular Estyn inspection of

schools

Overall, we consider that the impact of the proposals will be positive. The arrangements make each school's own self-evaluation the starting point for all evaluation and improvement work; school leaders know their schools best and should be able to decide what aspects of their operations to evaluate in detail, informed by their judgements about learner progress.

Research evidence on effective self-evaluation emphasises the importance of effective self-evaluation being focussed on evaluation for improvement, rather than to satisfy external accountability. Where school improvement is motivated more by external factors, such as institutional competition (for example league tables), schools and staff may perceive self-evaluation less as a meaningful exercise for organic school improvement and more as a ritualised audit of their practice.

The ending of the national categorisation system will also be positive, as it removes the incentive for schools to not be open about their support needs when working with regions and local authorities. Feedback from regional consortia noted that categorisation held back the extent of collaboration between schools, driving instead a culture of competition in some cases. Regional consortia and local authorities will continue to work closely with schools, as a professional partner in their improvement. The outcome of a school's self-evaluation will also provide more meaningful transparency about its areas of strength and priorities for improvement than a colour category.

There may be some short-term negative impacts to the proposed arrangements. For example, the new arrangements will require a culture change in approach to improvement and accountability, and individuals may initially require further support and professional learning to make best use of the arrangements and national resource. We anticipate that this will affect bodies and individuals such as practitioners, governing bodies and improvement advisers.

Local communities, including parents and carers, may need information and support to understand the changes to accountability arrangements, especially the ending of national categorisation which was used by many, albeit incorrectly, as an indicator of school quality. Whilst the publication of a summary of schools' improvement priorities and development plan, will provide parents and carers with access to more detailed information about their children's school than was previously provided by its colour category, this change may be perceived as a negative impact initially.

8.3 In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:

Maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals

- In supporting learners to realise the four purposes, the school improvement guidance contributes across all seven well-being goals. For example, the guidance contributes to a prosperous Wales, as it drives behaviours that support the Curriculum for Wales. The curriculum has been designed to ensure that learners develop the skills, knowledge and approach to learning which they will need throughout their lives and which will meet the potential needs of business and the economy in the future.
- The overarching purpose of school improvement is to help schools give learners the best possible learning experiences and outcomes, whatever their background or circumstance, in order to achieve high standards and aspirations for all. Schools should use a wide range of evidence when carrying out self-evaluation, and to consider the progression and well-being of all learners when setting their improvement priorities. This will contribute to the well-being goal of a more equal Wales. The guidance will therefore also contribute to Welsh Government well-being objective to 'continue our long-term programme of education reform, and ensure education inequalities narrow and standards rise'.

Avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?

The negative impacts identified above can be reduced and mitigated through:

- appropriate training provided, for example, to practitioners, governing bodies and improvement advisers. The Welsh Government will work with regional consortia and local authorities to ensure that effective, proportionate training is provided in a consistent manner across Wales
- the national resource: evaluation and improvement includes guidance and support to enable schools to carry out effective self-evaluation under the new arrangements
- effective messaging to communicate the aims and benefits of the new arrangements to all parties

8.4 How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?

The evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements subject to this integrated impact assessment are non-statutory. We will build on the experiences and learning developed during forthcoming academic years and will reflect this in revised statutory guidance to come into force in September 2024.

The statutory guidance will be the subject of further formal consultation before publication; we anticipate that the proposed statutory guidance will be the subject of consultation with young people. We also aim to work with practitioners through the national network for curriculum implementation.

The statutory school improvement guidance will be subject to a fresh integrated impact assessment before publication.

A. Children's rights impact assessment

Background

The overarching purpose of school improvement is to support schools give children and young people the best possible learning experiences and outcomes, whatever their background, thereby achieving high standards and aspirations for all. Under the Curriculum for Wales, a fundamental part of this will be ensuring that schools support every learner to progress towards the **four purposes**.

The guidance supports that objective by setting out a framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability that will deliver sustainable school improvement and drive the behaviours and practices required by the new curriculum and assessment arrangements. To be successful, it is crucial that all aspects of the schools system are aligned with and support the new curriculum and its underlying principles.

A **Children's Rights Impact Assessment** (CRIA) was conducted in relation to Curriculum for Wales guidance, which concluded that the impact of the new curriculum was expected to be positive. An extensive programme of engagement activity was carried out during the development of the guidance, including regional events and focus groups for children and young people.

The draft non-statutory school improvement guidance was the subject of a public consultation in 2021 which did not involve direct engagement with learners and young people. However we intend to issue updated school improvement guidance on a statutory basis in September 2024 and, prior to doing so, will learn from the impact of the non-statutory guidance, and carry out further consultation, including direct engagement with learners.

Evaluation, improvement and accountability framework

The arrangements set out in the guidance aim to provide schools and others with a system to ensure that every learner is supported to progress, and to encourage schools to evaluate and support the progression of all learners of differing ages, abilities and aptitudes.

What changes does the guidance propose?

