

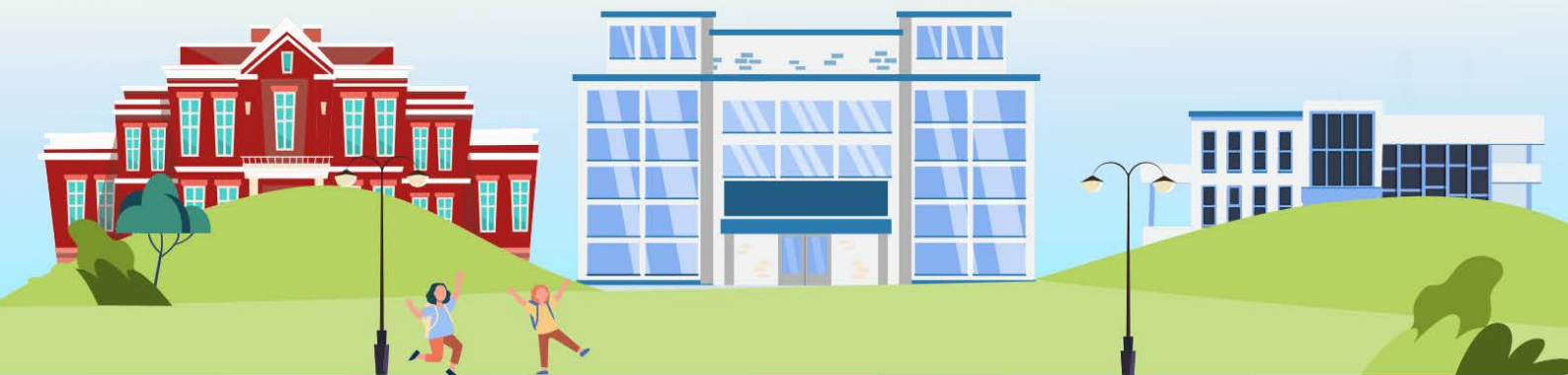
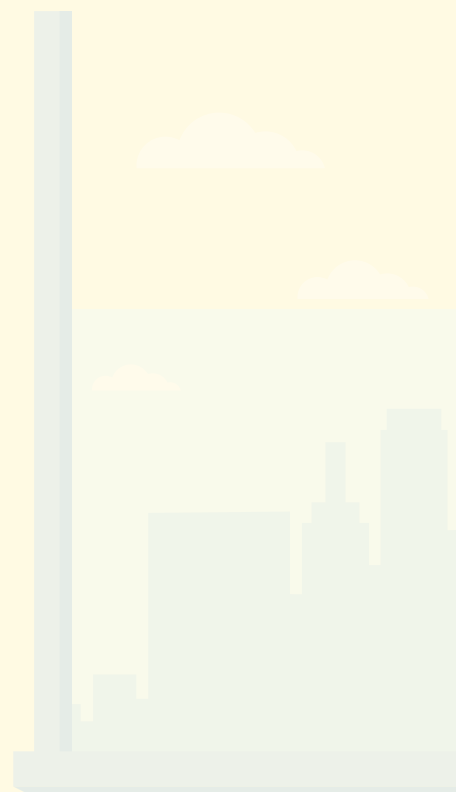


Guidance for inspectors

What we inspect

Local government education
services for inspections from 2022

This document is also
available in Welsh.



Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Introduction

Purpose of this guidance

This guidance sets out the way we will conduct inspections of local government education services (LGES) from September 2022.

Local government education services include education services provided on behalf of a local authority by:

- a regional consortium or other partnership between two or more local authorities
- another local authority
- another organisation commissioned by the local authority (for example, a voluntary organisation or a private company)

This guidance sets out the inspection arrangements for local government education services. It also sets out how we will follow-up with local authorities causing significant concern.

Local authorities and their partners can use this guidance to understand how we will conduct inspections. It may also help them self-evaluate and plan for improvement.

You will find more information and guidance about inspections on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales.

Legal basis and policy background for the inspection of local government education services

Inspections of LGES are carried out under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997 which provides that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales (HMCI) 'may, and, if requested to do so by the Secretary of State, shall, arrange for any local authority to be inspected'. Such an inspection 'shall consist of a review of the way in which the authority are performing any function which relates to the provision of education for (a) persons of compulsory school age (whether at school or otherwise) or (b) for persons of any age above or below that age who are registered as pupils at schools maintained by the authority'.

Other aspects of local authority provision are subject to inspection under a range of legislation, including the functions conferred on them under sections 25 and 26 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 relating to education, training or youth support services (within the meaning of section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000).

The Children Act 2004 introduces a duty on local authorities and their partners to co-operate to improve the well-being of children. As far as local authorities are concerned, the inspectorate is given the powers to review a local authority's functions relating to Section 51 of the Act, namely in co-operating to improve well-being and producing children and young people's plans where these functions relate to education, training or youth support services.

Section 51 of The Children Act 2004 changes the Education Act 1997 so that 'An inspection of a local education authority in Wales under this section shall consist of a review of the way in which the authority are performing:

- any function conferred on them in their capacity as a local education authority
- the functions conferred on them under sections 25 and 26 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 relating to education, training or youth support services'

Local authority inspections will be conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training (HMI) in Wales. In response to the Children Act 2004 requiring inspectorates to work more closely together, HMI may be joined by inspectors from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Health Inspectorate Wales (HIW). HMI may also be joined on inspections by additional inspectors (AI) authorised under paragraph 2 of Schedule 1 of the School Inspections Act 1996. HMCI may, under Section 41 of the Education Act 1997, as amended by the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004, request Audit Wales to assist with any inspection under Section 38. HMCI and Audit Wales have agreed that:

- i Audit Wales will contribute to those inspections of local authorities in which their expertise will add to the rigour and effectiveness of the inspection
- ii Audit Wales will contribute to the regular collection and analysis of local authority performance data
- iii as partners in the inspection of local authorities, Audit Wales and the inspectorate may use local authority inspection reports to produce other reports, surveys and studies

The inspection of local authority education services for children and young people will cover the statutory functions of the local authority, including the local authority youth service.

In addition, it will include inspection of the partnership arrangements for youth support services (YSS). These partnership arrangements are those led by the local authority to plan, co-ordinate and oversee all youth support services in an area. These partnership arrangements are set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000, and the Welsh Government policy as described in Extending Entitlement and associated guidance¹. Under the Children Act 2004², this statutory responsibility for partnership planning can be fulfilled through a young people's partnership, children and young people's partnership or a framework partnership.

Youth support services are those services for young people aged between 11 and 25, which are provided, procured or facilitated by a local authority and identified in the partnership plan and/or self assessment report. They are those, which in the opinion of the Welsh Government will encourage, enable or assist young persons

¹ Extending Entitlement and the accompanying directions and guidance for its implementation extend the legal basis in Wales for the provision of youth support services. In these documents, the Welsh Government has set out frameworks within which local authorities in Wales will provide youth support services.

² Stronger Partnerships for Better Outcomes Guidance (2006) National Assembly for Wales Circular No: 35/2006.

(directly or indirectly) to:

- participate effectively in education or training;
- take advantage of opportunities for employment; or
- participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.³

In addition to referring to those partnership arrangements for youth support services, the term partnership is used more generally throughout this guidance. National policy and the drive to improve services and be more cost effective means that local authorities are increasingly working in partnership and integrating services. In this guidance, 'partnership' is used to refer to any joint working arrangements where partners, who are otherwise independent, co-operate to achieve a common goal. The term will not be used to describe consultative arrangements, professional networks or contractual arrangements.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 has various implications for how local authorities work. Part 6, 'Performance and governance of principal councils' in particular includes several duties that may affect how local authorities are inspected and how we work with other inspectorates and regulators. Our inspections will take account of any regulations or statutory guidance introduced in relation to the Act.

The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 reinforces the powers of entry and right to documentation that is enshrined in previous legislation.

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal [Wales] (ALNET) Act 2018, supports the Welsh Government's aim to create a fully inclusive education system where all learners are inspired, motivated and supported to reach their potential. The priority on the additional learning needs (ALN) system is on early intervention, ensuring that needs are identified early, that the right provision is put in place promptly, and that there is multi-disciplinary work to support learners and deliver effective and prudent interventions.

Under the ALNET Act, local authorities will be responsible for learners with ALN from 0 to 25, ensuring that they can access suitable education or training, including compulsory education and specialist post-16 education or training where necessary. The Act and accompanying ALN Code introduce a range of new statutory duties for local authorities that will be phased in over a three-year implementation period starting in 2021.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Local Government (Wales) Act 2015 support the approach and arrangements for the inspection of local authorities either by individual inspectorates or jointly between us, Audit Wales and CIW.

Although it is not a legal requirement, this guidance handbook also takes account of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the Welsh Government in 2004 as the basis for policy-making for children and young people.

³ Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales Report by the Policy Unit The National Assembly for Wales 2000, p83.

In July 2022, the government published '[School improvement guidance: framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability](#)'. This guidance 'provides a new 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'.

Part 1: Inspection arrangements

Introduction

This section is set out in a way that reflects the sequence of work before, during and after a core inspection.

The reporting inspector (RI) is responsible for the conduct and management of the inspection and for the inspection report. While this guidance focuses mainly on the role of the reporting inspector, all team members must comply with the same inspection requirements.

Context

This guidance relates to the core inspection of local government education services. We regularly inspect aspects of local government education services through a variety of other activities. Some of this inspection work results in published evaluations, while other activity does not. The table below provides more detail.

Inspection activity	Frequency	Outcome
Local authority link inspector (LALI) work. A team of LALIs works within a region, and each local authority has one LALI as a key link. LALIs meet senior officers and elected members in local authorities to challenge them about their work to improve education outcomes. LALIs may meet leaders of education providers, managers of local services and directly observe council meetings. Through the year, we receive communication from learners, parents and other stakeholders about local government education services. LALIs will take this into account in their discussions with local authorities. LALIs also meet with regional consortia for school improvement services and with other partnerships between local authorities that provide education services.	At least termly	Oral feedback during visits. LALI work informs other inspection activity with the local authority and its education providers.
Thematic reports. Each year, the Welsh Government asks us to produce national reports on a range of themes. We will often visit a sample of local authorities or consortia or survey all local authorities or consortia as part of this work.	Annually	Oral feedback during visits. National reports feature individual local authorities or regional consortia with good practice.
Topical reports. We choose to focus on a specific aspect of local government education services and will evaluate this	Occasional	Written feedback to each local authority or regional consortium,

topic across all local authorities or all consortia. For example, we produced topical reports on the work of local authorities during the Covid-19 pandemic.		as appropriate. May also contribute to national reports or our annual report.
School organisation proposals. We are required to evaluate all school organisation proposals submitted by local authorities.	In line with submissions from local authorities	We produce a formal response which is included in the 'consultation report' published by the proposer, but this is not published on our website
Improvement conferences. We initially used improvement conferences to support local authorities outside of the inspection cycle where aspects of their education services caused concern. The approach has been used from September 2018 to support local authorities identified as causing significant concern following a LGES inspection.	Scheduled as required	A letter is sent to the chief executive of the local authority following an improvement conference detailing our views on areas for concern.
Inspections of schools and other education providers and related follow-up activity. Inspectors pick up useful information about the quality of challenge and support provided to the provider by the local authority or regional consortium to bring about improvement.	Ongoing	Findings inform inspection activity with the local authority and its regional consortium.

