The key features of the system for external school inspection have been in place since 1992, although the arrangements have changed incrementally since then. The system emphasises highlighting areas of strength in school performance, identifying underperformance, and supporting school improvement through collaborative working between practitioners.

### Early childhood education and care

**Responsible bodies**

**Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)**

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) [1] is the independent regulator of childcare and social care in Wales. It is responsible for the regulation and inspection of children’s day care, childminders, out-of-school care and children’s social care. It also works with Estyn (see below) in the inspection of private and voluntary providers in receipt of public funding to provide early childhood education and care for three- and four-year-olds.

**Estyn**

Estyn [2], the office of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, is the Crown body responsible for the inspection of early years settings receiving public funding to deliver early childhood education and care for three- and four-year-olds. This includes provision in maintained schools [3] and maintained nursery schools [4], and in private and voluntary settings in receipt of such public funding. It inspects these private and voluntary settings jointly with the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), with Estyn leading on the quality and standards of education, and CIW focusing on childcare.

**Approaches and methods for quality assurance**

Early years provision is delivered in a range of settings across public, private and voluntary providers. Inspection arrangements differ for early year providers, depending on whether or not they are considered part of the school system.

**Registered early years providers**

Childminders and childcare providers, such as nurseries, pre-schools or kindergartens, must be registered with, and inspected by, the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) [1], maintained schools [3], maintained nursery schools [4] and independent schools [5] do not have to register with the CIW unless they offer provision under the age of three. CIW registers provision as required under Part 2 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 [6] (as amended), by statutory instruments made under the Measure, and by the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare (NMS) [7] (2016).
These set out the standards for quality, management, physical environment and staffing which all providers must meet.

Previously, registered early years providers of childcare and play have been required to complete a Self Assessment of Service Statement (SASS) [8], which included a self assessment and an annual review of the quality of their provision. This gave information about the systems in place for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of care given to children, and was used by CIW to inform their inspections of providers. Providers are not required to provide a SASS for the 2018/19 financial year. However, they continue to have a legal duty to review the quality of the care they provide and should ensure that they have an up-to-date Quality of Care Review in place in case the CIW requests it.

Registered early years providers are inspected in accordance with The Child Minding and Day Care (Inspection and Information for Local Authorities) (Wales) Regulations 2010 [9] and The Regulation of Child Minding and Day Care (Wales) Order 2016 [10].

There are two types of inspection.

a) Full inspections: These are routine inspections, planned as part of a schedule of inspections. They take place approximately six months after a newly registered service becomes operational. After that, full day care services are inspected at least once every two years, and other childcare services, for example, child minders, sessional day care, crèches, and out-of-school care, are inspected at least once every three years.

b) Focused inspections: These are short inspections which consider the experience of people using the services. They aim to ensure that provision complies with standards and regulations in cases where poor outcomes have previously been identified.

Under the revised inspection framework [11] for childcare, introduced in April 2016, inspections cover four themes:

- well-being
- care and development
- environment
- leadership and management.

These four themes were drawn from an inspection framework which CIW has developed jointly with Estyn, the education inspectorate, for the inspection of non-maintained settings which are eligible for Welsh Government funding for provision for three- and four-year-olds (see below).

CIW began to phase in the introduction of ratings in 2018. Inspectors award one of four ratings against each of the inspection themes:

- excellent
- good
- adequate
- poor.

CIW childcare inspections are unannounced, although inspectors generally telephone childminders in the week prior to an inspection to confirm opening times and availability.

When CIW inspects a regulated service, it has a duty to prepare a written report of its findings and to make this available to those who use, or intend to use the service, and to the providers. For most
types of service, both a summary and full version of the inspection report are published on the CIW website. Hard copies are also available for those who cannot access the reports electronically. Reports are usually published around seven weeks after an inspection. For more detailed information, see the CIW Policy for Publishing Inspection Reports [12].