The guidance proposes to:

Strengthen the importance of robust self-evaluation and improvement planning by schools, which draws on a broad range of evidence

A key principle of the new arrangements is that schools' self-evaluation and improvement priorities should be the starting point for work with local authorities and regional consortia.

School performance will be considered in its widest sense, with schools evaluated in their own context, supported by a broad range of evidence, bespoke improvement planning and support. The progression, attainment and well-being of all learners will be important features of school evaluation.

The self-evaluation processes will identify areas of strengths and priorities for improvement, which will be drawn together in a single, strategic school development plan. Schools will publish a summary of their plan which includes priorities, actions, milestones and planned support for the current academic year, as well as a report on progress against the previous year's priorities.

Building on their own self-evaluation and development plans, schools will work

with local authorities and regional consortia to agree the additional support they need to improve.

Replace the national categorisation system

The new arrangements end the published national categorisation process, whilst retaining the core purpose of categorisation – determining what support schools need to improve. Categorisation itself will be replaced by a support process, led by regional consortia, in which consortia agree with schools the support they need to improve.

The guidance proposes that published School Development Plans summaries should include a short summary of the school's self-evaluation and conclusions, summing up the school's headline strengths and areas for development and providing the context for the school's improvement priorities and planned actions. This will form part of the wider school development plan summary, which is published on the school's website and is therefore accessible for the wider community, continuing to provide parents and learners with up to date information about their school.

Strengthen and provide clarity about the separation and distinction between evaluation and improvement activities and the accountability system

The guidance provides clarity about where accountability resides in each level of the education system. It emphasises that accountability and transparency should be seen as separate, if related, to evaluation and improvement activities. It makes clear that whilst local authorities have the power to intervene in 'schools causing concern', in the majority of cases governing bodies, as the accountable body for their school, should be free to oversee the evaluation and improvement process, supported by advice, resources and services from local authorities and

regional consortia.

In order to ensure that accountability remains robust, schools will be inspected more regularly by Estyn. Inspection reports will also have greater explanatory narrative about the performance of schools, supporting schools' improvement planning, without including summative judgements. Schools judged to be in the statutory categories of special measures or significant improvement, however, will continue to be clearly identified.

Clearly assign the roles and responsibilities of different bodies in the education system

Within a self-improving school system, it is important that the different bodies – principally schools and governing bodies, local authorities, and regional consortia – understand their own roles and responsibilities, those of others, and the relationship between them. The guidance therefore sets out Welsh Government's expectations of the role and responsibilities of the different bodies, in relation to evaluation, improvement and accountability, in order to help the self-improving system to function efficiently and effectively.

Impact on young people

We expect that the changes proposed in the school improvement guidance will have a positive impact on children in Wales.

The overarching purpose of school improvement is to help schools give young people the best possible learning experiences and outcomes, whatever their background, thereby achieving high standards and aspirations for all and narrowing the gap between disadvantaged learners and their peers.

Under the Curriculum for Wales, a fundamental part of this will be ensuring that

schools support every learner to progress towards the four purposes. In order to ensure that schools are helping learners to progress in a way that will support them to develop towards the four purposes, the Principles of Progression provide a framework for school leaders to use to design their processes for collecting and analysing evidence about learner progress, both over time and at a group level.

With the removal of levels in the Curriculum for Wales, it is necessary for schools and partners to develop a more sophisticated, broad-based understanding of learner progress. Schools need to collect evidence to evaluate learner progress, both at an individual, group and school level. They should use this evidence to answer the following two questions:

- are learners progressing in the ways described in the Principles of Progression, supporting them to develop towards the four purposes?
- is the pace of learners' progress in line with the expectations of teachers and the curriculum?

Schools' answers to these questions will help determine the lines of enquiry of subsequent self-evaluation and improvement. To help schools arrive at answers to these questions, the Principles of Progression include both overarching principles and principles specific to each Area of Learning and Experience.

To further support schools, the guidance sets out eight contributory factors which describe the key attributes that schools that are successfully realising the curriculum will possess; these factors should be taken into account when schools carry out self-evaluation. The Curriculum for Wales recognises that learners progress at different rates, and this is reflected in the new evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements.

The new arrangements support the introduction of a new culture for school evaluation and improvement, in which a main focus of all levels of the education system will be the delivery of school improvement processes that supports a

broad and balanced curriculum in all schools, and ensures that the progress and wellbeing of all learners, including the most vulnerable, feed into self-evaluation and subsequent improvement priorities and actions. Schools will be encouraged to be open about their strengths and areas for improvement, within a collaborative and supportive environment, which should ensure that they receive the support and advice they need to improve for the benefit of their learners.