During a core inspection of local government education services, we will take account of the inspection activity described above along with any other relevant inspection work we carry out that is not included above.

Principles of inspection

We will:

- ensure that inspection is of high quality and responds to the needs of all learners
- ensure that judgements are secure, reliable and valid,
- involve the local authority fully in the inspection process, including the use of nominees
- use the local authority's self-evaluation and improvement planning work as the starting point for the inspection and to inform questions about education services
- include peer inspectors in the inspection process
- keep to a minimum any requirements for documentation and preparation by the local authority
- evaluate evidence about the perspective of children and young people and other stakeholders

- apply the principle of equality for Welsh and English to all our inspection work, providing bilingual services in line with the practices of the local authorities inspected.
- be constructive in identifying and supporting local authorities with important areas for improvement
- contribute to joint assessments and reports with other inspection, audit and regulatory bodies as required by Welsh Government legislation.

Inspection mind-set

Our approach to inspection is:

- **Fair and impartial** – this means that we work to be independent, objective and balanced. We are robust and consistent in our work. We weigh the evidence and its significance to provide an honest, credible and accurate view of the provider's strengths and weaknesses.
- **Supportive** – we work to guide providers to implement improvements that benefit learners. We encourage innovation and recognise good intentions. We are friendly but always professional in our approach. We support educational reform. We work hard to develop meaningful relationships with providers and local and regional organisations as part of a Wales-wide support network.
- **Reflective** – we are open-minded. We listen to a wide range of stakeholders and reflect on their responses. We are thoughtful, measured and careful. We plan opportunities to think carefully about the inspection findings and to discuss them with others in the team.
- **Transparent** – we are well informed and communicate clearly, directly and succinctly. We use efficient and effective inspection methodologies to respond to the provider's unique situation. We plan inspection activity and report on strengths and weaknesses in ways that reflect the particular circumstances of each individual provider. As a result, our actions promote trust and respect.

Code of conduct for inspectors

Our code of conduct explains how inspectors embody the inspection mind-set through their actions. Inspectors should uphold the highest possible standards in their work. All inspectors have to meet the standards in our code of conduct.

When conducting the inspection, inspectors will:

- carry out their work with integrity, courtesy and sensitivity
- evaluate the work of the local authority objectively
- report honestly, fairly and impartially
- communicate clearly and openly
- act in the best interests of learners
- respect the confidentiality of all information received during the course of their work

It is important that inspectors evaluate the effectiveness of provision and leadership

on their contribution to outcomes and not on the basis of any preferences for particular methods. The key to the evaluations is whether the methods and organisation are fit for the purpose in supporting all learners to achieve high standards and high levels of well-being.

Inspectors should inform us of any perceived or actual conflicts of interest as soon as they receive notification that they are on the inspection team.

Expectations of providers

In order that inspection is constructive and beneficial, it is important that inspectors and providers establish and maintain a professional working environment based on mutual courtesy, respect and professional behaviour. We expect inspectors to uphold our Code of Conduct. This is what we expect providers to do in return:

- be courteous and professional
- apply their own codes of conduct in their dealings with inspectors
- enable us to conduct the inspection in an open and honest way
- enable us to evaluate the provision objectively against the framework
- use our electronic systems for managing inspections as required
- provide evidence that will enable us to report honestly, fairly and reliably about the local authority
- maintain a purposeful dialogue with our reporting inspector and other inspectors
- recognise that we need to talk to elected members, officers, learners, and other stakeholders without the presence of a manager or senior leader
- highlight any concerns about the inspection in a timely and suitable manner through the nominee or senior leader, preferably while our team is on site
- work with us to minimise disruption and stress throughout the inspection
- ensure the health and safety of inspectors while on their premises
- keep the meetings and inspection findings confidential until the publication of the report

At the point of the inspection notification, the local authority should review the membership of the inspection team. It is the responsibility of the local authority to immediately highlight any perceived or actual conflicts of interest prior to the start of their inspection.

Health, safety and well-being issues

Inspectors will carry out inspections in accordance with our guidance on inspecting safeguarding. If they observe anything that they think constitutes, in their opinion, a real danger to the safety of staff, visitors or learner, they should alert the Director of Education. In all cases, inspectors should make a separate electronic note of the threat and that they informed managers of it. Inspectors should report on obvious risks relating to health, safety and well-being under inspection area 3 (leadership and management). Where these risks are a serious concern, inspectors should include a recommendation in the report. We will send a well-being letter to the local authority asking them to outline how they will address the shortcoming.

Responding to a safeguarding allegation

If an inspector is alerted to an allegation/suspicion in respect of a child, young person or vulnerable adult, they should follow the procedures as set out in the current version of 'Estyn's policy and procedures for safeguarding', which is available on our website.

Approach to inspection

This guidance sets out the procedures for core inspections for local government education services. These procedures will be complemented by follow-up activity in local authorities that are identified as causing significant concern, and this is covered in Part 3.

The starting point for inspection is the local authority's evaluation of its own performance, supported by relevant evidence. Local government education services should be regularly evaluating their work as a natural process in their business improvement cycle. We do not expect a local authority to prepare a self-evaluation report for an inspection and will be critical of leaders if such a report is created solely for this purpose. Self-evaluation is a very important process for improvement. Honest and thorough self-evaluation, alongside diligent risk assessment, helps local authorities to sustain and further develop good services, plan for improvement where necessary and make informed decisions about the efficient use of resources.

Inspectors will not inspect or evaluate all education services during a core inspection.

After reviewing key documentation from the local authority, such as performance reports to elected members and strategic plans, alongside our information about the local authority, inspectors will choose specific aspects of education services to evaluate during the core inspection. Inspectors will do this by drafting 'local inspection questions'. Inspectors will share these questions with the local authority and ask for their views on their suitability. Inspectors will take account of feedback from the local authority. The final decision about the wording and focus of the local questions will be made by our inspectors.

Inspectors will sample evidence to test the local authority's own evaluation. The progress learners make from their starting-points and the standards they achieve are key measures of the quality of the education they have received and of the effectiveness of the leadership and management in the authority. Inspection will focus on the needs of learners, their well-being and attitudes to learning and the impact that the services funded or coordinated by the local authority have on them, directly or indirectly.

The inspection period and number of inspectors may vary according to the size of the local authority, the way in which local government education services are provided in the area and the number and nature of the inspection questions.

Inspection reports will cover all inspection areas and reporting requirements covered by the inspection framework outlined in Part 2.

All inspections are carried out in line with our Welsh Language Policy, available from

the inspectorate's website www.estyn.gov.wales and supported by supplementary guidance on inspecting the development of Welsh language skills.

Core inspection activities such as interviews, focus groups and team meetings are usually carried out face-to-face. Some activities may suit a remote approach using secure virtual meeting software or a telephone call. Activities carried out remotely will be used with discretion, either where circumstances or rules require it, or where it is convenient and efficient to do so without impeding the effectiveness of the inspection process. For example, as part of the preliminary activities, we may set up an online meeting for a group of headteachers instead of requiring them to travel a significant distance to a central location.

We will usually discuss and agree with the local authority which activities may suit a remote approach as part of the inspection planning process.

The Virtual Inspection Room

We will use an electronic system, called the 'Virtual Inspection Room' (VIR), for managing many aspects of the inspection. It is a web-based system that allows local authorities to upload information before the inspection and to download guidance from the inspectorate about the inspection process. The VIR is also the place where local authorities can access the nominee's guidance on preparing for the inspection and on completing post-inspection questionnaires.

The inspection team

Our inspection teams will be led by a reporting inspector. The reporting inspector will always be HMI, with other team members drawn from among HMI and additional inspectors. Additional inspectors may be on secondment or contract to the inspectorate. Each team will also have at least two peer inspectors. One peer inspector will usually be a senior leader from a local authority or regional consortium outside of their own local authority or region. Another peer inspector will usually be a head of a service area in a local authority or regional consortium.

At least one of the local authority link inspectors (LALIs) in the region will normally be part of the team and act as the deputy reporting inspector.

The inspection team will always include at least one inspector from Audit Wales. Depending on the nature of issues identified in pre-inspection evidence, the team may request an inspector from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). If appropriate the reporting inspector will contact CIW before the inspection to come to a view whether or not it would be beneficial for CIW to have a representative join the inspection team. In practice, it is rare for CIW to be involved in-person in LGES inspections.

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

The local authority will be invited to select a senior member of staff to take on the role of nominee, to work with the inspection team. The nominee should have sufficient seniority and knowledge of the local authority's work to act as a link between the local authority and the inspection team.

Inspection schedule

The programme of LGES inspection began in September 2018. We initially planned to inspect all local authorities over a four-year period. Due to COVID-19, the schedule has been severely disrupted. We will aim to inspect between four and six local authorities each year and aim to complete the current cycle of inspections of all local authorities by December 2024.

The programme will be discussed with other inspection, audit and regulatory bodies to help avoid duplication and take advantage of opportunities to work jointly with Audit Wales, CIW or HIW.

Contacting the local authority before the inspection

We will notify a local authority of a LGES inspection ten weeks in advance.

