



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Report:

**Analysis of responses to the
consultation on Estyn's inspection
arrangements for schools and PRUs
from 2024**

July 2023

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1. Introduction

In summer 2023, we conducted a public consultation on our inspection arrangements for schools and pupil referral units (PRUs). This was to ensure that stakeholders' views feed into how we approach inspection from 2024 onwards.

2. Methodology

The consultation took the form of a questionnaire that was available to complete either online or offline (a PDF document to be completed and returned via e-mail or post). We launched the survey on 25 May, and it closed on 26 June 2023. The questionnaire was heavily promoted at Eisteddfod yr Urdd during the week of 29 May – 2 June 2023. A QR code for the questionnaire was shared with visitors to our stand.

Responses were received in both English and Welsh. Of the 460 total responses, some did not complete the whole survey.

The responses to the free-text questions were grouped into themes. Representative responses have been included in this report to convey the key themes associated with each question. These included a mixture of direct quotes and paraphrasing (where elements from several responses were summarised). The Estyn Writing Guide was followed when describing the proportions of responses (e.g., 'few' equates to less than 20% of respondents).

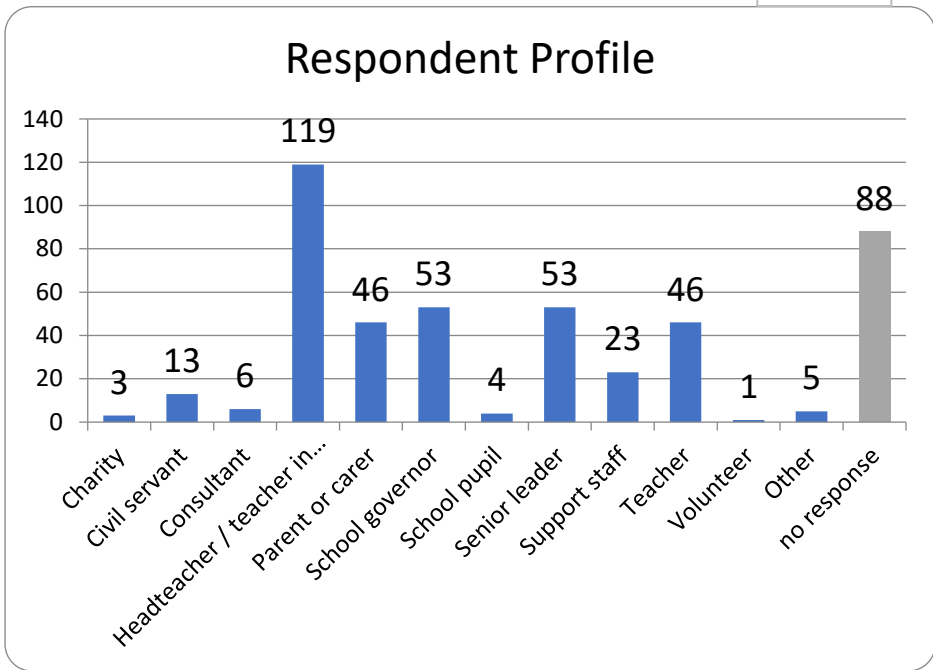
The full completion rate for the survey was low, with only 33% of respondents providing answers to all questions. Those motivated to complete the questionnaire may have specific reasons to do so – compared to those who provided a partial response. As a result, the analysis of the free-text responses may not be representative of all the 460 respondents.

