

GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL FOR WALES
CYNGOR ADDYSGU CYFFREDINOL CYMRU

POLICY POSITION

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF FUTURE INSPECTION ARRANGEMENTS IN
WALES TO A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Executive Summary

The policy position developed by the Council has seven key themes to inform the development of future inspection arrangements in Wales as part of a wider process of capacity building for continued improvement:

- a move away from the term ‘inspection’ to a model of ‘service review’;
- a whole system approach to review by Estyn in considering the roles and responsibilities of the Welsh Assembly Government, LEAs and schools;
- the increased use of robust self-evaluation outcomes to inform the need for ‘light-touch’ or more comprehensive reviews;
- the replacement of contracted private inspection teams with HMI-led teams of released current teachers;
- the need to support capacity building for improvement within and between schools and other providers, and to ensure that LEAs are ‘fit for purpose’ to provide support and are publicly accountable for their provision;
- the expectation that there would be reduced bureaucratic demands in preparing for notified inspections and associated post-inspection actions;
- ending the public labelling of under-performing schools as ‘giving cause for concern’ as this is often unhelpful in terms of building and retaining a school’s capacity to improve, and, instead, using the term ‘schools in need of enhanced support’.

The underlying ethos of the position is around maximising the impact of review whilst minimising its intrusion.

Introduction

1. In November 2007 the GTCW produced an interim policy position on future inspection arrangements in Wales. At that time Council members indicated their desire to develop a more considered position for June 2008.
2. The original position focused upon the need for future inspection arrangements to consider a school within the context of the broader community and as part of a family of schools, rather than an exclusively institutionally-focused inspection. The latter aspect was seen as vital in collaboratively developing schools' capacity to sustain improvement. The policy position also outlined the dissatisfaction with the current approach to contractor-based inspection teams and encouraged Estyn to move towards HMI led teams of seconded current classroom practitioners. The position also highlighted the need to reduce the periods of notice for inspection and in turn to adopt an inspection process that uses robust self-evaluation to inform the need for 'light-touch' inspections, or other more comprehensive forms of inspection.
3. After considering the interim position, the Council remitted a Task and Finish Group to consider the development of a policy position. Initially the Group considered their views on the problems associated with the current inspection system and these related to:
 - a lack of clarity regarding what exactly a school would be inspected upon, arising from scope for interpretation by different contracted inspection teams;
 - inspection notification periods being too long;
 - perceptions that the current inspection processes could give a false impression of a school, particularly as statistical analyses considered a single year's performance data, rather than trends over a three-year rolling period;
 - contract inspection teams often lacked current schools-based knowledge and inconsistently interpreted inspection guidance;
 - a lack of clarity regarding from where a school would get specific support for improvement and an associated lack of a consistent and specified entitlement to such support (despite the legal duty upon LEAs).

The Purposes of Inspection

4. In developing a more considered position the Council was mindful of Estyn's stated purpose of inspection to:

- identify strengths and weaknesses so as to help providers to improve quality and standards;
 - provide an independent published evaluation of the quality and standards achieved by the provider;
 - keep the National Assembly for Wales and the wider public informed about the standards and quality of education and training; and
 - identify and promote good practice and help providers to strive for excellence.
5. These objectives will inevitably need to evolve to embrace the core purpose of the School Effectiveness Framework in raising standards of achievement and well-being.
 6. Council believes that the features of any future system of inspection should be seen as part of a holistic approach to quality improvement and would be based upon:
 - the effective use of self-evaluation outcomes to minimise unnecessary inspection activity, with a primary focus for Estyn concentrating on the external validation of schools' systems of self-evaluation;
 - the inspection process acting as a prompt for additional support to be provided to a school or LEA where self assessment has not already triggered such action.
 7. There must be a shift from traditional inspection approaches in Wales to a model of **service review**. This would provide external validation of schools' self-evaluation, operating through a dialogue with learners, teachers and school leaders. Such an approach would contrast with one that operates from a perspective of compliance checking and that is 'done to teachers and schools by others'. The latter approach does not support sustainable capacity building for improvement within schools.
 8. A new approach must ensure that there is no increase in workload for individual teachers and schools. The expectation would be for reduced demands in preparing for notified inspections and associated post-inspection actions. Estyn must work closely with the Welsh Assembly Government and the SWAP group to ensure that this is achieved.
 9. To ensure that a system of robust and appropriately moderated self evaluation is fit for purpose, there is a need to develop the capacity of others to support school improvement that is of a consistently high standard across Wales. Identifying shortcomings or excellent practice within inspections is futile if the mechanisms to effectively build upon these findings are not in place.