Once the local authority has been formally notified, one of our inspection co-ordinators (IC) will contact the local authority by telephone to set up the arrangements for the inspection. During this discussion, the IC will:

- discuss an outline programme for the inspection including the process for discussing local inspection questions and the on-site inspection work
- share the draft local inspection questions
- 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 local authority wishes to have a nominee and, if it does, agree the role of the nominee and confirm that the nominated officer is of sufficient seniority and has completed the required training
- arrange the availability of supporting evidence
- discuss the timetable requirement for interviews
- organise any domestic arrangements such as a base room for the inspectors, parking and internet access
- ensure that there are agreed procedures for addressing any concerns or complaints that might arise during the course of the inspection
- set up the arrangements for feeding back the inspection findings
- agree the arrangements for completing the post-inspection questionnaire
- inform the local authority that the key arrangements will be confirmed in writing

The IC will request the following information from the local authority through the VIR as soon as possible after the formal notification of the inspection:

- key background information on the local authority
- internal documents that feature the local authority's views on aspects of education outcomes, the quality of education services or the quality of leadership and management of education services, such as reports to council, cabinet, scrutiny, the corporate management team, the Public Services Board or Welsh Government. The focus should be on documents produced within the last 12 months, but older documents may still be valid or provide useful context.

- current plans, including the highest level corporate plan and partnership plan, as well as plans relating to education services

We will ask the local authority to inform other partners and stakeholders, such as the regional consortium, about the inspection.

Surveys

We will open a citizens survey for three weeks in advance of the core inspection week. This survey will be publicised widely through our communications channels and we will ask the local authority to publicise it too.

Any stakeholder can complete the survey to share their views about local government education services in the local authority area. For example, we are interested in the views of:

- children and young people
- parents and carers
- elected members and governors
- staff working in the local authority and its schools (except headteachers – see below)
- staff working for the regional consortium
- local or national organisations with an interest in education services
- local citizens with an interest in education services

The citizens survey will include common questions for all LGES inspections as well as asking for views relating to the local inspection questions.

Our inspectors will consider the feedback from the survey alongside other evidence to during the main inspection week. The IC will explain how the survey is conducted during their initial conversation with the local authority.

We will seek the views of headteachers of schools in the local authority through their own survey. This survey will be open at the same time as the citizens survey. We will email all schools directly, but we encourage the local authority to promote the survey too to ensure a useful response rate.

We will share quantitative findings from surveys with the local authority, but all comments are confidential and will not be available to the local authority. Inspectors may summarise comments with the local authority where this is helpful to explore a theme further during the inspection.

For further information and guidance about how we use surveys, please see our supplementary guidance.

Preparing local inspection questions

In preparing for the inspection, the reporting inspector will take account of the local authority's view of itself alongside information already held by the inspectorate. We will also arrange to get a briefing on the local authority from Audit Wales and CIW.

In conjunction with our assistant director responsible for LGES and our lead officers for LGES, the local authority link inspectors (LALIs) will draft a set of local inspection

questions about education services prior to notification. Normally there will be at least four questions and usually no more than eight. These questions will focus on education services that relate to the local authority's strategic priorities or relate to information that we hold about education services in the local authority. They will cover specific aspects of inspection area 2. The inspection coordinator (IC) will have shared these draft questions with the authority as part of the notification process.

The local authority will have an opportunity to discuss the draft questions with the reporting inspector within 10 days of notification. This discussion will usually take place over the phone, although if it is convenient the reporting inspector may visit the local authority. As part of this discussion, the reporting inspector will explain the rationale for the draft question set, provide the thinking behind each question and discuss the potential inspection activity required in order that the inspection team can address each question. The local authority will be invited to share its own view as to the appropriateness and usefulness of the questions and the potential inspection activity. The reporting inspector will take the views of the local authority into account in finalising the local inspection questions. We aim to provide the final set of local inspection questions to the local authority no later than eight weeks before the core inspection week.

Planning the inspection and preparing the team

Once the local inspection questions have been finalised, which will usually be within 10 days of notification, the reporting inspector will draft a plan for the preliminary activities and core inspection week and develop a detailed timetable of activities with the local authority through the nominee.

The reporting inspector will allocate responsibilities to members of the inspection team. This will include assigning a lead inspector for each local inspection question.

Preliminary inspection activities

Usually two weeks before the core inspection week, we will carry out preliminary activities in the local authority.

This will be an opportunity for our inspectors to engage with senior leaders from local education providers and other relevant parties, to gather their views, discuss their experience of working with the authority or receiving support from the authority. The activity will be carried out by the reporting inspector and another inspector from the inspection team (usually a LALIs).

During these preliminary activities, interviews will usually take place with:

- headteachers
- chairs of governing bodies
- leaders or managers from other education providers where relevant (for example, non-maintained settings or FE institutions)
- children and young people's representative groups
- representatives from other statutory sectors, the voluntary sector, the private sector and other groups where there is a strong link to the local inspection questions

Inspectors will also seek to meet with parents and carers who may be able to provide useful evidence in relation to any of the local inspection questions. For example, if the local authority has a parent carer forum for children with a disability, and a local inspection question covers education provision for these children, then inspectors would seek to meet the forum to explore their experiences and views.

The reporting inspector will discuss with the local authority who should be interviewed. The local inspection questions will be taken into account when determining who to meet during the preliminary activities. These activities may take place online or in person, and the reporting inspector will discuss the most appropriate approach for each meeting with the local authority. The final decision about who to interview rests with us.

At the end of the activities, the reporting inspectors will brief the local authority about any significant matters arising from the interviews. Findings from the preliminary activities will be shared with the inspection team and taken into account during the core inspection week.

Observations of education services

Inspectors may observe education services as part of a LGES inspection where further evidence is needed to support work on local inspection questions.

In such cases, Estyn will usually make arrangements to observe the relevant services either as part of the preliminary visit or at some other convenient time prior to the main inspection week. The reporting inspector may take responsibility for these arrangements, or may delegate them to a member of the team who is involved in working on a particular local inspection question. Estyn may also use additional inspectors or peer inspectors to support observations where they have particular experience in the relevant service area.

During the core inspection week

Initial meeting with the local authority

At the start of the inspection, the inspection team should meet senior officers, including the chief executive and director of education, and senior elected members, including the leader, cabinet lead member and chair of scrutiny. The nominee should also be part of this meeting. The local authority may wish to invite other senior leaders to the feedback, such as the managing director from the regional consortium. This is at the discretion of the local authority, although the nominee should agree additional attendees with the reporting inspector in advance. The local authority will be given the opportunity give a presentation to the whole inspection team, lasting no longer than 30 minutes. The presentation should be used to emphasise the local context and highlight the main strengths and areas for improvement in education.

Early in the inspection, the local authority will be given the opportunity for key officers to meet with the lead inspector for each local inspection question. Where appropriate, the local authority may wish to involve regional consortium officers. These officers will be invited to share their perspective on the local inspection question, provide helpful context for the lead inspector and direct the lead inspector to the most useful evidence. Usually no more than three officers should be involved in this initial meeting. The inspector may also interview the officers involved in this initial meeting

at another time during the inspection.

Gathering and reviewing inspection evidence

Inspections start by considering the local authority's own self-evaluation and plans for improvement, which will be accompanied by a wide range of supporting evidence. Inspectors will sample, test and validate the evaluations offered by the local authority to form their own judgements.

The team will plan the inspection so that they can cover the reporting requirements and answer the local inspection questions.

The team will ensure that they have enough time to review the key evidence that is needed to make judgements and address the local inspection questions. The team will need to ensure that it is focused on the key evidence that can be used to substantiate its judgements. The main forms of evidence are:

- the authority's self-evaluation (the authority's views may be captured in a variety of documents, both paper and online, and should not be a report produced specifically for the inspection team)
- data on education outcomes in the local authority, including local data provided by the local authority
- briefings from our link inspectors for the local authority and our link inspector for the relevant regional consortium
- briefings from Audit Wales, CIW, and other inspectorates where relevant
- documentary evidence, including reports to cabinet, council and scrutiny
- the views of children, young people, parents and other stakeholders such as staff in LGES, schools and partner organisations (including the findings of any of our relevant surveys and questionnaires)
- interviews with senior leaders, officers and elected members
- interviews with senior leaders from the relevant regional consortium and other relevant partnerships
- interviews with officers and other stakeholders who can help inspectors to address the local inspection questions

The schedule for inspection interviews will need to be flexible to meet the needs of the inspection team.

Recording inspection evidence

Our inspectors will use various forms to note and collate their findings and judgements. Inspectors will complete their forms electronically as part of our electronic system for collecting, collating and recording inspection findings.

Team meetings

The main purpose of team meetings is to agree accurate, reliable, valid and corporate judgements. Meetings will provide opportunities for inspectors to:

- test the local authority's own view
- discuss emerging issues
- identify any gaps in the evidence base
- consider main inspection findings

- consider recommendations

Towards the end of the inspection, the team will formally moderate and agree all judgements together. Inspectors will not make summative judgements for each inspection area. The team will make a summative judgement about whether or not the local authority is causing significant concern.

Professional dialogue

At the end of every day, the reporting inspector should, as far as practicable, offer to have a professional dialogue with the chief executive or another senior officer to discuss the progress of the inspection. This is an opportunity to share provisional strengths and possible important areas for improvement as well as the need for further evidence. The LA officers and members should be clear that these are emerging, interim findings based on the evidence considered so far. These findings may be amended, on reflection, after scrutiny of further evidence or after further interviews have taken place, or as the result of moderation within the team.

Formal feedback

At the end of the on-site part of the inspection, the team will feedback orally to senior leaders and managers. Usually those present at feedback should include the chief executive, education director and deputy directors, council leader, cabinet lead, and chair of scrutiny. The local authority may wish to invite other senior leaders to the feedback, such as the managing director from the regional consortium, at their discretion. The nominee should agree the attendees with the reporting inspector in advance. The Audit Wales team member may wish to attend the meetings and contribute to feedback. In addition, the Welsh Government may wish to attend the feedback meetings, with observer status. If this is the case, the Welsh Government should contact the local authority directly to arrange for the attendance of an official.

The feedback meeting provides the opportunity for leaders and managers to hear and to reflect on the judgements. The feedback should focus on the strengths and areas for improvement and the factors that contribute to them. The reporting inspector should explain to the local authority that issues may be raised and discussed, factual matters may be corrected and judgements may be clarified, but the judgements themselves are not negotiable.

All the judgements reported during an inspection are provisional and subject to moderation and validation by HMCI. The judgements are confidential to the local authority and its partners and should not be communicated externally, including via social media, until we publish the report on our website. Any notes or recordings made at feedback, whether electronic or written, should also be treated as confidential and must not be communicated externally.

Our inspectors will explore ways to provide greater opportunity for professional dialogue alongside feedback. They will consider how they can provide this opportunity for key officers for each of the local inspection questions as well as for senior leaders in relation to the main messages overall.