Estyn and CIW have developed a new, joint framework for the inspection of non-maintained settings which are eligible for Welsh Government funding for the provision of early childhood education and care for three- and four-year-olds. As set out in the Guidance Handbook for Inspecting Care and Education in Regulated Non-school Settings [13] (2019), these settings are inspected across the following six themes:

- well-being
- care and development
- environment
- leadership and management
- learning
- teaching and assessment.

The first four themes are the same as those in the CIW inspection framework for childcare described above, but the joint Estyn/CIW framework also considers learning, and teaching and assessment. For more detailed information about these key themes, see pages 10-20 of the Guidance Handbook.

Settings receive 10 working days’ notice of inspections and are contacted by the inspection coordinator to make arrangements for the inspection. The inspection team consists of a lead inspector and a team inspector and the inspection takes place over two consecutive half days. Inspectors give an inspection judgement for each theme (excellent, good, adequate or poor) and also give an overall rating for the setting. Reports are published within 45 working days after the inspection.

Previously, non-maintained settings receiving funding from the Welsh Government to provide free, part-time education for three- and four-year-olds were inspected by Estyn alone, under its 2010 Common Inspection Framework [14]. This covered more, but narrower areas than the new framework.

**Early years provision in schools**


**Primary and secondary education**

**Responsible bodies**

**Estyn**

Estyn [2], the office of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, is responsible for the inspection of schools, early years settings in receipt of public funding, further education colleges [17], initial teacher training, youth work, work-based learning and adult education. Estyn, which was established under the Education (Schools) Act 1992 [18], also provides advice, based on inspection evidence, to inform the Welsh Government in the formulation and evaluation of education and training policy. It is headed by Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales (HMCI), a Crown appointment. HMCI has a statutory duty to produce an annual report, which is laid before the National Assembly for Wales.
In June 2018, the results of an independent review of the role of Estyn in supporting education reform were published. The review outlined a series of recommendations, including an enhanced role for Estyn in providing evaluation and support at school, local authority, regional and national level.

Local authorities (LAs)

Every local authority in Wales is required to promote high standards of education for pupils of school age in its area. Under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, local authorities are responsible for monitoring and supporting the performance of the schools they maintain. They must identify schools in their area which are underachieving, low-attaining or otherwise giving cause for concern, and take an active role in relation to these schools to bring about the necessary improvements. Some local authority school improvement functions are the responsibility of regional education consortia.

Schools

Schools in Wales carry first-line responsibility for their own quality assurance, which is generally referred to as ‘self-assessment’ or ‘self-evaluation’. Self-evaluation is an important part of the quality assurance process, providing the basis for planning, development and improvement in schools.

The prime responsibility for institutional self-evaluation and school improvement lies with the headteacher and governing body of each individual school. The headteacher and senior management team monitor and evaluate all aspects of the work of the school in order to set objectives for improvement. The governing body also needs to have an overview of the performance and management of the school (including its own effectiveness), and is expected to ensure that effective systems for monitoring and evaluation are in place.

Approaches and methods for quality assurance

External inspection by Estyn

The inspection of maintained schools in Wales (including nursery classes in primary schools and post-compulsory education in secondary schools) is carried out under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

School inspection is a process of evidence gathering in order to provide an assessment of how well a school is performing. Inspections focus on five areas (see section ‘Framework for inspection’ below), identified as the most important areas that help learners achieve.

The Education (School Inspection) (Wales) Regulations 2006 (as amended) require all schools to be inspected at least once within the seven-year period beginning 1 September 2016. However, Estyn is planning to launch a consultation on extending the current seven-year period to eight years. This would allow a partial suspension of inspections in maintained schools from September 2020 to August 2021, and enable Estyn to work closely with schools in preparation for the introduction of the new ‘Curriculum for Wales’ from September 2022. Further information regarding the changes to inspection arrangements is available on the Estyn website.

Schools receive 15 working days’ written notice of inspection and inspections typically take four days to complete.

Inspections are conducted by a lead inspector and, depending on the size of the school, a team of inspectors.
Lead inspectors are usually permanent members of Estyn staff known as Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Education and Training (HMIs). Inspections may also be led by Registered Inspectors (RgIs) who carry out the same role as HMIs. Estyn contracts with RgIs for each inspection they are awarded.