10. Critically such an approach must be able to assume the availability of LEA and other mechanisms to support sustained improvement in partnership with schools.
11. This paper goes on to explore self-evaluation and support for improvement and looks at the role of schools, LEAs, the Welsh Assembly Government and Estyn as part of a holistic approach to quality improvement, rather than focusing upon the inspection process in isolation.
12. The Council recognises the contribution inspection has made to raising standards but any future approach will need to focus on the systemic barriers to improvement and not focus on individual institutions in isolation.

Effective Self-Evaluation and Support for Improvement

13. Inspection approaches based on the external validation of rigorous self-evaluation will ensure that improvement can take place continuously.
14. Such an approach would need to be within the context of a holistic approach to quality improvement, with ongoing monitoring of service delivery and associated improvement being continuous, rather than the current cyclical peaks of activity before or after inspection.
15. It is assumed that any revised inspection approach will need to support the implementation of the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) and its tri-level approach to the work of schools, LEAs and the Welsh Assembly Government.
16. In recognising that Estyn's objectivity and independence must be maintained to ensure public confidence, it is vital that there is a rigorous approach to ensuring public accountability at all three levels of the schools system. The inspection process must play a key role in guaranteeing that there is no complacency on the journey to quality improvement by reviewing the work of:
 - **schools** in either validating judgements or triggering additional support;
 - **LEAs** by ensuring they have the ability to effectively support as well as to monitor and challenge their schools;
 - **the Welsh Assembly Government** to ensure that adequate resources have been made available to embed legislative and policy direction within school practice, whilst demonstrating their leadership role in supporting pedagogical innovation and associated exchange of best practice and next practice.
17. The School Effectiveness Framework acknowledges that service improvements for all learners cannot be achieved in isolation by schools,

LEAs or the Welsh Assembly Government. It is of crucial importance that inspection or review arrangements recognise that the effectiveness of the implementation of such a strategy is only as strong as its weakest element.

Roles and Responsibilities of Schools

18. Any future inspection arrangements should expect schools to undertake their current roles and responsibilities in ensuring the best outcomes for learners and teachers and the communities in which they serve. This position will reasonably expect school leaders, teachers and the wider school workforce to effectively engage in rigorous and regular self-evaluation, which is evidence-based, involves all stakeholders, has clear outcomes to inform action and has the potential to be shared across schools and LEAs to improve the practice of all.
19. There is a need for schools (and others) to further develop vertical partnerships that support this holistic approach to improvement and this should encompass early years, primary, secondary and tertiary/FE education providers and will be a vital component to complement the schools centred SEF. Such an approach would clearly aid the development of Estyn's approaches to network inspection across a specific geographical area. Appropriate incentives and disincentives (along with resources, training and adequate lead times for implementation resources) would be required to encourage effective partnership working across traditional boundaries to share best practice and build capacity within and beyond a locality.
20. Any revised approach must ensure that there is no increase in workload for individual teachers and schools. The expectation would be for reduced demands in preparing for notified inspections and associated post-inspection actions and Estyn will need to work closely with the SWAP group to ensure that this is achieved.
21. The guidance issued previously by the Welsh Assembly Government in relation to best-practice in school self-evaluation is a useful starting point; however continued engagement with teachers, school leaders, LEAs and other interested parties by WAG will be crucial if self-evaluation is to continue to increase in effectiveness and the ownership of such approaches retained by practitioners and schools. Such a role would fit within WAG's national leadership remit within the SEF.

