

23. Inspection

This chapter considers:

- the aims of the school inspection process
- the circumstances in which a school may be inspected
- the procedures the head teacher and governing body are expected to follow prior to, during, and following an inspection.

Background

1. Inspection is intended to help schools to improve by highlighting their strengths and weaknesses, providing them with recommendations for improvement and promoting a culture of rigorous and reflective self-evaluation and improvement work. The publication of inspection reports also provides information to parents and the wider community about the quality of education and whether pupils are achieving as much as they can.

2. Estyn is the office of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales. It is independent of, but funded by, the Welsh Ministers under section 104 of the Government of Wales Act 1998.

3. School inspections are governed by the Education Act 2005 and related regulations. Inspections must be conducted by teams of inspectors, each led by a registered inspector (Rgi) or a His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) or additional inspector, and must result in a written report. Section 28(5) of the Education Act 2005, says that registered inspectors must report on:

- the quality of the education provided in the school,
- how far the education provided in the school meets the needs of the range of pupils at the school,
- the educational standards achieved in the school,
- the quality of the leadership in and management of the school, including whether the financial resources made available to the school are managed effectively,
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils at the school, and
- the contribution made by the school to the well-being of those pupils
- the development of pupils at the school with reference to the four purposes of a curriculum (see Chapter 11 of the Handbook).

There is also a duty in the Chief Inspector to keep the Assembly informed about action taken at maintained schools to promote healthy eating and drinking and is included in Estyn's inspection framework.

4. Some schools have a religious character and teach denominational religious education. In these schools, religious education and the content of collective worship

are inspected separately under section 50 of the Education Act 2005 and are not included in section 28 inspections.

5. The following categories of schools are inspected under section 28 of the Education Act 2005:

- Community schools
- Foundation schools
- Voluntary aided schools
- Voluntary controlled schools
- Maintained nursery schools
- Special schools
- Pupil referral units.

Early years provision

6. Schools can accommodate a range of early years provision. This might include, for example, Flying Start or childcare provision. Such provision may be for children under the age of three or for three and four year olds. Teams should only inspect this provision if the childcare provision is also a Registered Education Provider with the local authority to provide relevant nursery education.

7. Where there is early years provision that is not part of the school (i.e. the children are not on the school's register), inspectors must check that the provision has been registered with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and the local authority as appropriate. This is an important safeguarding issue and inspectors should raise this matter with the school if it has not taken the appropriate action.

Post-16 sector

8. In the post-16 sector, the Learning and Skills Act 2000 requires the Chief Inspector in Wales to report on:

- the quality of education and training provided
- the standards achieved by those receiving education or training
- whether the financial resources made available to those providing education or training are managed efficiently and used to provide value for money.

The school inspection system

9. The current system of regular external inspections started in 1993. All secondary schools were inspected by August 1998 and all primary and special schools by August 1999.

10. The most recent cycle of inspections of primary, special and secondary schools, started in September 2016. As of September 2016, education and training providers are to be inspected at least once within an eight year period (between September 2016 and August 2024), and thereafter at least once in every subsequent 6 year period. The date of the next inspection is not linked to the date of their previous inspection. Therefore, a provider may have fewer or more than 8 years between each inspection.

11. Estyn has the power to make an unannounced visit to any education and training provider in Wales if they have concerns.

12. Estyn monitors a sample of all inspections. They quality assure all inspection reports and provide feedback to inspectors on the quality of their work. Inspectors who fall below Estyn's quality standard may be required to undertake further training and in severe cases may lose their registration.

Inspection framework

13. Estyn has published and rolled out a refreshed inspection framework from September 2022. The inspection is based on five inspection areas: Learning; Wellbeing and attitudes to learning; Teaching and learning experiences; Care, support and guidance; and, Leadership and management.

The Virtual Inspection Room

14. The inspectorate will use an electronic system for managing many aspects of the inspection. This system is called the virtual inspection room (VIR). It is a web-based system that allows schools to upload information to the inspectorate and to download guidance from the inspectorate about the inspection process. The VIR is also the place where schools can access the nominee's guidance on preparing for the inspection and the post-inspection questionnaires. The nominee is a senior member of staff selected by the school to work with the inspection team. This role is described in more detail below at paragraphs

15. There is a comprehensive set of guidance documents and videos available on Estyn's website to help schools to understand and to use the system.