Other team members may be HMIs, additional inspectors (either independent, self-employed inspectors or individuals seconded to Estyn by an employer), or peer inspectors (people who are currently in a managerial role in a school and have teaching or training experience).

Inspection teams may also include lay inspectors; members of the general public who are trained by Estyn to take part in a school inspection. In addition, the school being inspected may nominate a member of staff to attend inspection meetings and liaise between the inspection team and the school, but not take part in the evaluation itself.

Estyn provides an overview of the inspection process and further information on the different inspector roles.

Framework for inspection

In September 2017, Estyn introduced a new Common Inspection Framework for use in schools, independent specialist colleges, pupil referral units and work-based learning providers. Estyn also provides guidance on inspection for specific sectors, including primary and secondary schools. Supplementary guidance for inspectors evaluating particular areas of education, such as literacy, numeracy, or ICT, is also provided.

During the inspection, inspectors spend as much time as possible gathering evidence about the quality of teaching and learning by:

- analysing the school’s self-evaluation;
- carrying out questionnaires with parents/carers, staff, governors and employers;
- scrutinising learners’ work and learning in the classroom;
- examining the school’s performance information;
- talking to learners, governors, staff, teachers, parents/carers and employers.

Inspectors make judgements about the following areas:

1. standards
2. wellbeing and attitudes to learning
3. teaching and learning experiences
4. care, support and guidance
5. leadership and management.

Schools are not given overall judgements for performance or prospects for improvement. Instead, each of the above areas is judged using a four-point scale:

a) excellent - very strong, sustained practice and performance;

b) good - strong features are present, although small aspects may require improvement;

c) adequate and needs improvement - strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement;

d) unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement - important weaknesses outweigh the strengths.
Inspection outcomes

Inspectors provide verbal feedback to school leaders and managers at the end of the inspection, informing them of the judgements for each of the five inspection areas and whether the school needs any follow-up activity. They also produce a report of their findings after the inspection. This contains information on the context of the school; a brief summary of key strengths and areas for development; judgements and findings for each of the inspection areas; and a statement on the next steps. This inspection report is sent to the governing body, the headteacher, the local authority and other stakeholders. The governing body must send a copy of the report to all parents and carers of pupils at the school within five working days of receiving it. Estyn subsequently publishes the report on its website.

As outlined in Estyn's Follow-up Guidance for Schools and Inspectors (2017), the inspection team will also consider whether the school needs any of three types of follow-up activities:

1. Estyn review
2. significant improvement
3. special measures.

Estyn review: a school is placed in this category when the judgement given to area five (leadership and management) is ‘adequate and needs improvement’, and other areas are in need of improvement and monitoring. Estyn will make a series of recommendations for the school in its inspection report and will monitor the school’s progress in addressing these for between 12 and 18 months after publication of the report. Monitoring from Estyn will generally involve evaluating documentary evidence. If this demonstrates that the school is making insufficient progress, Estyn will carry out monitoring visits to the school until the school demonstrates that it is improving, or it is placed in one of the two statutory categories below (as defined by Section 44 the Education Act 2005).

Significant improvement: a school is placed in this category when it is performing significantly less well than it might be expected to perform. It is likely to have received a judgement of ‘adequate and needs improvement’ in many inspection areas or, ‘unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement’ in one or more of the inspection areas. A school in this category must work with its local authority to address its weaknesses by producing a post-inspection action plan (PIAP), and Estyn will visit the school in the term following the publication of its inspection report to evaluate whether the school’s PIAP is suitable. Estyn will then carry out a monitoring visit about 12 to 18 months after the publication of its report to decide whether the school can be:

- removed from the list of schools in need of significant improvement;
- visited once more to have its progress checked;
- placed in special measures, if its progress has not been sufficient.

Special measures: a school is placed in this category when:

- the judgement for inspection area five (leadership and management) is ‘unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement’ and;
- it has a few areas for improvement to a very marked degree, or;
- it has many areas for improvement to a lesser degree.