Follow-up activity

During all core inspections, the inspection team will consider whether local

government education services are causing significant concern and require follow-up activity.

The potential reasons for identifying that a local authority is causing significant concern are:

- a high proportion of learners underachieving over time or a considerable decline in achievement over time (this only applies if enough evidence is available following the COVID-19 pandemic)
- a high proportion of schools or other education providers placed in statutory categories (this only applies if enough evidence is available following the COVID-19 pandemic)
- serious safeguarding concerns
- failure to address shortcomings identified during previous inspections or through other internal or external activity
- important weaknesses in senior leadership
- any other concern that presents a significant risk to the well-being or achievement of children and young people

The inspection team must report as they find and be able to substantiate their judgements on the basis of sound evidence. If the evidence points to the conclusion that the authority is causing significant concern, inspectors must make that judgement.

At all times, our inspectors should remember that the main emphasis in LGES inspections is on the outcomes for learners.

In judging the extent to which senior leaders have the capacity to bring about improvements, inspectors will need to give attention to how well these leaders know and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the authority. Inspectors should also establish if senior leaders show the ability to tackle the weaknesses through the sense of purpose and direction they provide, and through decision made and action taken to address concerns. Discussions with senior leaders should provide evidence of how they are tackling these issues and if they are giving attention to the right things. Inspectors should also take account of how well-informed elected members are about issues that affect the performance of the authority. They should evaluate how well they use this information to take effective and appropriate decisions. They should consider how well the scrutiny committee fulfil their duties.

In all circumstances, it is vital that inspectors evaluate the work of the authority in the context in which it is currently operating. They should not be unduly influenced by recently prepared plans for improvement that have yet to be implemented or the recent appointment of staff, such as a new chief executive or senior education officer. This is because, in both cases, the effect or impact of improvements will not have taken place and inspectors must judge outcomes rather than speculative or good intentions.

Team discussions should take account of any mitigating factors to ensure the validity and reliability of judgements before coming to a decision that an authority is causing significant concern.

If the authority is judged to be causing significant concern, the RI should take the following steps:

- telephone and inform the appropriate inspection co-ordinator before the authority is told of the judgement, no later than the end of the inspection of the local authority
- inform the Assistant Director or Strategic Director of the judgement (who will in turn inform HMCI)
- tell the chief executive at the end of the inspection that the team has reached the judgement that the authority is causing significant concern.

Within five days of the end of the inspection, the RI will:

- complete the relevant section of the reporting judgement form (reporting JF)
- place the completed reporting JF in the inspection documents section of the VIR
- inform the designated IC by email and copy to the IC inbox at ic@estyn.gov.wales

HMCI, or HMI acting on behalf of HMCI, will scrutinise the work of the inspection team to check the judgement. The RI should ensure that all the evidence collected during the process of the inspection is available for scrutiny. HMCI has the power to call for any information required.

If HMCI does not agree with the RI's opinion, the reasons will be explained and they will be given the opportunity to discuss HMCI's decision and amend the report and summary by removing the opinion that the authority is causing concern.

After the due process of internal challenge and moderation has been completed to secure the judgements, HMCI will notify Welsh Ministers that the local authority is causing significant concern. In exceptional circumstances, we may wait until the authority has responded to factual accuracy check stage of the process.

Reports and summaries for authorities causing significant concern

The RI must make clear in the evidence base that, in their opinion, the authority is not ensuring the provision of an acceptable standard of education and senior leaders lack the capacity to secure the necessary improvement, and therefore the authority is causing significant concern. They must also make clear the main shortcomings which led to that judgement.

After the inspection

The inspection report

The RI is responsible for producing a final inspection report that is clear to a lay audience and helpful to the local authority and its partners. When writing reports, inspectors should take account of our writing guidance.

All LGES reports will be published bilingually. The report will take the following form:

About the local authority

Summary

Recommendations

What happens next

Main findings

- Outcomes
- Education services
- Leadership and management

Inspection reports will be published within forty-five working days of the inspection.

We will provide the local authority with a late draft of the report to help check the factual accuracy of the content. The local authority will have five working days in which to consider the draft report and to identify any factual errors. This is not an opportunity for the local authority to challenge judgements.

Five working days prior to the publication of the final report, the inspectorate will send an embargoed electronic copy to the relevant director at Welsh Government for discussion with Ministers.

We will send electronic copies of the final report to the chief executive of the local authority, the chief education officer, the council leader the elected member with main responsibility for education, and the chair of education scrutiny.

We will also send a copy of the report to Audit Wales. Where inspectors from one or more other inspectorates have joined the team for a local authority inspection, we will send a copy of the report to the inspectorate(s) concerned.

We will publish the report on our website. Audit Wales and other inspectorates may make the report available on their own websites after it has been published.

Following publication of the report

For local authorities identified as causing significant concern, we will be proactively involved in the local authority's post-inspection planning process. Further information is set out in the 'follow-up' section of this guidance. For all other local authorities, the process following publication of the report is set out below.

Following the publication of the inspection report, we expect that a relevant scrutiny committee of the local council scrutinises the report and challenges senior leaders, including officers and elected members, about their plans for improvement. At least one inspector involved in the inspection will attend this meeting as an observer, but will contribute to the session where it helps clarify any matters relating to the inspection and the report.

Following the publication of the inspection report, the local authority should update its plans to address the recommendations and to take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. The local authority should update its plans within three months of the publication of the inspection report.

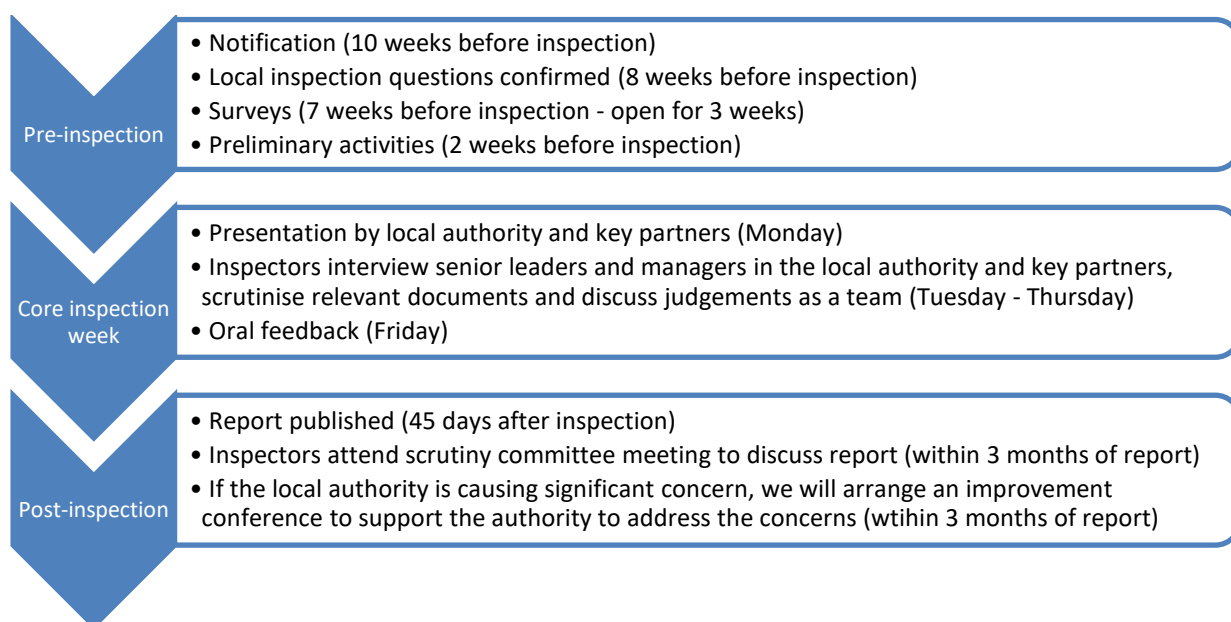
We do not require a separate post-inspection action plan.

The LALs for the authority will discuss the updated plans with senior leaders in the authority, including the chair of scrutiny. The LALs will also check that the authority has suitable arrangements in place to monitor the implementation of its plans and evaluate the impact.

Promoting excellence in local government education services

We are keen to promote excellence in local government education services. If the inspection team has identified significant strengths in outcomes, education services or leadership and management, then we will work with the local authority to share its work with other local authorities.

Timeline summarising key milestones during the inspection process



Assuring the quality of inspections

We are committed to:

- effective selection, training, briefing, support and deployment of inspectors, including peer inspectors
- effective training, briefing and support to allow the nominee to play an active role
- regular dialogue with the senior leaders of the local authority during inspection
- criteria and recording systems that comply with our inspection framework for LGES and guidance
- careful review and analysis of evidence
- unambiguous oral feedback of the team's findings

As part of its quality assurance procedures, we invite local authorities to complete a post-inspection questionnaire (PIQ). The questionnaire will be available to local authorities in the VIR. Local authorities should complete the first part of the PIQ immediately after the on-site inspection and submit it electronically to us through the VIR system. Local authorities can complete the second part of the PIQ after the publication of the inspection report, again through the VIR system.

The local authority should raise any concerns about the conduct of an inspection with the reporting inspector as soon as possible during the inspection.

The reporting inspector will carry out the quality assurance of the inspection in the first instance. The inspectorate will quality assure a sample of inspections on-site and will assure the quality of all inspection reports before their publication on our website. Our arrangements for assuring the quality of inspections and the arrangements for dealing with complaints are available on our website.

Part 2: Inspection areas and reporting requirements

The guidance that follows sets out how inspectors should approach the various sections of the inspection report and what they need to consider when evaluating the three inspection areas of the inspection framework for LGES.

The Local Government Education Services Inspection Framework

The three inspection areas of the LGES inspection framework are set out below.

The Local Government Education Services Inspection Framework

Inspection area 1 – Outcomes

Standards and progress overall
Standards and progress of specific groups
well-being and attitudes to learning

Inspection area 2 – Education Services

Support for school improvement
Support for vulnerable learners
Other education support services

Inspection area 3 – Leadership and management

Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers
Self-evaluation and improvement planning
Professional learning
Safeguarding arrangements
Use of resources

Inspectors will evaluate and report on all aspects of inspection areas 1 and 3 of the framework.

Inspection area 2 of the framework sets out the scope of services that could be inspected during an inspection. As part of each inspection process, we will form a set of local inspection questions about education services. Inspectors will evaluate services covered by these questions and report on each question separately within the report.