Under the new evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements:

- governing bodies are accountable for the effectiveness and improvement of their school and oversee their evaluation and improvement activities. As part of this accountability role, governing bodies will publish summaries of their school's annual school development plan, setting out their school's improvement priorities and the actions which it will take to deliver them. It will also report against the previous year's priorities
- the school's improvement priorities should be determined by consideration of the outcomes and conclusions of its self-evaluation, and of statutory national priorities, which include reducing the impact of poverty on learners' progression and attainment. Self-evaluation should be based on the widest and richest possible range of information, covering the breadth of learner's educational experience. The self-evaluation processes should consider how the school is enabling all learners, and groups of learners, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to progress along their own learning pathway. The aim to raise standards and aspirations for all learners should be a key driver. Consideration of learner wellbeing should also be at the heart of self-evaluation under the new arrangements
- a key aspect of the arrangements, which is emphasised by the eight contributory factors, is the importance of pupil voice and community engagement in school self-evaluation. The views of learners, their families and the wider community should be sought and taken into consideration in the self-evaluation process. This will contribute to the contextualisation of the wider evidence before schools, and should ensure that the needs of all learners are considered in the process and reflected in subsequent

improvement priorities

- to support effective school self-evaluation, we have worked with schools, regional consortia and Estyn to develop the National Resource: Evaluation and Improvement, which provides schools with prompts and case studies to help them carry out self-evaluation. The resource covers a range of areas, with its four main themes for evaluation including Teaching and Learning and Equity and Wellbeing
- whilst schools' will continue to use qualifications data in their self-evaluation, for example as a starting point for self-evaluation in some areas, it should not be used in isolation or out of context, nor presented as evidence of how effective a school is. Using external qualifications data out of context, for accountability purposes, has in the past led to perverse behaviours and choices by schools that are not necessarily in the best interests of learners - for example, a narrowing choice of the curriculum at both primary and secondary sectors and an excessive focus on the GCSE C/D boundary, which can lead to schools not recognising the achievements or requirements of learners either below or above that threshold, or of learners in different age groups. The removal of any perceived incentives to such behaviours will improve the life chances of all learners, as schools will be encouraged to offer a broad and balanced curriculum and to ensure that the progress made by every learner is their priority
- the new evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements will also see the ending of the national categorisation system, with its published categories. Whilst the core purpose of the categorisation system was to establish the level of support needed by schools to improve, it had a number of negative consequences. Most significantly, whilst the category in which a school was placed did not reflect on the quality of education delivered by the school, but was rather an assessment of the support it needed to improve, it was seen as an accountability exercise - an assessment of the quality of education delivered by the school. This led to the consequential risk of schools not engaging fully or openly in what should have been a beneficial evaluation and improvement process to determine the level of support they

needed to improve for their learners. In addition, the OECD's report to Welsh Government, 'Achieving the new curriculum for Wales', published in October 2020, referred to ways in which perceptions of the national categorisation system 'have tempered schools' confidence and even their capacity to engage in enquiry, experimentation and innovation. Responses received to the consultation on the draft school improvement guidance were also strongly in favour of the removal of categorisation for this reason

The replacement of categorisation with a more bespoke process, in which schools set out the support they need in their published school development plan summaries, removes the suggestion of comparative judgement whilst continuing to provide transparency for learners, families and the wider community. The new arrangements should encourage schools to think more widely about where they need to develop to support all learners to progress towards the four purposes, and how they can best do so. It will also allow them to work more collaboratively and effectively with others in the education system, including regional consortia, local authorities and other schools, to obtain any support they need to improve for their learners.

As a result of the pandemic, the categorisation process has been suspended since the summer of 2020. The clear feedback we have received from regional consortia, who daily saw the impact of categorisation on schools' behaviour, is that its suspension has improved their relationships with schools, and has accelerated a culture change towards a professional partnership that supports and accelerates schools' improvement rather than one based upon accountability. Regional consortia have reported that the removal of the categories has resulted in schools being considerably more open about requesting support, especially those schools which had previously been categorised as green.

Explain how the proposal is likely to impact on children's rights

The Welsh Government is proud of our record of promoting children's rights and working to ensure all children in Wales have the best start in life. Our ambition is that the rights of every child and young person in Wales should be promoted and respected to enable them to be the best they can be.

The development of the new curriculum for Wales has had due regard to the UNCRC and Welsh Government has worked closely with the Office of the Children's Commissioner. The proposed new framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability in schools, set out in the school improvement guidance, is designed to align with and support the new curriculum and its underlying principles.

We consider that the evaluation, improvement and accountability framework and the guidance in which it is presented contribute to the following articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

- article 28 - Children have a right to an education. Discipline in schools should respect children's human dignity. Primary education should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this
- article 29 - Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full. It should encourage children to respect their parents, and their own and other cultures

The school improvement guidance will also support schools and others in the education system evaluate and improve the delivery of the four purposes to their learners. (The four purposes specifically recognise the role of children's rights: all children and young people will be ethical, informed citizens; who respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society; and who understand and exercise their human and democratic responsibilities and rights.) In doing so, it will be supported by the national evaluation and

improvement resource, which will help practitioners to deliver on the expectations set out in the guidance. The resource has ‘curriculum’ as one of its four themes.’ and contains prompts to support schools to self-evaluate their delivery of and progress towards the four purposes and the principles of curriculum for Wales.

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