3. Profile of respondents

We received a total of 460 responses to the consultation questionnaire, some responses were not full responses, therefore some respondents did not provide their demographic information. Those that answered had the following respondent profile:

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

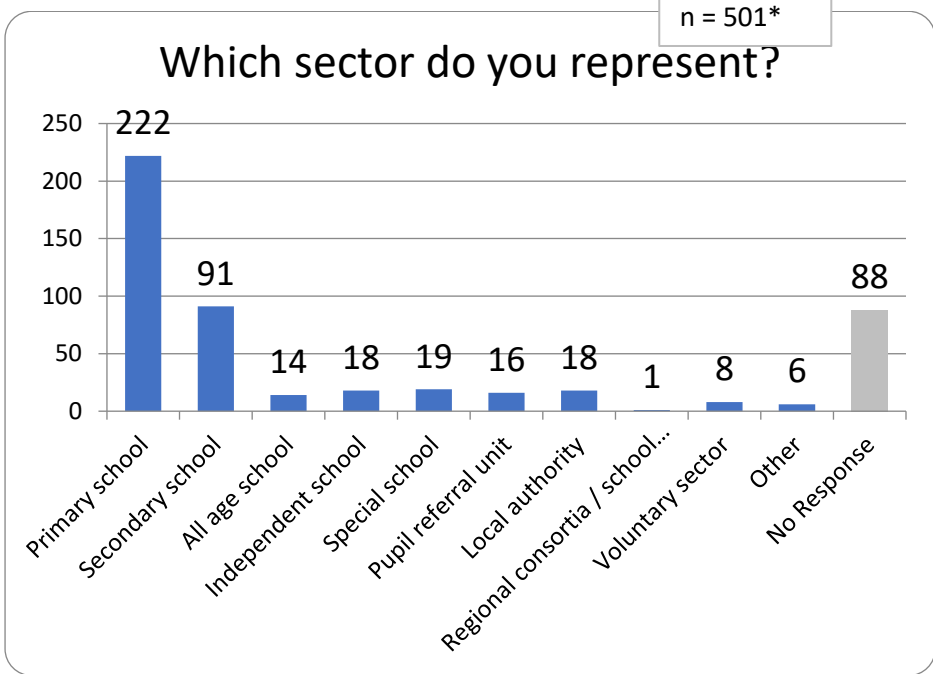
n = 460



We also asked respondents which sector they represented.

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

n = 501*



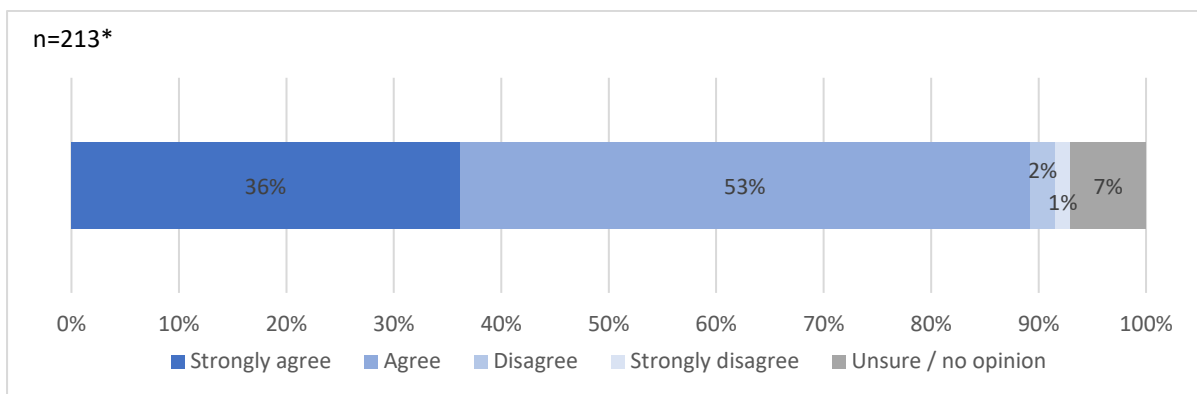
*501 responses received in total. 20 individuals represent more than 1 sector

4. Results

4.1 Responses to Proposals

Firstly, we asked respondents what their views were on the proposal that the number of inspection areas that are considered during inspections is changed from five to three.

Figure 3: We propose that we change the number of inspection areas that we consider on inspections from five to three.