About the local authority

This section of the report should be brief and contain factual background information about the local authority. The section should not contain any judgement of the local authority or its provision. The reporting inspector normally agrees the content of this section with the local authority during the inspection and during the local authority's factual accuracy check of the draft report prior to publication. Where there is

disagreement about the content of this section, the reporting inspector will make the final decision about what to include in the report.

This section will contain brief information on:

- the size and nature of the local authority
- the background and circumstances of the learners, such as the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals
- the linguistic background of the learners
- any important changes since the last inspection
- any other relevant factors, such as the proportion of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) or the degree to which learners move in or out of the local authority area
- the date of appointment of the chief executive and chief education officer (or their equivalents)
- the month/year of the local authority's previous inspection

Summary

This section of the report will contain a short summary statement (usually one or two paragraphs) on the inspection findings and whether or not follow-up activity is required.

The summary should report on the key strengths and any important aspects or weaknesses that require improvement. It will reflect the findings of the main report.

Recommendations

The recommendations should give the local authority clear and specific indications of the areas for improvement that it will need to address. We will write the recommendations in order of priority. The recommendations should arise from the most important judgements in the report and should provide a clear and practicable basis on which the local authority can move forward.

Inspection areas

For each inspection area, we are providing guidance on what it covers and the considerations that inspectors need to keep in mind when making judgements.

Within each inspection area, the reporting inspector may report on the aspects in the order they appear in the handbook or they may choose to sequence the aspects differently in order to reflect their findings.

1: Outcomes

Inspectors must consider all three aspects, although inspectors are not required to report against all the detail covered in the guidance for this inspection area.

Unless specifically stated, references to data in this section are to be understood in broad terms and cover any relevant information about the progress, achievement, attainment or well-being of learners. Inspectors should take account of national changes relating to data, such as qualification changes and performance indicator changes. Inspectors must take account of the message sent jointly to local authorities and regional consortia in July 2019 by HMCI, Welsh Government's Director of Education and WLGA's Chief Executive:

We ... strongly advise you to use a broad range of un-aggregated data and information to enable you to discharge your duties when reporting on school performance. Evaluating the performance of individual schools rather than generating aggregated data at local authority level will be more helpful to supporting and challenging individual schools with their improvement.

We paused our inspections of all education providers maintained by local authorities in March 2020 due to COVID-19 and no further inspections were carried out in 2019-2020. No inspections were carried out in 2020-2021 or in the first half of 2021-2022.

We had planned not to inspect any of these providers in 2020-2021 to enable inspectors to visit all schools to discuss preparations and plans for the implementation of Curriculum for Wales from September 2022. These visits did not happen due to COVID-19. Instead, inspectors contacted a range of providers through video meetings or phone calls during 2020-2021 to discuss their experiences of providing education during the pandemic, and to explore the support they received from the local authority and regional consortium. These discussions did not aim to evaluate the work of the school, the local authority or the regional consortium as inspectors could not gather first-hand evidence of impact on learners.

During the pandemic we continued to follow-up with providers that were placed into a statutory category following their inspection. This follow-up work during the pandemic was carried out virtually, and as such did not enable inspectors to consider first-hand evidence of learners' outcomes.

When considering learners' standards inspectors would usually give greatest weight to our inspection reports on schools and other local authority education settings as these provide the most complete view of standards. Similarly, when considering

learners' well-being, inspectors would usually draw upon our inspection reports on schools and other local authority providers as these provide the most complete view of well-being and attitudes to learning. In both respects, inspectors would usually focus on the previous three years, and take account of the nature of the sample during that period.

Inspectors also used a range of data to support their evaluations of outcomes. This data has been affected by COVID-19 including, for example, key stage 4 and key stage 5 results, post-16 destinations, school attendance and school exclusions. Inspectors will not be able to compare data within or across local authorities between the period before the pandemic, the period during the pandemic and the period following the pandemic.

When inspectors don't have enough recent inspection reports or comparable data to consider, they will not be able to make full evaluations of outcomes across a local authority. This is highly likely to be the case for 2022-2023. In such cases, inspectors should preface their report under inspection area 1 with the following standard text:

Estyn is unable to provide a full evaluation of outcomes. This is due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the suspension of inspections of schools and most other education providers between March 2019 and February 2022. It is also due to the lack of data about outcomes that can be compared over time as the pandemic caused changes to the way that qualifications were awarded and affected most other data that inspectors consider when making evaluations, such as school attendance, school exclusions and post-16 learner destinations.

Any evaluations that follow provide a context by reporting on outcomes before the pandemic or relate to more recent outcomes where the evidence base is valid and reliable.

Inspectors may evaluate and report on trends in outcomes for all aspects before the pandemic as this provides useful context for the work of the local authority and regional consortium.

1.1 Standards of learning and progress overall

Inspectors should only evaluate standards and progress overall, or aspects of these, where sufficient evidence is available. If sufficient evidence is available, then inspectors must use the following guidance.

Our evaluation of standards will be informed by outcomes from a wide range of learning experiences within schools and beyond, including non-maintained settings and provision for non-formal learning.

In evaluating standards, inspectors should give greatest weight to our inspection reports on schools and other local authority education settings as these provide the most complete view of standards. This is because the evaluations take account of first-hand evidence of learners' progress, not simply data analysis. Inspectors should consider judgements given for standards for providers inspected over the last three years. Inspectors should take appropriate account of the nature of the sample during that period (for example, in a small local authority only one secondary school may

have been inspected during that period). Inspectors should analyse the trends in outcomes, and how quickly outcomes improve in schools requiring follow-up after an inspection.

Alongside inspection reports, inspectors should take account of data, and other evidence, to evaluate standards. Inspectors will consider school-level data published by the Welsh Government. Inspectors should not aggregate data at local authority or consortium level and should draw conclusions after considering the individual data for all relevant providers. Published external qualification data must not be used in isolation to make an evaluation.

Inspectors should be careful not to give too much emphasis to any particular indicator or performance in one particular year and should instead seek to ensure that an evaluation of outcomes considers all children and young people over time. It is important to look at the whole picture.

Inspectors should consider how well children and young people develop their literacy, communication and numeracy skills and digital competence across the range of education and training provision including youth support services. They should consider outcomes in relevant qualifications, the outcomes of any literacy and numeracy assessments and the progress made by learners who receive additional support to improve their basic skills. Inspectors will not use Welsh Government reading and numeracy assessments to make judgements about standards or progress of specific groups as these are intended for formative use only. Inspection reports for providers in the local authority area will provide useful evidence about learners' skills development.

In inspecting Welsh language skills, inspectors should look at continuity and progress from one key stage to the next, and consider the progress that all learners make by the end of key stage 4.

Inspectors should consider whether pupils move on to further education, training or employment that is appropriate for their ability, interests and previous performance. In particular, at the end of key stage 4, inspectors should consider the destinations of all pupils and, where possible, the extent to which these destinations are sustained into the following calendar year and beyond. Inspectors should consider the number of school leavers not in education and training (NEETs).

1.2 Standards of learning and progress of specific groups

Inspectors should only evaluate standards and progress of specific groups, or aspects of these, where sufficient evidence is available. If sufficient evidence is available, then inspectors must use the following guidance.

Inspectors should judge the outcomes achieved by particular groups of learners in schools, EOTAS and other education settings. This includes children and young people from vulnerable groups, including those with ALN and other learners that require extra support as they move through school.

Learners who are in one or more of the following groups may be more vulnerable to underachievement or poorer well-being:

- learners with ALN
- disabled learners
- learners with physical or mental health needs
- care-experienced children, including looked-after children
- children at risk of harm, abuse or neglect
- children from families in difficult circumstances
- young carers
- pregnant young women and young parents
- learners from minority ethnic groups
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children
- learners with English or Welsh as an additional language
- refugees and asylum seekers
- children of migrant workers
- LGBTQ+ learners
- young offenders
- learners who are excluded from school
- learners with low attendance
- learners educated otherwise than at school
- learners from low-income households
- learners who are educated at home
- children of armed services families
- school-age learners who perform or who have employment
- more able and talented learners

A local authority does not necessarily have specific, additional statutory responsibilities for learners in all these groups, and neither should this be seen as an exhaustive list of learners who may be vulnerable or require extra support.

Not all learners within these groups will require extra support. However, inspectors should be aware that they may experience difficulties at some time in their life.

Inspectors should consider the local authority's analysis and evaluation of the performance of groups of learners based on the progress they have made during their time in the authority. For small groups of learners in particular, such as looked after children, inspectors should place more emphasis on the progress of the individuals rather than a comparison of their overall attainment against the national average.

1.3 Well-being and attitudes to learning

Inspectors should only evaluate well-being and attitudes to learning, or aspects of these, where sufficient evidence is available. If sufficient evidence is available, then inspectors must use the following guidance.

Inspectors should take account of the wide range of information from the local authority and its partners alongside evidence from school, PRU and other inspections to evaluate well-being and attitudes to learning for all learners.

Inspectors should draw upon our inspection reports on schools and other local authority providers as these provide the most complete view of well-being and attitudes to learning. Inspectors should consider judgements given for standards for providers inspected over the last three years. Inspectors should take appropriate

account of the nature of the sample during that period (for example, in a small local authority only one secondary school may have been inspected during that period). Inspectors should analyse the trends in outcomes and how quickly outcomes improve in schools requiring follow-up after an inspection.

Inspectors should take account of the views of children and young people, especially where these are captured through standard surveys and where comparative information is available relating to national responses and trends over time, including surveys conducted as part of our inspection of providers.

Inspectors should consider information about children and young people's health, and the extent to which they make healthy choices as they grow up. Inspectors should consider available data from services such as those to increase engagement in physical activities or to support mental health.

They should use data from the local authority and its partners and schools and other inspection reports to evaluate the extent to which children and young people feel safe in schools and other settings.

Inspectors should make sure that any enquiries focus on the impact of LGES on the development of healthy and safe attitudes across a range of settings.

When evaluating children and young people's participation in learning, inspectors should consider attendance, behaviour and attitudes, and the extent to which children and young people have a say in what and how they learn in schools and other settings.

Inspectors should consider overall school attendance rates compared with similar local authorities. In particular, inspectors should consider rates of persistent absence, especially for vulnerable learners. Inspectors should take account of any notable differences in the use of attendance codes.

Inspectors should consider exclusion data for permanent and temporary exclusions. Inspectors should also take account of information about managed moves. When considering exclusions and managed moves, inspectors should particularly consider the extent to which they relate to learners who were already vulnerable.