The school must work with its local authority to address its weaknesses by producing a post-inspection action plan (PIAP), and must send Estyn its action plan within 20 days of the publication of the inspection report. Estyn will carry out a series of monitoring visits at least once every six months.
to check whether the school is making progress with regard to their recommendations. When the school is judged to have made sufficient progress, Estyn will recommend that it be removed from the list of schools in special measures.

Should a school not demonstrate sufficient capacity or willingness to bring about the desired improvements, the local authority may, in addition to giving directions to the school to take steps:

- require that the school seek advice or collaborate with others to secure improvement;
- appoint additional governors, including replacing the chair of governors temporarily;
- suspend the governing body’s authority to manage the school’s budget;
- appoint an interim executive board.

Under the [School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/34), if a school fails to make the desired improvement, Welsh ministers also have powers to issue the school with a warning notice. The Act also allows ministers to direct a local authority to cease to maintain a school in special measures.


### External support for school improvement

At local level, [local authorities (LAs)](https://cymru.gov.uk/) are responsible for monitoring the schools they maintain, for supporting school improvement, and also for intervening when a school gives cause for concern (if it has been placed in one of the follow-up categories described above after an Estyn inspection). As explained above, both local authorities and Welsh Ministers have powers to intervene where a school is causing concern.

Local authorities monitor and support the performance of the schools in their area through:

- analysis of data on standards of pupil attainment and other aspects of school performance;
- examination of school development plans (see the sub-heading ‘Schools’ self-evaluation’ below) and post-inspection action plans (see above);
- an annual programme of ‘support and challenge’ meetings.

This support and challenge may come from [regional consortia](https://cymru.gov.uk/) of local authorities of which there are four. The support and challenge role is normally delivered through regional consortia staff who work directly with schools. Known as ‘Challenge Advisers’, they provide a standard level of support to all schools, and undertake additional work with those schools whose performance is below the expected level, and those working in challenging circumstances. For further information, see this 2016 [report](https://cymru.gov.uk/) by the Wales Audit Office and the [national standards](https://cymru.gov.uk/) for Challenge Advisers (2014).

There is increasing emphasis on schools collaborating within informal or formal networks to drive school improvement. This was a central theme of the Welsh Government’s ‘Schools Challenge Cymru’ project, which ran between 2014 and 2017.

### National School Categorisation System

Since January 2015, a National School Categorisation System has been used in Wales to support school improvement. Primary and secondary schools are assessed on the basis of:

- a range of quantitative outcome indicators;
- robust self-evaluation by the school of its capacity to improve in relation to leadership and learning and teaching;
• assessment of the school’s self-evaluation by challenge advisers in the regional consortia.

Based on these assessments, schools are categorised by colour depending on the level of support they require:

   a) green - these schools will receive up to 4 days of support;
   b) yellow - these schools will receive up to 10 days of support;
   c) amber - these schools will receive up to 15 days of support;
   d) red - these schools will receive up to 25 days of support.

For more detailed information, see the Welsh Government guidance [39] on the National School Categorisation System.

Schools’ self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is an important part of the quality assurance process: it provides the basis for school planning, development and improvement. Ultimate responsibility for institutional self-evaluation rests with the school governing body [23] and the headteacher of each school, who evaluate all aspects of the work of the school and set objectives for improvement. It is recommended that schools use Estyn’s Common Inspection Framework from September 2017 [29] as the basis for their self-evaluation.

By 1 September 2015, all maintained schools [3] in Wales were required to have a school development plan [40] in place which complies with The Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014 [41]. This is the school’s strategic plan for improvement, which sets out how it will achieve its targets in relation to its priorities, and how it will use the resources it has available. Schools update the plan every three years.

As part of the Welsh Government’s national mission for education, Estyn is working with OECD, schools, local authorities and regional consortia to develop a self-evaluation toolkit. The project [42] aims to:

• develop a national definition for school improvement processes;
• agree a national purpose for this work;
• define a set of principles to support effective school improvement processes.

It is intended that the draft guidance toolkit will be available in autumn 2019.

Article last reviewed March 2019.