



REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

6 DECEMBER 2023

Report by: Alwyn Jones, GwE Assistant Director

Subject: Estyn Consultation - Future inspection arrangements for local government education services and school improvement services

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1. To provide the Joint Committee with a formal record of the response to the Estyn Consultation – ‘Future inspection arrangements for local government education services and school improvement services’.

2.0 Background

2.1. From September 2024, Estyn will be introducing new inspection arrangements for education providers in Wales. Estyn have already consulted with individuals and organisations in the youth services, schools and PRU sectors, and now want to ask for views from other sectors. These are:

- Welsh for adults
- Post-16 settings (further education, adult learning in the community and independent specialist colleges)
- local government education service

2.2 The consultation which opened on 29 September 2023 until 30 November 2023, seeks the views of individuals and organisations working in, or interacting with, education and training providers, to help inform how Estyn can best develop their inspection guidance and approaches from 2024 onwards. The response - Appendix 1 - on behalf of GwE's Joint Committee, was submitted on 27/11/2023.

3.0 Considerations

- 3.1. The questionnaire invites views about the changes Estyn are proposing to their inspection arrangements in the local government education services sector, under the following headings:
- Separate inspections of school improvement services and other services provided through a formal partnership arrangement.
 - Notification for LGES and school improvement services' inspections
 - Local inspection questions
 - Inspection Guidance for LGES, School improvement services and services provided through formal partnerships.
 - Follow-up activity
 - Reporting requirements
 - Effective Practice
 - Link inspector work
 - Schools and PRUs in special measures.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 The Joint Committee is asked to formally note the content of the response to the Estyn consultation.

5.0 Financial implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6.0 Equalities Impact

- 6.1 There are no new equalities implications 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 with GwE Management Board and the Joint Committee.

9.0 Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – Response to Estyn Consultation 'Future inspection arrangements for local government education services and school improvement services'

OPINION OF STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective

Statutory Finance Officer:

No comments to add to the report from the perspective of financial propriety.

Future inspection arrangements for local government education services and school improvement services - consultation

Dear colleagues,

We invite you to share your views about the changes we are proposing to our inspection arrangements in the local government education services sector. The feedback on our current arrangements from our key stakeholders has been very positive and we propose to continue with many aspects of our current inspection approaches. However, there are aspects we wish to approach differently so that we can consider more effectively the work of the local government education sector, and these form the main basis for this consultation. The consultation also includes proposals relating to our link inspector work, where we are considering building on the more focused topic-based approaches we have been piloting this year.

The consultation will be open on 29 September and will close on 30 November.

Who is this consultation for?

This consultation is for all who have an interest in the inspection and link inspector arrangements for local government education services and school improvement services, including:

Education professionals and leaders across the sector, including staff from school improvement services

Governors, leaders and staff from schools and NM settings (primary, secondary, PRUs, all age, special)

Elected members

Parents and carers

Public and voluntary sector stakeholders

Your views will help inform how we can best develop our inspection guidance and approaches from 2024 onwards.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

The information you provide will be held by Estyn. If you disclose your identity, it will be treated in confidence, in line with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Estyn will use an independent company to assist with general data analysis, this will not include the transfer of personal information about individuals. The analysis report will include only general information and will not name or identify any individuals. The information will be used to help improve how we inspect education and training in Wales.

Here is a link to our [Privacy Notice](#).

2. Key information about you

1. Please choose one option below which best describes the capacity in which you are completing this questionnaire.

- Local authority officer
- Elected member
- Senior leader in schools/PRUs
- Teacher or support staff
- School governor
- School pupil
- Parent or carer
- Other (please specify):

Chair of GwE Joint Committee (on behalf of the six North Wales Education Portfolio Leads).

2. Which sector do you represent? Please select all relevant options.

- Local authority
- Regional consortia / school improvement service
- Primary/Secondary/All age schools; Special; PRUs
- Non-Maintained sector
- Voluntary sector
- Other (please specify):

3. Separate inspections of school improvement services and other services provided through a formal partnership arrangement.

3. We propose to carry out separate inspection of school improvement services and services provided through a formal partnership of two or more local authorities. The school improvement services' inspections and other services provided through formal partnership agreements inspections will look at the quality and impact of the services with local inspection questions providing specific focus areas for this work.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposal?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and to explain why you've chosen the option above:

School Improvement Services are also inspected as part of Local Authority inspections. This leads to duplication and means that the same School Improvement Services provided through regional consortia are inspected several times over by different HMIs during an inspection cycle. Deploying HMIs that know the Service well to each LA inspection would ensure greater consistency and reduce duplication.

In the North Wales region, GwE would potentially be involved in a minimum of fourteen inspections during an inspection cycle (if it includes full and interim inspections). In addition, there may be follow-up visits if the Local Authority or regional consortium go into a follow-up category. Estyn also undertake LALI visits to each Local Authority (that include GwE staff) and to GwE on a termly basis. This has huge implications on capacity for the regional consortium.