Inspectors should also consider the extent to which children participate in early years education places, and young people's participation in the youth service or other youth support services.

Inspectors should analyse the impact of joint working by the LGES and the regional consortium as well as other partners to ensure the general well-being of children and young people while out of education or in the process of reintegration into education.

When evaluating children and young people's contribution to the community and involvement in decision-making, inspectors should look at the local authority's reports on the outcomes of school councils and other forums, which allow children and young people's voices to be heard. They should look at the local authority's reports on how children and young people have been able to influence decisions that affect them made by their schools, communities, the local authority and its regional consortium.

2: Education services

Inspectors will not evaluate or report on all aspects in inspection area 2 because this focuses broadly on each authority's strategic priorities for education. Each authority will have a different set of education priorities depending on local contexts.

The framework that follows sets out the scope of services that may be inspected and provides inspection guidance.

As part of each inspection process, we will form a set of local inspection questions about education services. The questions could cover any of the aspects covered in inspection area 2.

Inspectors are only required to evaluate services covered by these questions.

Inspectors must report a response to each question separately within the report.

Since the start of the previous local authority inspection cycle in 2010, local authority budgets have reduced, a higher proportion of education budgets are delegated directly to schools and the Welsh Government has expected services to be increasingly regionalised. Along with changes to legislation and regulations, inspectors must take account of all these changes, irrespective of the local inspection questions. We will always evaluate provision for the impact it has on learners' outcomes.

Inspectors should take account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on services when evaluating their work and impact. Where relevant, inspectors should consider how well services adapted to support learners, schools and other providers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the following recovery period.

As part of the inspection process, inspectors may carry out observations of education services as part of a LGES inspection where further evidence is needed to support work on local inspection questions.

2.1 Support for school improvement

Inspectors evaluate how well the local authority knows and monitors its schools and provides appropriate challenge, support and intervention to promote good outcomes for all learners through high quality education provision and strong leadership.

School improvement services are largely delivered through regional consortia on behalf of local authorities, although statutory responsibilities relating to school improvement remain with local authorities. Where a local authority is a member of a regional consortium, inspectors should consider how well the local authority ensures that regional services meet the needs of local schools and PRUs. If a local authority is not part of a regional consortium, inspectors should consider carefully whether or not there are suitable alternative arrangements in place to provide school improvement services that meet the needs of schools.

Inspectors should consider the impact of the school improvement services on the local authority's schools and PRUs. Inspectors may consider, for example, the impact of work in the following areas:

- knowing schools well and challenging them on their performance
- supporting schools to plan for improvement
- supporting schools with curriculum reform and other changes to national policy
- supporting schools to share good practice and learn from other schools
- supporting effective professional learning at all levels in schools
- supporting schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the following recovery period

Inspectors may consider whether partnership agreements with schools are effective. They may use the local authority's reviews of the partnership agreement to help reach these judgements.

Inspectors may judge whether there are appropriately differentiated procedures for monitoring, challenging and supporting schools, and how well these are understood by schools.

Inspectors may judge the robustness of work to monitor schools by local authority officers or regional consortium staff and the clarity, usefulness and accuracy of their written reports, as well as their impact on schools or education services.

Inspectors may judge the quality of data and data analysis provided to schools. They may evaluate whether data is distributed in a timely way to schools and used appropriately to support schools to improve.

Inspectors may evaluate how well schools are supported in developing effective procedures for self-evaluation and improvement planning. When schools are causing concern, inspectors may evaluate how effectively they are monitored so that shortcomings are identified at an early stage. Inspectors may consider how swiftly and successfully issues are addressed in these schools as a result.

Inspectors may evaluate how well the local authority uses the full range of its legal powers when schools are identified as causing concern and when these schools do not make progress quickly enough.

Inspectors may use the outcomes from school and PRU inspections to help judge the impact of school improvement work. This includes the number of schools placed in a statutory category or in receipt of follow-up activity and the length of time schools remain in a category. Inspectors may consider the views of reporting inspectors for school inspections regarding the quality of pre-inspection information provided by the local authority as well as feedback within the inspectorate about the quality of post-inspection action plans and local authority statements of action.

Inspectors may evaluate the strategies of the authority and its regional consortium for raising standards in national priority areas. For example, inspectors may consider the availability and quality of support provided to schools in areas such as literacy, numeracy, digital competence, Welsh language development, reducing the impact of poverty as well as curriculum reform and changes to qualifications. Inspectors may assess whether or not any strategies to support these national priority areas are clear, coherent and well understood by schools.

Inspectors may consider how well school improvement services take account of learners' well-being and the progress of vulnerable learners when considering the nature of challenge and support to provide to schools and PRUs. Inspectors may judge how well the authority promotes well-being for all learners, such as healthy lifestyles and participation in physical activity through its schools.

Inspectors may evaluate how successfully the authority (through its regional consortium where applicable) has identified the overall management development needs of governors and senior and middle managers in schools across the authority. They may consider how successfully this analysis has informed a systematic programme of support and development for senior and middle managers including mentoring, consultancy, leadership programmes and the dissemination of good practice. In particular, they may consider what impact this support has had on school improvement, including improving better resource management and improved provision and outcomes for learners.

Inspectors may evaluate whether the authority has effective policies to manage governor recruitment, including from minority or under-represented groups. They may consider whether the authority (and its regional consortium where applicable) ensures governors are provided with relevant information about the school's performance, including analyses of financial data and of pupils' performance compared to that of similar schools.

2.2 Support for vulnerable learners

Section 1.2 of this guidance provides relevant information about vulnerable learners.

Inspectors may consider how well the local authority co-ordinates, supports and provides a range of universal and targeted services to promote inclusion and the well-being of all children and young people, and support vulnerable learners to achieve good outcomes. As well as considering the services provided for children and young people who are identified as vulnerable, inspectors may also consider services which may be provided universally that aim to reduce the risk of children and young people becoming vulnerable.

Inspectors may review how well the local authority is carrying out its statutory duties for learners with ALN as set out in the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal [Wales] Act 2018 and accompanying ALN Code. Inspectors may consider the authority's work to support early identification of ALN. They may evaluate how well the authority ensures that learners with ALN have appropriate support, intervention, advocacy and provision in line with their needs, including pre-school and post-16 support. Inspectors may review work to support learners at the point of transition between phases or providers. In evaluating support for learners with ALN, inspectors should consider the extent to which provision is equally available through the Welsh language.

Under the ALNET Act, all children, their parents or carers and young people up to the age of 25 have the right to appeal to the Education Tribunal against a decision made by a local authority in relation to their ALN or their individual development plan (IDP). Inspectors may evaluate the local authority's arrangements for avoiding and resolving disagreements at the earliest opportunity and at the most local level.

Inspectors may consider the effectiveness of joint commissioning protocols for children and young people with complex needs, particularly for those placed outside the local authority. Inspectors may review how well the local authority monitors the quality of education and outcomes for learners placed outside the local authority.

Inspectors may evaluate how well education services work with partners such as social services, health services, youth justice services and voluntary sector organisations to provide support for vulnerable learners and improve their outcomes.

Inspectors may consider the effectiveness of support provided to parents and carers of learners with ALN on the quality of education and outcomes for their children, in particular the effectiveness of impartial advice or mediation services in dispute resolutions.

Inspectors may consider how well the education services promote social inclusion, including the effectiveness of work to promote equality and prevent and tackle discrimination, harassment and bullying, including in relation to protected characteristics.

Inspectors may evaluate the range of opportunities for children and young people to access high quality personal support, advice, guidance, advocacy and school-based counselling services in response to their individual needs and to support their progress in education.

Inspectors may consider how well education services promote good attendance. They will consider the effectiveness of the range of universal and targeted interventions to improve attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism, particularly for vulnerable learners.

Inspectors may consider how well education services promote and support good behaviour. They may consider the effectiveness of the authority's actions to reduce exclusions and ensure that pastoral support plans are used appropriately. They may consider how well the local authority monitors the use of exclusions, including the rates and length of fixed-term exclusions, the rate of permanent exclusions and the number of exclusions overturned by independent appeal panels. Inspectors may also consider how well the local authority supports and monitors the effective use of managed moves between schools.

Inspectors may evaluate the quality of provision and timeliness of support to meet the needs of excluded pupils and all pupils educated other than at school (EOTAS). Inspectors may consider how effective the authority's procedures are for commissioning, monitoring and quality assuring EOTAS services.

Inspectors may consider the effectiveness of the authority's procedures for identifying pupils missing from education, not at school or at risk of being out of education, training or employment. They may consider whether there are clear and effective strategies in place to reduce the numbers of young people not in education, training or employment and the impact of these.

Inspectors may consider whether there are effective and timely arrangements in place for children and young people to make the transition back into education following, for example, an exclusion, a change to a pastoral support plan, a period of home tuition or a period of time at a PRU. Inspectors may evaluate whether children coming to live in the authority during the school year, including looked-after children,

refugee children and children returning from custody who are no longer on a school roll, are accommodated without delay in schools that meet their needs and with appropriate support for the transition.

Inspectors may consider the quality of youth support services, including the authority's own youth service, based on their impact on outcomes for young people. Inspectors may consider how well the services enable young people to participate effectively in education and training, take advantage of opportunities for employment and participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.

Inspectors may consider the quality of education services for young offenders. They may consider how closely the performance of young offenders is monitored and the impact of targeted programmes to prevent re-offending.

Inspectors may evaluate the local authority's oversight of children educated at home by their parents, including children and young people with statutory plans for their education. Inspectors may consider whether the local authority provides useful guidance and sign posting for support for parents educating their children at home.

Inspectors may consider the quality of training available for staff in early years settings, in schools and in other education settings such as youth centres to support them to meet the needs of children and young people with ALN. This training may, for example, include outreach support from maintained special schools or specialist provision.

Inspectors may assess how well the local authority fulfils its responsibilities as a corporate parent for looked after children in relation to their education.

2.3 Other education support services

Inspectors may consider whether the local authority works effectively with non-maintained settings to provide good quality funded education for eligible three and four-year-old children. They may consider the quality and appropriateness of the authority's strategic plan to offer funded education to children not in receipt of early education in maintained schools. Inspectors may consider whether there are enough places for early education of good quality to meet the demand identified through a childcare sufficiency assessment. These may include enough Welsh-medium places to reflect the authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). Inspectors may consider the effectiveness of support and training provided to enable all settings to improve.

Inspectors may consider how effectively the local authority works with other partners to co-ordinate and ensure sufficiency of play provision across the area. Inspectors may consider how well the authority assures the quality of this provision.