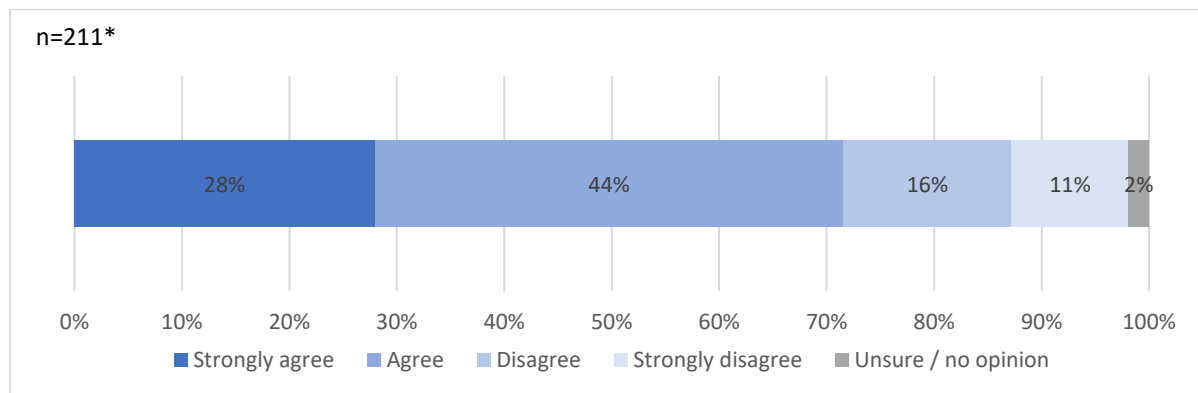
*213 responses received in total (46% of all respondents)

There was a strong level of support for this proposal – with 89% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). Only 3% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

Although very few in terms of numbers (fewer than 10% of all respondents), the strongest ‘theme’ in the free-text responses related to the overlap and repetition that exists within the current system and that moving to three well-defined areas would remove much of this overlap, therefore reducing the amount of duplication of work required from all those involved.

We then asked about the proposal that we maintain the ten-day notice period which schools and PRUs have before an inspection.

Figure 4: We propose that we maintain the ten-day notice period which schools and PRUs have before an inspection. This gives us sufficient time for questionnaires and for the schools and PRUs to upload relevant documentation etc. What are your views on this proposal?



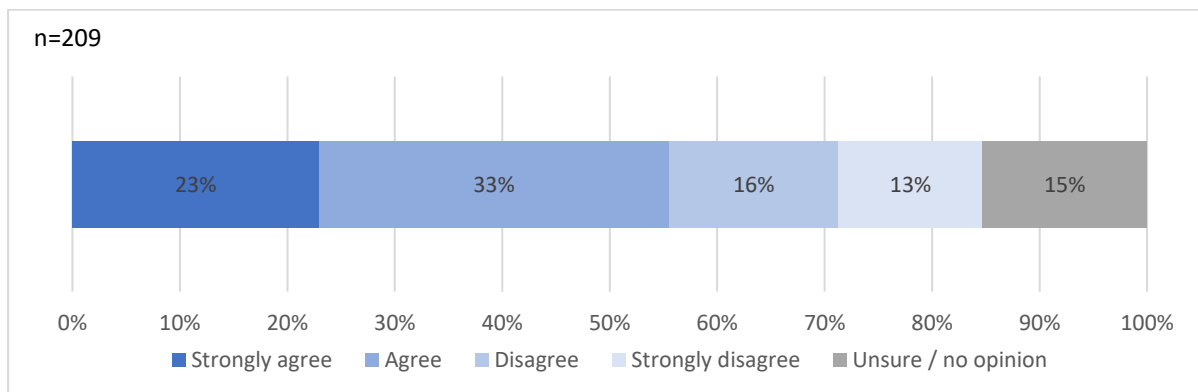
*211 responses received in total (46% of all respondents)

There was support for this proposal – with 72% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). 27% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