How will Estyn ensure that there is a common and fair framework for inspecting school improvement services provided through regional consortia and those Local Authorities that have their own school improvement service? Is there duplication with LGES inspections?

In addition, not all consortia/partnership are undertaking the same responsibilities.

In GwE, the region is not responsible for supporting schools in areas such as ALN, attendance, behaviour and inclusion. Partneriaeth in South-West Wales, for example, are responsible for the PL offer but not the school improvement function. In such a complex landscape, how will Estyn ensure that the framework captures this nuanced approach? And will Estyn have the capacity to address this during an inspection week?

If School Improvement Services are inspected separately then this could be carried out as a rolling programme, each visit focused on specific themes. This approach could allow for a greater understanding and evaluation of impact than what could be captured if the inspection were an 'event'. This would also allow for an ongoing dialogue with Estyn and give continuous confidence and assurances to stakeholders via an annual published written report.

4. Notification for LGES and school improvement services' inspections

4. We currently provide a 10-week notification for a LGES inspection. This allows us to carry out the pre-inspection activities such as discussing and finalising the local inspection questions, issuing the citizen and headteacher questionnaires and holding the pre-meetings with key stakeholders prior to the inspection week.

We propose to shorten the notification period from ten to eight weeks. This would still allow us sufficient time to carry out the pre-inspection activities. We will also notify the local authority that we will inspect their youth services as a stand-alone inspection four weeks into the LGES notification period. This will enable us to consider and include the key messages from the Youth inspection in our LGES inspection.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to shorten the notification period for a LGES inspection to eight weeks?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please use the box below to explain why you've chosen the option above or to suggest an alternative notification period:

The current 10-week notification is appropriate. However, we have no objection for this to be reduced to 8 weeks (allowing for school and bank holidays).

5. Notification for school improvement services inspection and other services provided through formal partnerships.

We propose to have a five-week notification period for a school improvement service inspection and inspections of other services provided through formal partnerships. This will also provide us with the time to discuss and finalise the local inspection questions and issue and analyse the relevant questionnaires before our on-site visits.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to have a notification period of five weeks for the school improvement services' inspections?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree**

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and to explain why you've chosen above or to suggest an alternative notification period:

The notification period should be the same as for LGES inspections. There is no rationale for it to differ. However, as noted in Section 3, we are of the view that School Improvement Services should be inspected on a rolling annual programme with a focused theme.

5. Local inspection questions

6. We propose to continue with developing local inspection questions and discuss and finalise these with the local authority, school improvement service or other services provided through formal partnerships. We think local inspection questions provide a proportionate focus for our inspection work, whilst also ensuring the inspections cover the most important areas.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should continue to use 'local inspection questions' on our LGES inspections?

- Strongly Agree**
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and explain why you've chosen the option above:

These should be agreed with the local authority and school improvement services and have clear rationale for being included.

As noted in Section 3 above, we are of the view that School Improvement Services should be inspected on a rolling annual programme with a focused theme.

7. We also propose to develop local inspection questions for our school improvement services inspections as well as our inspections of services provided through formal partnerships.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should have local inspection questions for our school improvement services' inspections and for services provided through formal partnerships?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and explain why you've chosen the option above:

As noted under Section 3 above – we believe that School Improvement Services inspections should be a rolling programme with a focused theme. This would provide an ongoing dialogue with Estyn and give continuous confidence and assurances to stakeholders through an annual published written report. 'Local Questions' or specific themes could be agreed with the School Improvement Services on an annual basis.

6. Inspection Guidance for LGES, School improvement services and services provided through formal partnerships.

8. Our current inspection guidance has three inspection areas – outcomes, education services and leadership. We propose to combine the outcomes and services areas into one inspection area which we are calling 'education services and their impact'. We think strengthening the link between actions and outcomes will make our reports more accessible. For example, we could report on the work the local authority is undertaking to improve attendance and make the link to the difference it is making to the attendance rates in its schools and PRUs.

Current inspection areas

IA1 Outcomes

IA2 Education services

IA3 Leadership

Our proposed inspection areas

IA1: Education services and their impact

IA2: Leading and improving

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to combine the outcomes and services areas into one inspection area for our LGES, school improvement services and services provided through formal partnerships inspections?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and explain why you've chosen the option above:

There needs to be a clear understanding and agreement of what 'impact' should look like in the short, medium and long term. In the past, the 'impact' of School Improvement Services has been inappropriately linked to learners' progress and end of key stage performance indicators. School leaders and teachers are the ones who have direct impact on learner progress.

School Improvement Services influence the practice and behaviour of the adults working in schools and should be judged on the quality of the support provided and its impact on practice. School Improvement Services should work with schools to support them in capturing impact on pupil progress as part of their school self-evaluation processes. There also needs to be a clear understanding of the timescale required to evidence impact and what would be the expected outcome over time.