The inspection team

16. The composition of the inspection team will depend on the type, age range, linguistic nature and number of pupils on roll.

17. HMI are permanent members of staff that lead and carry out inspection work providing independent and objective judgements on the provision of education and training. Registered inspectors (RgIs) and additional inspectors can also act as reporting inspectors on inspections, effectively carrying out the same role as an HMI. RgIs tender for inspection work and enter into a contract with Estyn for each inspection job they are awarded.

18. All members of an inspection team will have successfully completed Estyn's selection and training procedures. Estyn recruits, trains and maintains a list of approved Rgls. The role of Rgl is set out in legislation for the inspection of schools and pre-school settings. Team and peer inspectors may apply to become Rgls if they meet the selection criteria. In these cases, they must undertake further training and assessment successfully before becoming an Rgl. All inspectors receive regular training to keep them up to date with inspection matters.

19. Inspection teams will be led by a reporting inspector (HMI, additional inspector or Registered Inspector) with other team members drawn from among HMI or additional inspectors. Each team will also have a peer inspector (senior member of staff from another school) and a lay inspector.

20. The reporting inspector manages the inspection team and the whole inspection process, and is the first point of reference for everyone involved in the inspection.

21. Schools will be invited to select a senior member of staff, called the nominee, to work with the inspection team. The nominee will have sufficient seniority to act as a link between the school and the inspection team but need not be the headteacher of the schools.

22. In order to act as a nominee on an inspection, the senior member of staff must have completed the Estyn online training course before their inspection. If the school decides not to have a nominee, this does not prejudice the inspection. The fact that a school does not have a nominee has no impact on the judgements made by the inspection team.

23. The exact nature of the nominee's role is agreed with the reporting inspector before each inspection and confirmed in a statement of agreement. The nominee can take part in a range of inspection activities, including observing lessons and attending team meetings, but cannot take an active part in arriving at corporate judgements.

24. The peer inspector brings the perspective of a current practitioner to an inspection. Peer inspectors have been nominated by the school at which they work and have been trained by Estyn. The peer inspector contributes fully to the inspection and corporate judgements.

Self-evaluation

25. Schools' self-evaluation and their development plans will be a starting point for inspection. Both inspection and self-evaluation are concerned with providing an accurate assessment of quality and standards; identifying strengths and areas for improvement and what needs to be done to improve them. Self-evaluation findings may be presented to inspectors in a variety of formats; the focus during inspection should be on the effectiveness and impact of self-evaluation and improvement processes, not the quality of documentation.

26. Guided by the Estyn 'What We Inspect' and 'How We Inspect' documents, inspectors will test the validity of the school's self-evaluation findings and priorities

for improvement. Inspectors' judgements on leadership and management take account of the quality and accuracy of school self-evaluation and the impact of improvement work, including how accurately leaders and managers know the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Before an inspection

27. Under new inspection arrangements, schools will receive ten working days' notice of the inspection. The inspection coordinator and the reporting inspector will both contact the school to discuss the arrangements for the inspection. During these discussions, the inspectorate will:

- explain the purpose of the inspection and discuss an outline programme for inspection
- discuss the specific information required before the inspection and make the arrangements for receiving it in electronic form through the VIR
- ask if there are any issues or risks the team should be aware of and ask for a general health and safety briefing for the team at the start of the inspection
- establish whether the school wishes to have a nominee and, if it does, agree the role of the nominee
- agree arrangements for the school to set up a meeting with parents/carers
- arrange the availability of supporting evidence, including samples of pupils' work
- ensure that there are agreed procedures for addressing any concerns or complaints that might arise during the course of the inspection
- arrange for no more than three members of the governing body to meet inspectors during the inspection period
- organise any domestic arrangements such as a base for the inspectors and parking
- set up the arrangements for feeding back the inspection findings
- agree the arrangements for completing the post-inspection questionnaire
- inform the school that the key matters of the arrangements will be confirmed in writing.

28. The inspectorate will request the following information as soon as possible:

- key background information on the school
- a copy of the current school development plan
- full details of the school's timetables and other intended activities for the period of the inspection.

Inspections involve observation of teaching, training, and work with pupils. On the basis of the information received, inspectors will select a sample of sessions to observe and to evaluate.

If the inspection is to take place early in the school year, the inspectorate may ask for samples of pupils' work from the previous year.