Roles and Responsibilities of LEAs

22. It is generally acknowledged that schools need effective and ongoing partnerships with LEAs, families of schools or other organisations to allow them to effectively self-evaluate their performance and inform improvement activity.
23. LEAs have the potential (both individually and collectively) to work with schools and act as enablers to support the sharing of best practice; facilitate contextually-relevant performance benchmarking; to externally moderate self-evaluation; to ensure effective and locally informed challenge; and in turn provide consistent support to sustainably build capacity for self-improvement with individual schools and families of schools. It is felt that this role is of particular importance in building capacity amongst small rural schools. More needs to be done to ensure that the LEAs are 'fit for purpose' (and publicly accountable if they are not) and that approaches are based on collaborative partnerships with schools and are proactive in emphasising collaboration between schools. This approach should encourage more effective working between schools and through consortia arrangements to spread good practice across LEA boundaries.
24. LEAs have a statutory duty under the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act (and associated Code of Practice) to ensure the quality of provision within their schools and to provide support to schools (in inverse proportion to need) to help them improve service delivery through the provision of effective challenge, support and intervention measures. Statements within the Estyn Annual Report for 2006/07 seriously question the current capacity of LEAs to consistently and effectively undertake this role. The report states that '*The quality of (LEA) services inspected is much worse than last year and is the worst outcome since 2001-2002. We found that one-third of services were poor and two-thirds of the services we inspected were unlikely to improve*'.
25. In the light of these concerns, any review of inspection arrangements (and associated support service improvement) must ensure that all LEAs are able to provide effective services for all schools if the systemic shift in quality improvement is to be achieved. The imperative for systemic change is highlighted by comments in Estyn's Annual Report for 2006/07 about the number of schools failing to improve over time and the need for systemic change rather institutionally-specific actions.
26. Teachers in classrooms across Wales are only too aware of the inconsistency of support and challenge provided to schools and teachers by their LEAs and these perceptions appear to be corroborated by Estyn's findings. Estyn must continue to inspect the effectiveness of LEA services to schools (and if

necessary, demand additional action through post-inspection action plans) if the strategic objectives of the SEF are to come to fruition.

27. Similarly, the capacity of LEAs to deliver services in support of school improvement will be vital. This is of particular concern in the light of the lack of advisory staff experienced in senior secondary school roles, a disproportionately aged school improvement and advisory workforce and associated workforce planning and professional development challenges¹. Estyn's role in reviewing the capacity of these services to improve over time will be crucial.
28. The urgent and continued need for the large number of relatively small LEAs in Wales to work collaboratively is essential if consistently high-quality services are to be delivered to support improvement. Council would encourage all LEAs to further develop systems and protocols for collaboration amongst themselves to address the significant challenges associated with the continued provision of effective and experienced advisory and improvement practitioners (particularly at senior secondary level) in order to deliver support for school improvement.

The Role of the Welsh Assembly Government

29. The Welsh Assembly Government has an overarching leadership role in achieving a 'Vision to Action' approach in support of schools and LEAs to ensure they are able to operate in an environment that is not inhibited by resourcing, legal and policy issues, and that recognises the Assembly Government's responsibility for positively supporting policy implementation rather than regarding it as a task for others to deliver.
30. Council would encourage Estyn to comment upon WAG's self-evaluation of its effectiveness in this area and for WAG departments to be open and responsive to this in the light of the tri-level approach to school effectiveness.
31. Additionally, Estyn would need to assess the effectiveness of the strategic pedagogic leadership provided by WAG (and the associated partnership with the profession) and its key role in the exchange of best practice and its vision of next practice.

The Inspection Role of Estyn

¹ Refer to the 2007 Survey of Soulbury Workforce staff undertaken by LGE (Local Government Employers)

32. Whilst acknowledging the significant impact of the current inspection arrangements in moving forward the delivery of improved services to learners, a more significant question needs to be asked concerning the purpose of inspection in further improving service quality for learners. In considering the role of inspection as part of a holistic approach to quality improvement, the future role of Estyn must evolve to a model of service review that provides:
- external validation of self-assessment within schools, LEAs and WAG;
 - reassurance to the public in terms of public accountability for the performance of schools and national and local government;
 - effective channels for the identification and exchange of cutting-edge / best practice;
 - information for policy development at all levels;
 - an effective improvement advisory function to both schools and LEAs that informs ongoing improvement activity.
33. There is a need for a structural shift to be made to allow all school inspections to be undertaken by teams comprising of released or seconded classroom practitioners and these teams should be led by HMIs.
34. We strongly advocate a move away from a multiplicity of private contractors (many of whom are perceived as lacking current school experience). By doing so, the scope to increase the currency of knowledge underpinning assessments would be dramatically increased. Similarly, the scope and mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice greatly improve. To embrace such an approach, Estyn will need to ensure that adequate HMI capacity is available to lead teams and it will also need to work more closely with teachers, schools, LEAs and WAG to overcome the barriers to effective engagement by (and release of) current classroom practitioners as part of the inspection process.
35. In developing its policy, the Council recognises the role of those other than teachers and HMI to contribute to a more rounded perspective for inspection teams such as those with expertise in the field of governance, resources, integrated services for children and community and employer engagement.
36. The need for a consistent approach to review, regardless of team composition, should be systematically reinforced by greater standardisation of documentation and checklists.
37. In respect of the future approaches to inspection, there appears to be consensus that:

- self-evaluation must be the key to informing either 'light-touch' validation or a more comprehensive service review where needed;
- lead times, or notification periods, for inspection must be reduced as part of an approach that is more reliant upon self-assessment and continuous (rather than cyclical) improvement;
- the need for inspectors to understand the context within which schools operate and empathise with current schools-based challenges.