There should be an agreed understanding of who 'owns' the impact. For example, how much impact on learner progress, if any, would be expected if a practitioner attends a one-day professional learning session? Pupil progress is affected by a wide range of factors such as the ability of the individual teachers, level of attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning. Thus, it is a complex process to accurately measure the direct impact of support for teaching on pupil learning.

7. Follow-up activity

9. Replacing our current approach with regular monitoring visits.

Currently, when a local government education service is judged to be causing significant concern, we arrange an improvement conference to discuss and agree a forward work plan to address the recommendations. The attendees at this conference are the key stakeholders involved in carrying out and supporting the local authority's improvement plan.

Around a year later, we arrange a 'progress conference' which considers the progress against the targets in the improvement plan. We usually arrange a monitoring visit around a year after the progress conference. The monitoring visit involves a team of inspectors visiting the local authority to evaluate the progress against the plans and determine whether the local authority has made sufficient improvements and does not cause significant concern. The timing of the monitoring visit depends on the rate of progress made by the local authority in addressing the areas requiring improvement.

We propose that our follow-up process will continue to start with an improvement conference, but that the subsequent activities are monitoring visits looking at specific recommendations over time. We believe this approach is more helpful to local authorities as it gives them direct feedback on their work and helps them to consider their next steps. It also provides better opportunities for them to demonstrate their progress against the improvement priorities. Once we have judged the local authority has made sufficient progress against all the recommendations, they will be removed from follow up.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to use regular monitoring visits as part of our follow-up activities in local authorities causing significant concern?

- Strongly agree

- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly agree

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and explain why you've chosen the option above:

It would be useful if, during monitoring visits to evaluate progress against specific recommendations, that Estyn had the flexibility to remove some recommendations if they are assured that strong progress has been made. The Local Authority would continue to focus on the remaining recommendations until they are deemed to have made sufficient progress against all of them and removed from follow-up.

10. We propose to develop the same follow-up processes for a school improvement service or a service that is provided through formal partnerships which is 'causing significant concern'.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to follow-up for a school improvement service or a service that is provided through formal partnership that is causing significant concern?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and explain why you've chosen the option above:

This would have potential ramifications on individual Local Authorities, e.g., if no issues had been identified with School Improvement Services as part of their own inspection, but that concerns were raised about the consortia's work during a regional consortia inspection that placed them in a follow-up category.

This is another reason why we believe that that School Improvement Services inspections should be a rolling programme rather than an 'inspection event'. This would provide an ongoing dialogue with Estyn and give continuous confidence and assurances to stakeholders through an annual published written report. There would be no need for a 'Follow-up' category under an annual rolling programme of inspections.

8. Reporting requirements

11. We propose to identify reporting requirements for all our LGES and school improvement services' inspections. This will ensure that we have evaluations of these key areas in all our reports. Our draft guidance identifies the following as reporting requirements:

Reports must cover:

- Impact of the work of services areas on learners' progress, wellbeing, attendance and behaviour
- Equity in the education system
- Welsh language

- **Safeguarding**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the areas we have identified as reporting requirements for our LGES inspections?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree**

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and explain why you've chosen the option above:

As noted in Section 6 above:

There needs to be a clear understanding and agreement of what 'impact' should look like in the short, medium and long term. In the past, the 'impact' of School Improvement Services has been inappropriately linked to learners' progress and end of key stage performance indicators. Only schools have direct impact on learner progress.

School Improvement Services influence adults and should be judged on the quality of the support provided and its impact on practice. School Improvement Services should work with schools to support them in capturing impact on pupil progress as part of their school self-evaluation processes. There also needs to be a clear understanding of the timescale required to evidence impact and what would be the expected outcome over time.

There should be an agreed understanding of who 'owns' the impact. Pupil progress is affected by a wide range of factors such as the ability of the individual teacher, level of attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning. Thus, it is a complex process to accurately measure the direct impact of support for teaching on pupil learning.

12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the areas we have identified as reporting requirements for our inspections of school improvement services?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree**

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and explain why you've chosen the option above:

Not all areas listed above are the responsibility of the regional consortium. How will Estyn ensure that there is a common and fair framework for inspecting school improvement services provided through regional consortia and those Local Authorities that have their own school improvement service? Is there duplication with LGES inspections? In GwE, the region is not responsible for supporting schools in areas such as ALN, attendance, behaviour and inclusion. How will Estyn ensure that they have the capacity and expertise to deal with such a nuanced approach?

As noted above – we believe that School Improvement Services inspections should be a rolling

programme rather than an 'inspection event'. This would provide an ongoing dialogue with Estyn and give continuous confidence and assurances to stakeholders through an annual published written report. 'Local Questions' or specific themes could be agreed with the School Improvement Services on an annual basis. This would also reduce duplication with LGES inspections.