29. The inspectorate will also arrange to obtain a briefing on the school from the local authority.

30. The inspectorate will ask the school to inform other partners and stakeholders about the inspection, including arrangements for a pre-inspection meeting with parents/carers.

31. When schools are notified of inspection, they will receive information on how to access online questionnaires for pupils and parents/carers and staff, and those available for the governing body for maintained schools and PRUs. The outcomes of the pre-inspection questionnaires will form part of the pre-inspection evidence. Schools are asked to encourage all pupils to complete the survey.

32. The inspectorate will arrange for questionnaires about the work of the school to be available to all carers/parents before the inspection.

33. The inspectorate will collect, collate and analyse the learner and parent questionnaire responses and present the outcomes in an annex to the inspection report.

34. The governing body must arrange a meeting between the Registered Inspector and parents/carers who have children at the school. All parents/ carers (including the LA where there are 'looked after' children at the school) must be invited to the meeting, including those who are members of the school's staff or governing body. Other governors and staff cannot attend.

During an inspection

Initial team meeting

35. In the initial meeting of the inspection team, there should be a health and safety briefing from the school. After that, the team should discuss the strategy for the inspection.

Gathering and reviewing inspection evidence

36. The team will consider a wide range of evidence. The main forms of evidence are:

- observation of teaching or training sessions and other activities
- samples of pupils' work
- the views of pupils and stakeholders
- discussions with staff, leaders and managers, governors, parents and others.
- Documentary evidence, including information about pupil's performance and progress
- Briefing from the local authority

37. The team will use direct observation of work wherever possible to gather evidence to support judgements. The team carry out a mixture of full lesson observation and learning walks. During a learning walk, inspectors will normally spend no less than 30 minutes observing a learning activity.

38. Learner voice is a key source of evidence of. Discussions will provide an opportunity to explore pupils' knowledge and understanding of their work, and how well they feel the school supports them and contributes to their wellbeing.

39. Inspectors will request lists of pupils from the school and then select those that they wish to interview. The inspection team may request lists based on various categories, for example, those with additional learning needs, Welsh speakers, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds and minority ethnic groups.

40. Schools should make information available to the inspection team about the standards achieved by pupils, particularly the results of any initial screening tests, reading tests and other assessments. This will help inspectors to judge pupils' progress compared to starting points.

41. The team will need to consider stakeholders' views on the school and test out the validity of those views during the inspection in order to inform judgements.

42. If the headteacher is not acting as nominee, it is important that the reporting inspector holds a brief daily meeting with the head teacher to agree new arrangements, discuss matters of concern, clarify inspection issues, obtain further information and discuss emerging findings.

Recording inspection evidence

43. Inspectors will use judgement forms (JFs), to record their findings and judgements. These may relate to observation of learning activities, discussions with pupils, interviews with staff, interviews with leaders and managers, scrutiny of documentation, performance information and samples of pupils' work.

Team meeting

44. The main purpose of team meetings is to arrive at an accurate, thoroughly tested and corporate view of standards, wellbeing, quality and leadership.

Professional dialogue

45. At the end of an observation, inspectors should, as far as practicable, have some brief professional dialogue with the member of staff.

Formal feedback

46. At the end of the on-site part of the inspection, the team will provide verbal feedback to leaders and managers. A representative from the governing body, and a member of the local authority or regional consortium, should be invited to attend the meeting. The feedback should convey the key messages regarding the school's strengths and areas for improvement and if placed in a follow up category, the reasons for the level of follow up.

47. The reporting inspector should explain to the school that questions for clarification may be asked during the feedback meeting, but that the team's judgements may not be questioned. There should be broad consistency between the evaluations that are fed back and what appears in the written report.

48. All the judgements that are reported during an inspection are provisional and subject to moderation and validation by HMCI. They are confidential to the school until the report is published.

Follow-up activity

49. During all core inspections, the inspection team, along with the nominee, will consider whether the school needs any follow-up activity and it will feed back clearly to leaders and managers if any follow up activity is required during the formal feedback meeting.

50. Where the inspection identifies practice worth sharing, inspectors will invite the provider to write a case study that will be published on the Estyn website.

Where the inspection identifies important concerns in relation to standards, quality of education and training or leadership and management, the team will identify which level of follow-up activity is most appropriate.

