



REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

13 JULY 2022

Report by: Arwyn Thomas – GwE Managing Director

Subject: National School Improvement Guidance: Framework for Evaluation, Improvement and Accountability

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To present information for Joint Committee members on the content of the national guidance and the implications for regional processes and systems.

2.0 Background

The new national guidance provides a point of reference for schools, pupil referral units, local authorities, diocesan authorities, regional consortia and Estyn, which outlines the Welsh Government's expectations of them in contributing to school improvement, in the context of their wider legal duties.

The overarching purpose of school improvement is to help schools give learners the best possible learning experiences and outcomes, whatever their background, in order to achieve 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 make progress, contributing to 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 behaviours and practices that are 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.

Schools, local authorities, regional consortia and Estyn to have regard to the guidance when dealing with school improvement arrangements.

The guidance states that schools have the central role in driving improvements and that governing bodies are the accountable bodies for their schools. In this role, they take responsibility for strategic leadership of the school, for its effective governance and ultimately for driving improvements in their schools for the benefit of learners. For the

majority of schools, governing bodies should be free to oversee the evaluation and improvement process, supported by advice, resources and services from local authorities and regional consortia. However, where schools are causing concern, local authorities are expected to take swift and effective action, advised and supported by regional consortia.

Within the framework, there is a clear distinction between evaluation and improvement activities; accountability; and transparency. The majority of the energy and focus in the system should be on delivering school improvement, guided by effective self-evaluation, improvement planning and support in all schools.

Underpinning the arrangements will be a broad range of high quality information about schools and their locality, and other parts of the system, which will need to be used in a timely, intelligent and supportive way.

The Welsh Government plans to update the guidance, building on learning in 2022/23 and 2023/24, and to issue it as statutory guidance to come into force in September 2024.

The accountability system is defined within the guidance as *'...the processes in place to confirm that evaluation and improvement is functioning effectively and the safety net for when it is not.'* The guidance makes clear that accountability should not drive school improvement activity, although it can contribute to it; and it should ensure that problems are identified and addressed. The guidance defines two strands to the accountability system:

- i. the role of effective democratic accountability and governance arrangements at all levels of the school system
- ii. the role of Estyn in delivering regular, consistent, comprehensive and accurate inspections of schools, local authorities and regional consortia. Schools will be inspected more regularly by Estyn and inspections will provide fair and rigorous evaluations of learner progress, the quality of leadership, teaching and learning in schools, realisation of the new curriculum and the well-being of practitioners and learners.

All parts of the schools system will need to see self-evaluation as a mechanism for improving individual schools and the wider schools system, and ultimately supporting learner progress, rather than as a compliance exercise within the accountability system. To further enhance their improvement planning, schools are encouraged to engage peers in the self-evaluation process to gain external perspective on improvement priorities.

Learner progress is central to the Curriculum for Wales, so progression needs to have similar importance within evaluation and improvement activities, and accountability processes. The guidance suggests that schools use the following two questions as a starting point for their improvement activities:

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

Schools' answers to these two questions will need to be informed by a wide range of information and evidence and, in turn, will determine the focus of subsequent self-evaluation and improvement work. Given the centrality of progression to the success and

aims of the Curriculum for Wales, governing bodies and Estyn – the key elements of the school accountability system – will have a legitimate interest in evidence schools hold about the progress made by their learners.

In using information, schools, local authorities and regional consortia should:

- reduce reliance on narrow measures of learner attainment to draw conclusions on school performance. The analysis of data and information is important, but should not be valued more highly than other sources of evidence for self-evaluation e.g. listening to learners; observing teaching.
- be aware that qualification and summative assessment/attainment data will not be sufficient to make a judgement on learner progress. They will therefore need to draw on wider sources of information and evidence. These are likely to include: information from teachers who will be assessing learner progress; information relating to learner progress in respect of the Principles of Progression; data on attendance, behaviour and welfare; observations of learning and teaching; discussions with learners and teachers.

Schools will need to show how their expectations for progression compare to those of other schools and settings, to ensure coherence and equity across the education system and a sufficient pace and challenge in their approach to progression in their curriculum and assessment arrangements. Collaboration in developing and maintaining a shared understanding of progression should form an ongoing part of a school's self-evaluation and improvement processes. This professional dialogue should deliver rich information supporting a school's consideration of what is working well in supporting learner progression, and what areas might be further strengthened.

The outcome of a school's self-evaluation provides more meaningful transparency about areas of strength and priorities for improvement, which will be reflected in their school development plan, than un-contextualised attainment data. To help increase confidence in, and commitment to, the school and its development plan, schools should publish the summary copy on its website. This summary should include a:

- high-level summary of the school's self-evaluation
- high-level priorities for the current year
- progress against those for the previous year
- external support the school will access to help it achieve its improvement priorities

From September 2022, the 'national priorities' defined in the School Development Plans Regulations will be updated to be consistent with the Curriculum for Wales, similarly emphasising the importance of progression. The new 'national priorities', which schools must have regard to when setting their improvement priorities, will be:

- improving pupils' progression by ensuring their learning is supported by a range of knowledge, skills and experience
- reducing the impact of poverty on learners' progression and attainment.

Schools' own improvement priorities and development plans are published in summary form for the benefit of learners, parents and other stakeholders. This supports a culture in which schools are open about the support they need and where middle tier partners work with schools in a supportive, non-judgemental way.

With the school's self-evaluation and development plan as the starting point, regional consortia and local authorities will need to agree with each school the additional support it needs to improve and to build its own capacity. The agreed support schools will receive from regional consortia and the local authority is incorporated in their development plans, including published summaries, providing an incentive for schools to ask for the help they need and enhancing transparency.

The wide range of information being used at school level to evaluate improvements and identify future priorities, supports regional consortia and local authorities to identify schools' support needs, as well as helping them to identify their own improvement priorities in order to improve service delivery.

Additionally, in order to support governing bodies in fulfilling their accountability function, regional consortia and local authorities should, once a year, provide a short, internal report for governing bodies that:

- provides wider feedback on the school's self-evaluation processes and improvement priorities.
- highlights any of the school's strengths which it feels could, or already are, being used to support other schools.
- draws attention to the governing body of any particular issues they need to be aware of and monitor in the school, as its accountable body.
- based on all of the above, details how they propose to support and / or broker support to address its improvement priorities, and more widely.

3.0 Considerations

3.1 In North Wales, GwE and the six Local Authorities are committed to working in partnership with schools to ensure that we have robust and purposeful systems and processes in place to adhere to national expectations. Our approach will ensure that we have the confidence and support of all key stakeholders and that each partner will take full accountability for undertaking their role and contribution with transparency, effectiveness and efficiency.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 The Joint Committee is asked to note and accept the content of the report.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. GwE will operate within current financial resources.

6.0 Equalities Impact

6.1 There are no new equalities arising from this report.

7.0 Personnel Implications

7.1 There are no new personnel implications arising from this report.

8.0 Consultation Undertaken

8.1 Consultation and discussions have been held with GwE Management Board, Joint Committee and with representatives from the local authorities. Consultation and discussions with regional Headteachers' Strategic Forums will be undertaken following publication of the document on 28 June 2022.

OPINION OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

I will provide any comments in the meeting.

Statutory Finance Officer:

I am satisfied that there are no financial implications arising from the report, and that GwE will implement the framework within their current financial resources.