As above (Question 11):

There needs to be a clear understanding and agreement of what 'impact' should look like in the short, medium and long term. In the past, the 'impact' of School Improvement Services has been inappropriately linked to learners' progress and end of key stage performance indicators. Only schools have direct impact on learner progress.

School Improvement Services influence adults and should be judged on the quality of the support provided and its impact on practice. School Improvement Services should work with schools to support them in capturing impact on pupil progress as part of their school self-evaluation processes. There also needs to be a clear understanding of the timescale required to evidence impact and what would be the expected outcome over time.

There should be an agreed understanding of who 'owns' the impact. For example, how much impact on learner progress, if any, would be expected if a practitioner attends a one-day professional learning session? Pupil progress is affected by a wide range of factors such as the ability of the individual teacher, level of attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning. Thus, it is a complex process to accurately measure the direct impact of support for teaching on pupil learning.

9. Effective Practice

13. On our inspections, we identify interesting and effective practice that may be helpful to other providers. We currently share this practice as case studies on our website and have piloted including the case studies in the appendix of the reports. How useful do you find these case studies?

- Extremely useful
- Very useful
- Somewhat useful
- Not useful
- Not at all useful

14. We have also included cameos to highlight interesting, innovative or effective practice within the narrative of the inspection report, such as using a highlighted box in the text. How useful do you find this approach?

- Extremely useful
- Very useful
- Somewhat useful
- Not useful
- Not at all useful

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and state the reason(s) why you chose the option above.

It is difficult to gauge how the practice would apply in different context and are probably time limited in terms of their usefulness.

15. What do you think is the best way we could share effective practice to have most impact

Annual conference to showcase - facilitated by Estyn.

10. Link inspector work

16. In addition to inspection, a key part of our work with local authorities and school improvement services is our link inspector engagements.

We propose to continue with a designated link inspector for each local authority and school improvement service, and their work will mainly involve being a point of contact and gathering general updates from the local authority about their services, which will help us to identify the LA's key assurances and risks.

During the last year, we have piloted a topic approach whereby we focus on specific aspects of the local authority or school improvement service's work to get a deeper understanding of the strengths and possible considerations for moving forward.

We propose to develop this approach by also undertaking an annual visit with a small team of inspectors to each local authority and school improvement service which will result in a brief evaluative published report. We will agree the focus area with the local authority and school improvement service well in advance so that the relevant officers can be made available for the engagement. We think this will give us a deeper understanding of each local authority and school improvement service's work in specific areas, whilst also providing helpful constructive feedback to the officers involved.

To what extent do you agree with our proposal to retain a link inspector for each local authority and school improvement service?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and explain why you've chosen the option above:

It is useful to have an open dialogue with Estyn through Link Inspector work. It is important to have consistency in HMIs deployment so that they are allowed to develop a deeper understanding of the LA or regional consortium. The LALI should be included in LGES / regional consortium inspections to share their knowledge and understanding harvested from LALI visit.

Written feedback should also be provided following LALI visits to support the LA/Regional consortium on their improvement journey.

There are capacity issues for regional consortia staff attending their own and Local Authority termly visits.

17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to carry out an annual focused visit to each local authority /school improvement service to look at a specific aspect of their work?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and explain why you've chosen the option above:

As noted above, if regional consortia are to be inspected separately, then this could be carried out as a rolling programme with a focused theme. This would provide an ongoing dialogue with Estyn and give continuous confidence and assurances to stakeholders through an annual published written report.

As noted in Section 3 – there are huge capacity implications for the regional consortium if this would be in addition to full and interim inspections.

11. Schools and PRUs in special measures.

18. Currently we do not formally evaluate the impact of the local authority's work in supporting individual schools and PRUs in special measures. We propose that the link inspector undertakes specific activities which could include for example, joining the monitoring team or visiting the school independently of the monitoring team to consider and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the support provided by the local authority. The outcome of this work will be a brief letter to the local authority. We propose that this activity will take place normally every 12 to 16 months.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that we carry out activities evaluating the impact of local authority's support on the progress being made an individual school or PRU in special measures?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please use the box below to give us your opinions and explain why you've chosen the option above:

See comments in Section 11 regarding impact. Understanding impact of support is a complex process which needs to be discussed and agreed on a national level with all stakeholders involved in school improvement including Welsh Government.

There is merit in giving this recommendation further consideration if the Link Supporting Improvement Adviser for the schools could work closely with the Link Inspector. It would allow the Link Inspector to access detailed information around the quality of the support, guidance and resources shared with the school. It would also mitigate against any conflicting message the school could receive from the Link SIA, Link Inspector and the Estyn monitoring team.

This process could be worthwhile if it is open and transparent for all stakeholders.