51. There are three levels of follow up activity:

1. Special measures
2. Significant improvement
3. Estyn Review

52. Special measures and significant improvement are statutory categories that apply to schools causing concern as defined by section 44 of the Education Act 2005 and any associated guidance. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language and Welsh Government officials will be informed when schools are placed in these categories and kept informed, following monitoring inspections by Estyn, of subsequent progress as required by the legislation.

53. Estyn Review is a non-statutory level of follow-up for those schools whose shortcomings are not serious enough to require a statutory category. Estyn, in conjunction with the local authority, will review these schools' progress around 12 months after the core inspection.

After the inspection

The inspection report

54. The reporting inspector is responsible for producing a final inspection report that is clear to the lay audience and helpful to the school.

55. The Inspectorate will give the school a late draft of the report to help check the factual accuracy of the content. The school has five working days in which to consider the draft report and to identify any factual errors.

56. Estyn will publish reports bilingually where this has been requested, in line with Estyn's Welsh Language Scheme.

57. The report will be produced within statutory or agreed sector timescales; currently this is within 35 working days from the date on which the inspection was completed.

58. The report will indicate if the school requires any follow up inspection activity.

59. Following receipt of the report, the governing body must arrange for:

- The parents of all pupils to be sent a copy of the summary within 10 working days;
- The full report and summary to be available for inspection at such time and place as may be possible by a member of the public who wishes to see it; and
- Copies of the full report and summary to be provided for anyone who asks.

Assuring the quality of inspections

60. As part of its quality assurance procedures, the Inspectorate invites schools to complete a post inspection questionnaire (PIQ). The questionnaire will be available to schools in the VIR. Schools should complete the first part of the PIQ immediately after the on-site inspection and submit it electronically to Estyn through the VIR system. Schools can complete the second part of the PIQ after the publication of the inspection report, again through the VIR system.

61. Schools should raise any concerns about the conduct of an inspection with the reporting inspector during the inspection. Any objections to the findings of inspection should also be discussed with the reporting inspector as they arise during the inspection. The quality assurance of the inspection will always be carried out by the reporting inspector in the first instance.

62. Estyn's arrangements for dealing with complaints are set out in Complaints Handling Procedures, which is available on the Inspectorate's website <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/>.

The action plan

63. The governing body must draw up an action plan (this may also be referred to as the School Development Plan or School Improvement Plan) within 20 working days of receiving the inspection report. "Working days" does not include weekends or bank holidays or holidays longer than one week but does include half term breaks of one week or less. The action plan must set out the action to be taken on each of the recommendations identified in the report, with target dates for completion.

Schools in special measures and the induction of NQTs

64. Induction generally cannot take place in a school requiring special measures as judged by Estyn. There are two possible exemptions to this requirement:

- the person in question began their induction period, or was employed as a graduate teacher or a registered teacher on an employment-based teacher training scheme, at the school at a time when such circumstances did not apply
- one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales has certified in writing that they are satisfied that the school is fit for the purpose of providing induction supervision and training.

In brief:

The governing body must:

- tell parents and others about an inspection
- in voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and foundation schools designated as having a religious character, arrange a separate inspection under section 50 of the Education Act 2005, of collective worship and any denominational education
- Arrange a meeting between the reporting inspector and parents
- meet with the Reporting Inspector and the chair of governors to discuss the work of governors
- take steps that are reasonably practical to ensure that every registered parent/carer of a registered pupil at the school, receives a copy of the summary of the report of an inspection within 10 working days after receiving the report
- draw up an action plan setting out follow-up action and send information about the actions proposed to parents
- include information in their annual report to parents about their action plan(s) and progress being made.

The Law

The Education Act 2005

The Education and Inspections Act 2006

School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Part V and Schedule 26

The Education (School Inspection) (Wales) Regulations 2006 (SI 2006/1714), as amended

The Government of Wales Act 1998

The Further and Higher Education Act 1992

The Learning and Skills Act 2000

Inspection work also takes account of legislation governing Estyn and educational providers themselves, including, for example, the Welsh Language Standards (No2) Regulations 2016.

Guidance

Schools Causing Concern – Statutory guidance for schools and local authorities (issued September 2017)

Induction for newly qualified teachers in Wales (revised July 2017)

[Induction for newly qualified teachers in Wales 2017](#)

Estyn Publications

[on Estyn's website at <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/inspection/inspection-guidance/>]

Guidance regarding schools in special measures and the induction period for newly qualified teachers