Implications and Practicalities

Dissemination of good practice and informing policy

38. In addition to the institutionally-specific role of assuring public confidence and accountability, the inspection system has a critical role to perform in terms of identifying and disseminating best practice and informing policy development at all levels.

39. An increased practitioner-based involvement in the inspection process advocated in this paper and a move away from the current contractor based teams should also have a beneficial effect of enhancing dissemination channels. This would be complemented by the use of HMIs to lead teams who should be more able to consistently and systematically identify and share best practice. This sharing should be formalised through joint learning events for teachers, school leaders, inspectors, LEA advisors and policy lead officers, as element of WAG's Pedagogy Strategy. This could take place in schools (especially in rural areas) and across LEA partnerships where appropriate.

40. In addition to the range of Estyn publications, guidance, documents and toolkits, the use of channels such as GTCW's publications and web site and the National Grid for Learning Cymru's (NGFL Cymru) infrastructure are seen as key to the effective dissemination of good practice to all practitioners.

Changes to the Key Questions

41. In advocating self-evaluation as the basis for future inspection arrangements, all Key Questions would need to change to reflect this approach.

Grading

42. The numeric values attached to grades within current inspection reports are viewed by many teachers and school leaders as unhelpful in assessing the performance of a school or an area of activity, as many consumers of such information do not look at the narrative that supports the eventual numerical value awarded.
43. The Council understands the role Estyn has to undertake in producing assessments that are easily understood by a range of audiences and particularly parents and the wider non-educational community. Even allowing for these factors, Estyn needs to consider alternative approaches to those that allow the outcomes of inspection of complex organisations, processes and relationships to be represented by some organisations as little more than seven numerical values for the seven Key Questions.
44. There is a need to end the current approach to imposing grade capping on assessments of leadership and management based upon the outcomes of Key Question 1 and 2. The move to end this grading correlation is seen as part of a more mature approach to review and support for improvement. This would remove the perceived punitive nature of grading to the lowest common denominator that currently prevails. This is particularly relevant to the current relationship between Key Questions 1 & 2 and Key Question 6.
45. In order to provide greater objectivity across grades during the course of an inspection cycle, there is a need for these grades to be criterion-referenced, rather than norm-referenced.

Actions in the case of schools where inspection shows under-achievement or gives ‘cause for concern’

46. As previously outlined in this paper, the need to provide consistently high-quality support to schools will be of vital importance within the SEF (particularly for those in need of most significant improvement). The provision of support by LEAs and others will have a key role in helping schools move forward.
47. Where unsatisfactory inspection outcomes have not been pre-identified by schools and LEAs ahead of inspection, additional support and challenge will need to be provided for both the school and LEA. This should ensure systems for supporting, monitoring and challenging schools are fit for purpose at both levels.
48. The GTCW strongly believes that the public labelling of under-performing schools as ‘giving cause for concern’ is often extremely unhelpful in terms of building and retaining a school’s capacity to improve. Estyn may wish to give

consideration to abandoning such labels in light of the SEF's systemic shifts to drive forward improvement, rather than an historical institutional focus.

49. Council would recommend that schools in such circumstances be described (but not labelled) as 'schools in need of enhanced support'.

Stages to the Vision – what is achievable by 2010 and in the longer term

50. Whilst many of the changes the Council would want to see have major structural, legislative and logistical implications that are unlikely to be achieved before 2010, certain areas could be changed before then.

These include:

- the use of statistical data for school performance over a three year rolling-average rather than a specific year's data;
- the use of existing socio-economic contextual data (such as the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation) to assess relative performance of schools based on their catchments;
- a re-evaluation of programmes to encourage engagement and paid release by Estyn of peer assessors to take on a greater role within the inspection process;
- a review of risk-criteria informing 'short inspections', to minimise the inspection burden upon high-performing schools and associated notification period reduction;
- simultaneous (or close proximity) inspection of families or clusters of schools to assess local capacity for improvement;
- decoupling of gradings linked to Key Question 1 & 2 outcomes;
- the need for self-evaluation by (and associated inspection of) the Welsh Assembly Government to provide strategic pedagogical leadership and be publicly accountable for this role;
- a revised approach to describing schools in need of support for improvement.