Inspectors may consider how well the local authority coordinates youth support services. They may consider how well the authority works with partners, including the local voluntary sector, schools and others, to provide a suitable range of appropriate youth support services that meet locally identified needs. Inspectors may consider whether or not the authority has identified gaps or duplication in the provision of youth support services and how it has intervened to plan more effectively. Inspectors may consider whether the local authority is meeting its statutory responsibilities in relation to youth services provided, procured or facilitated by a local authority. Inspectors may consider the quality of opportunities for children and young people to

gain accreditation or recognition for learning and participation through youth support services.

Inspectors may consider how well education services ensure that children and young people's views are sought and taken into account in decisions that affect them.

Inspectors may consider whether the authority has up-to-date knowledge of the capacity of schools including information about overfull schools and numbers of surplus places. Inspectors may consider whether there is enough capacity in both primary and secondary sectors, including Welsh-medium and special education, and whether any school is significantly overfilled or has significant surplus capacity without good reason. Inspectors may be assured that there is appropriate provision for all learners.

Inspectors may review post-16 provision across the authority area. Inspectors may consider whether or not the local authority works well with schools and external partners such as further education institutions and work-based learning providers to ensure that there are appropriate education and training opportunities for all post-16 learners.

Inspectors may consider how well the authority identifies the demand for Welsh-medium education in its area and the extent that its provision currently meets this demand. Inspectors may consider how well developed and accurate are the systems for forecasting and monitoring the requirements for places across all phases. Inspectors may evaluate whether the appropriate range of places in all phases for Welsh medium education reflects the authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. Inspectors may consider how the authority works with its partners such as other local authorities and its consortium to meet demand, consult each other and to co-ordinate their arrangements effectively where appropriate.

Inspectors may evaluate whether the authority has accurate, up-to-date information about the condition, sufficiency and suitability of all school and PRU buildings. Inspectors should consider whether the priorities for investment in school and other education buildings are transparent, based on an evaluation of their current condition and suitability, and have been agreed with the schools involved. They may consider if funds for repairs and maintenance in school budgets are clearly identified and whether the authority ensures that schools undertake their responsibilities in relation to their premises. Inspectors may consider the management of the building programme, including whether emergency repairs are promptly organised.

Inspectors may consider how well the authority plans ahead and evaluates all options to ensure appropriate capital resources are available to deliver its school organisation plans. Inspectors may consider whether or not published school organisation proposals are likely to maintain or improve the standard of education provision in the area. They may consider how well the local authority has considered the benefits and risks of the proposals and have considered the educational aspects of the proposal appropriately. Inspectors may consider whether there is good use of information about local needs and liaison between authority departments, such as housing, planning and social services to link into wider regeneration strategies.

Inspectors may consider how local admissions authorities consult each other and co-

ordinate their arrangements for admissions to schools effectively. They may consider whether the admissions forum is effective and whether or not the information provided to parents on school admissions is easy to access and understand, transparent and satisfies the Admissions Code of Practice.

Inspectors may consider to what extent parents' preferences for school choices are met. They may review how quickly and equitably the authority responds to appeals to minimise the risk of children and young people missing any of their education.

3: Leadership and management

Inspectors must evaluate and report on all aspects, although inspectors are not required to report against all the detail covered in the guidance for this inspection area.

Inspectors should take account of the wide range of evidence available to them through all our inspection activities with local authorities and regional consortia in addition to the specific evidence provided by the local authority during the core inspection and information gathered through interviews.

Inspectors should ensure that strong education services that are led well are taken into account and reported on in this section, particularly where these services are not captured through the local inspection area questions in inspection area 2.

In evaluating all aspects of leadership and management, inspectors should take account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. For all aspects, inspectors should consider the quality of leadership and management provided during the pandemic and the following recovery period. The quality of operational leadership and management provided during a crisis should be considered within the wider context of strategic leadership and management.

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers

There is a strong link between leadership and management, the quality of education services, and outcomes. Inspectors should be mindful that, while the link is strong, there is usually a time delay between leaders taking helpful and decisive action to bring about improvements and the impact of this action on outcomes, particularly in relation to school performance.

Inspectors should assess the quality of the internal leadership provided by officers and elected members, the leadership provided to schools and other funded education providers, as well as their leadership, or contribution to the leadership, of any partnership arrangements, such as that with their regional consortium.

Inspectors should consider the extent to which leaders and managers have established and communicated a clear vision and appropriate aims, strategic objectives, plans and policies that focus on meeting all learners' needs. They should judge whether leaders and managers create and support a shared understanding of clearly identified needs and priorities for learners.

Inspectors should consider how well leaders and managers act in accordance with the principles set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Inspectors should consider how well leaders and managers make decisions and set priorities for improvement that balance immediate, short-term needs with the long-term needs of learners, the local community and Wales. Inspectors should consider the extent to which leaders prioritise sustainable improvements over short-term improvements that are unsustainable.

Inspectors must consider, and report on, how well leaders and managers promote equity in the education system. Inspectors must assess how well leaders and managers promote equality and prevent and tackle discrimination, harassment and bullying, including in relation to protected characteristics. Inspectors must review how well leaders and managers are discharging their duty to consider how their decisions might help reduce the inequalities in experience and outcomes in education associated with socio-economic disadvantage.

Inspectors should reflect on how well leaders and managers at all levels set high expectations for officers, schools, other providers and partners. They should consider how well staff at all levels understand and discharge their roles and responsibilities and how well they collaborate in driving forward strategic priorities and plans for education services.

Inspectors should consider how well leaders and managers develop an effective, engaged team of staff. They should consider to what extent leaders and managers model and promote professional values and behaviours that contribute positively to school improvement and effective collaboration between staff and with other providers. They should consider how well leaders and managers promote, and provide support for, staff well-being, including that of headteachers.

Inspectors should look at the effectiveness of the leadership of elected members and officers. In doing this, they should consider whether this leadership is effective and purposeful in securing:

- effective and efficient service delivery that impacts on standards and the quality of education and training for all children and young people
- provision that meets local needs, as identified in the authority's strategic plans and its plans with partners
- the effectiveness and impact of work with key partners such as the regional consortium for school improvement
- provision identified in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
- provision that is clearly learner-focused and maximises potential for every learner
- children's and young people's rights, inclusion and well-being

Inspectors should judge whether the leadership has taken difficult decisions in a timely manner when necessary, following a rigorous and open process of examination and consultation that is consistent with strategic objectives.

Inspectors should look at the extent to which leaders and managers sustain high quality or improve weak aspects of provision. They should consider how well leaders and managers identify and assess risks, prevent problems from occurring in the first place and how swiftly they bring about appropriate remedial actions when problems occur.

Inspectors should judge, through focus groups, interviews and inspection reports, how clearly and transparently the authority consults with and communicates its vision, intentions and expected outcomes to schools, learners and other relevant stakeholders.

Also, they should look at the quality of the relationship between the local authority, its regional consortium, its schools and other partners in terms of their impact on outcomes for learners in the authority.

Inspectors should consider how well LGES strategy documents set out the authority's strategic vision, aims and priorities and how they comply with the requirements of relevant Welsh Government guidance and respond appropriately to national, regional and local priorities. This should include looking at the key educational priorities as identified by the authority and the extent to which they have been accepted by all partners and the local communities.

Inspectors should consider how well the authority commissions, works in partnership with, coordinates, oversees and monitors any partnership or contracted services. Such services would include the regional consortium for school improvement, education support services provided by another local authority on behalf of the local authority and services contracted to private or voluntary organisations, for example school-based counselling services or advocacy services.

Inspectors should evaluate how well different directorates and services across the authority understand the priority given to education in corporate plans and policies and their respective contributions to achieving that priority.

Inspectors should evaluate whether corporate and other strategic plans are consistent with each other, so that they are clear, well sequenced, affordable and achievable. They should look for the 'golden thread' of education and training running through the various layers of plans, policy agreements and other initiatives. In the case of school improvement, this 'golden thread' should run from each individual school, through the local authority, to the strategic plan of the regional consortia school improvement service.

Inspectors should consider whether stakeholders, including schools, partners, elected members and officers, are aware of and fully committed to achieving the targets for the services.

Inspectors should judge the effectiveness of scrutiny by elected members and other supervisory boards in challenging underperformance and in informing the continuous improvement of service delivery and policy development. In this, inspectors should consider the effectiveness of the Public Services Board (PSB) in identifying and unblocking relevant barriers to improvement. Inspectors should use evidence from the PSB's monitoring of its impact on service delivery.

Inspectors should evaluate the usefulness of scrutiny processes. Inspectors should judge the clarity and honesty of data and information along with accompanying analysis and evaluation that is presented to scrutiny. Inspectors should consider how well scrutiny arrangements are supported by good training to promote scrutiny members' understanding and exercise of their responsibilities. Inspectors should look

at impact of the structural arrangements for scrutiny on the quality of their work such as the use of scrutiny task groups to analyse specific aspects of the education service whilst developing the understanding and expertise of members.

Inspectors should judge whether the programme of work of scrutiny is well organised and how good the alignment is between the programmes for scrutiny committees and the cabinet so as to enable make timely and well-informed decisions. Inspectors should also consider the extent to which all political groups are engaged in contributing to decision and monitoring progress so that this cross-party involvement signals a common goal in improving services for children and young people.

Inspectors should gauge whether members have a good overview of all services across the local authority in order to compare and challenge services more effectively and make well-informed decisions. Also inspectors should consider the quality, accuracy and usefulness of the reports and briefings provided by officers to scrutiny committee members.

Inspectors should look at how well members have made difficult decisions in areas such as school reorganisation. Also inspectors should consider how well members hold managers to account for the services and outcomes that they are responsible for.

3.2 Self-evaluation processes and improvement planning

Inspectors should evaluate how accurately leaders and managers know the strengths and weakness of the local authority's education services as a result of well-established processes for self-evaluation, monitoring and quality assurance.

Inspectors will judge the extent to which self-evaluation is part of the council's normal annual business improvement cycle, supported by relevant performance information and evidence such as performance reports, progress reports and data analyses provided to the council's scrutiny, cabinet or audit committees. Scrutiny committees should have a key role in supporting and challenging the self-evaluation process and inspectors should assess the quality of their contribution.

Inspectors should evaluate how well the local authority involves, and takes account of the views of, stakeholders in its self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, including children and young people, parents, service deliverers and partners. In this, inspectors should check that the local authority takes appropriate account of linguistic and other diversity in the community.

Inspectors should consider the quality of improvement planning and how well the priorities for improvement link to the findings from the local authority's self-evaluation processes and are informed by audit, needs assessments and data analysis.

Inspectors should check the consistency and coherency of plans within the local authority, from the highest level plan through to service level plans, and externally with partners. Inspectors should consider how leaders and managers ensure that priorities are supported by the allocation of resources. They should evaluate the extent to which leaders and managers define relevant, measurable and achievable actions for improvement. They should consider how well the plans have specific, realistic timescales and allocate appropriate responsibility for their delivery

Inspectors should review how well the authority evaluated its work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Inspectors should consider how well the authority used their evaluations to make timely improvements in services and influence their medium-term and long-term service plans.

Inspectors should judge the effectiveness of corporate performance management arrangements and their impact on staff, services, partners and workforce development. They should use evidence from the local authority's own monitoring of the impact of its performance management arrangements.

Inspectors should consider how the performance management system allows elected members and senior managers to make effective use of performance indicators to monitor progress against milestones regularly and take appropriate remedial action. They should judge the impact that planning, priorities and actions to bring about improvement have on outcomes.

Inspectors should consider how well the authority has responded to recommendations from previous inspection reports, thematic reports and other relevant reports from inspectorates and regulators. Inspectors should judge the extent to which the authority's actions have led to improvements in standards and quality. They should consider the pace of progress and the sustainability of any improvements.

Inspectors should consider how well the authority responds to complaints about its services whether from schools, parents or carers, governors or members of the public and how lessons learnt from complaints are used to improve service delivery.

3.3 Professional learning

Key to maintaining and improving the performance of local government education services is the professional knowledge, skills and understanding of the local authority's staff. Inspectors will consider the extent to which staff at all levels keep up to date with knowledge about their areas of responsibility, including learning from good practice. Inspectors should consider how the authority's staff promote and engage in professional learning through structured learning opportunities, research, and collaborations with professional networks in Wales, the UK and internationally. Inspectors will consider the impact that professional learning activities have on improving the quality of outcomes and education services.

Inspectors should consider how effectively the local authority plans, in partnership with its regional consortium, for professional learning to achieve the strategic vision, aims and priorities, and to shape further improvement planning. Inspectors should consider how well performance management arrangements are used to identify the professional learning needs of staff. Inspectors should evaluate the appropriateness and impact of professional learning in motivating staff and improving their performance. Inspectors should consider how well staff develop their leadership skills through structured learning opportunities. Inspectors should consider how well professional learning is linked to succession planning.

Inspector should consider how effectively the local authority is developing as a strong learning community and achieving a culture of collaboration across the local authority, its schools and partner organisations. Inspectors should consider how

effectively local government education services share good practice, learns from others and contributes to professional learning communities more widely. In particular, they should evaluate how well the local authority learns from best practice elsewhere.

3.4 Safeguarding

Inspectors will consider the extent to which there is a culture of safeguarding throughout education services in the local authority that supports all learners' well-being. Inspectors will also consider how well the local authority promotes a culture of safeguarding in schools and other providers that supports all learners' well-being.

Inspectors will evaluate how well the authority fulfils its statutory responsibilities relating to safeguarding. In particular, they will evaluate whether the authority has in place effective safeguarding arrangements, including:

- strategic planning for, and oversight of, safeguarding in education, including regular reporting to members
- appropriate support and guidance for all providers of education services in its area, including early years, play and youth support services
- appropriate safeguarding practice in its direct education services such as EOTAS, PRUs and youth service
- appropriate arrangements in place to ensure that all partnership work undertaken, coordinated or funded by the local authority adheres to high standards of safeguarding

Inspectors will consider whether the authority has robust procedures for checking the suitability of staff and others who are in contact with children, including the maintenance of a record of all staff working with children and the outcomes of appropriate safe recruitment checks. Inspectors will consider whether the authority has robust procedures for staff training and that all staff know how to respond to child protection issues.

Inspectors will need to consider whether the authority has appropriate policies, procedures and reporting arrangements in relation to physical interventions and withdrawal.

Inspectors will consider how well the authority fulfils their duty to prevent learners from being drawn into terrorism, by preventing radicalisation and extremism.

Inspectors must report on whether the local authority's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern or do not meet requirements and give serious cause for concern.

3.5 Use of resources

Inspectors should evaluate how clearly the allocation of resources is linked to priorities. They should consider whether improvement strategies are accompanied by sound financial planning and workforce development which makes proposed developments feasible.

Inspectors should consider how fairly the local authority funds schools based on the needs of learners and the contexts of schools. Inspectors should consider the local

authority's most recent review of its funding arrangements for schools. Inspectors should consider how well the local authority deploys and ensures effective use of specific grant funding to schools and other providers, either directly or through a regional consortium or other partnership arrangement.

Inspectors should judge how proactively the local authority is seeking and using additional external, regional or partnership funding to address its local priorities or national priorities such as the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They should ask whether partnership working is addressing duplication of provision or addressing non-viable provision.

Inspectors should judge how well the local authority compares its costs and outcomes with those of other authorities and can demonstrate that children and young people achieve good outcomes in relation to costs of the services that it provides.

Where the local authority commissions support for children and young people from external agencies, for example support for minority ethnic learners or young carers, inspectors should judge how well the local authority ensures that the support provided is good value for money, evidenced through improved outcomes.

Inspectors should judge how well the local authority, with schools, monitors and manages the quality and cost of regional consortium arrangements. Inspectors should judge how effectively the local authority holds the regional consortium to account for the service it is delivering. Inspectors should evaluate how well the local authority ensures that it is receiving value for money from the regional consortium.

Inspectors should evaluate how well the local authority regularly reviews its services in order to secure continuous improvement and value for money through due regard to economy, effectiveness and efficiency.

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which the local authority is pursuing partnerships with other local authorities where this is in the interests of improving outcomes for learners and achieving better value for money.

In all of the above, inspectors should use evidence from the local authority's monitoring reports and reports from the authority's scrutiny and external auditors on its management of resources. This could also include evidence from the regional consortium and any externally commissioned services.

When considering value for money, inspectors should evaluate the effectiveness of the local authority in achieving high quality outcomes for children and young people but they will also need to take into account how well the authority manages its resources.

Inspectors should evaluate:

- the extent to which the local authority successfully balances the effectiveness of its education provision against costs, including staffing costs
- the effectiveness with which the authority deploys its own resources
- the extent to which it makes good use of the funding it receives

Part 3: Follow-up arrangements for local authorities causing significant concern

There will be one category of follow-up for local government education services inspections: 'causing significant concern'. The guidance below sets out how we will work with a local authority causing significant concern following their inspection.

Follow-up activity may involve virtual meetings online rather than on-site meetings. These will be used with discretion, either where circumstances or regulations necessitate it, or where it is efficient without impeding the effectiveness of the inspection process or inconveniencing anyone involved.

Post-inspection improvement conference

Around three months after the inspection, we will chair an improvement conference with senior leaders (officers and elected members) from the local authority and other key stakeholders where relevant, such as the regional consortium. We will formally notify the authority four weeks in advance but will aim to ensure that the date is suitable for the local authority well before we issue this notification.

The purpose of the conference would be to check that the authority has fully understood the reasons for the inspection judgements, and to check that the authority is developing appropriate plans to address shortcomings.

Following the conference, we will send a letter to the chief executive of the local authority. This letter will confirm the degree of assurance inspectors received during the conference that the local authority understands the reasons why it causes significant concern. The letter will also confirm how well the local authority is planning to address the concern. In the letter, inspectors may include recommendations for the authority to support further improvement in its plans to address the concern.

We will invite the Welsh Government, Audit Wales and the Welsh Local Government Association to participate in the conference. We will also invite CIW where appropriate.

Our local authority link inspectors (LALIs) will meet regularly with local authority officers, elected members and stakeholders following the conference to monitor improvement work.

Progress conference

Around a year after the post-inspection improvement conference, we will facilitate a progress conference. We will formally notify the authority four weeks in advance but will aim to ensure that the date is suitable for the local authority well before we issue this notification.

The conference will involve the same set of senior leaders as the first conference. The purpose of the conference is to evaluate progress since the inspection, check that plans to address shortcomings are having the desired impact, and that they are updated appropriately.

We will invite the Welsh Government, Audit Wales and the Welsh Local Government

Association to participate in the conference. We will also invite CIW where appropriate.

A VIR will be set up for the conference which will allow the local authority to share a few key documents and supporting information that is relevant.

Following the conference, we will send a letter to the chief executive of the local authority. This letter will confirm the degree of assurance inspectors received during the conference that the local authority's actions since the inspection have had the desired impact on the areas for improvement. In the letter, inspectors may include recommendations for the authority to support further improvement in its plans to address the concern. This letter will also be copied to the Minister for Education.

In light of our view of the progress made by the local authority at this stage and its plans for further improvement, we will consider how likely it is the authority could be removed from follow-up in a year's time. If we think that it is likely that the authority will be able to demonstrate enough progress to be removed from follow-up, then we will plan a monitoring visit. We may agree with the local authority not to make a decision about this at the time of the progress conference and instead wait up to six months before deciding whether or not to proceed with a monitoring visit. In this interim period, LALIs will keep in close contact with the local authority. If we think that the authority will require more time, then we will facilitate a second progress conference around a year after the first one.

The LALIs will continue to meet regularly with local authority officers, elected members and stakeholders following the conference to monitor improvement work in between improvement conferences and the monitoring visit.

Monitoring visit

We will carry out a monitoring visit around a year after the last progress conference. We will formally notify the authority four weeks in advance but will aim to ensure that the date is suitable for the local authority well before we issue this notification.

The size of the team and design of the visit will be tailored to the specific context of the local authority and the nature of the recommendations. We may invite Audit Wales or CIW to contribute to the visit if appropriate.

A VIR will be set up for the conference, which will allow the local authority to share a few key documents and supporting information that is relevant.

During the monitoring visit, inspectors will consider how well the local authority has addressed each of the recommendations and how much progress has been made overall. If the local authority is no longer causing significant concern, then inspectors will recommend to HMCI that the authority is removed from follow-up.

We will publish a report of the monitoring visit. The report will include an evaluation of progress for each recommendation, a summative commentary on progress and an overall judgement on progress, which will confirm whether or not the local authority has made sufficient progress to be removed from follow-up.

If inspectors are not satisfied with progress, we will return in around a year's time for a further monitoring visit.