A minority of respondents provided additional comments (21%). There was a variety of opinion about how long the notice period for inspection should be, with a relatively even three way split between those who agree with the ten-day notice period (39%); those who wanted to see a longer period (25%); and those who felt there should be a shorter / no notice period (36%). Those responders who supported the current ten-day notice period felt that this was the right balance – giving ‘enough time’ to prepare, without becoming something which ‘impacts’ and ‘distracts’ from the day job. Very few individuals commented that there should be no notice period at all – and that this would give a much more honest picture of the situation within schools. Others, again very few, stated that the 10-day period creates a huge amount of workload and undue pressure on schools and staff – they argued that increasing the notice period to 15 to 20 days would enable staff to prepare thoroughly without the overbearing level of pressure associated with the current 10-day notice period.

There were mixed responses to the proposal to engage more frequently with schools and PRUs with inspection activity.

Figure 5: We propose that we engage more frequently with schools and PRUs with inspection activity. What are your views on this proposal?



*209 responses received in total (46% of all respondents)

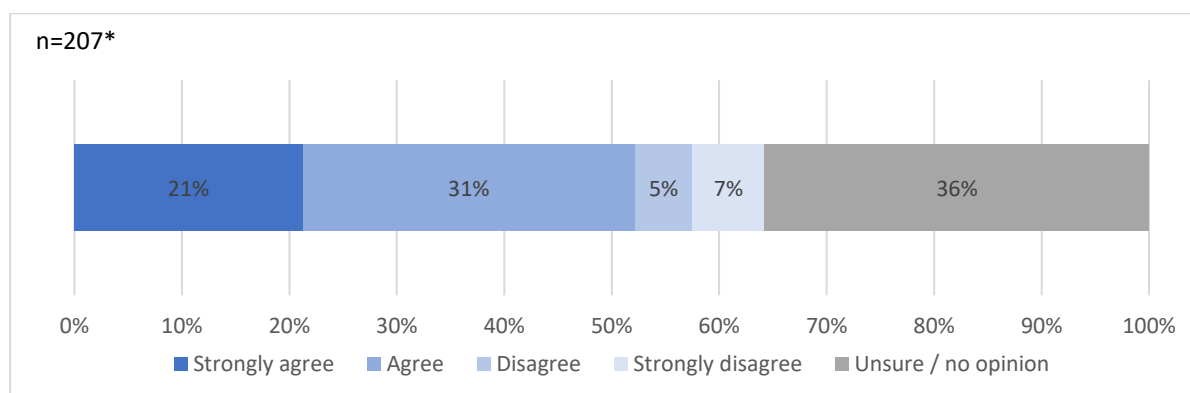
Of those who answered, there was support for this proposal – with 56% of those who answered agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). 29% of those who answered, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

A minority of respondents (24%) provided additional comments. The most popular ‘theme’ (although mentioned by very few respondents) was a warning about the levels of ‘stress’ and ‘workload’ associated with inspection and that more activity would likely result in a negative effect on ‘staff and pupil morale’ and have a ‘worsening effect on the already poor retention crisis that we have in Wales’.

A very small number of respondents had expressed the following concern: ‘constant fear of being inspected’ is already seen as something which negatively impacts schools, with some seeing the process as a ‘distracting and time-consuming box-ticking exercise’.

There were a few responses related to how Estyn carries out its work: If the increased inspection activity was done in a more ‘consultative’ manner with Estyn being seen as a ‘supporter and enabler’ of improvements in schools through ‘professional dialogue’, then many individuals would be supportive of increased inspection activity. More frequent interaction may result in a ‘fairer and more complete’ picture of the performance of schools, compared to the current ‘snapshot – which some parents and teachers are not able to partake in due to the 6-year timeframe’. Some of these responders suggested that the inspection activity needs to become more of a ‘partnership’ and ‘discussion’ between the schools and Estyn, rather than the current system – which feels as if it is trying to ‘catch schools out’.

Figure 6: We propose to visit every independent school at least twice during an inspection cycle. One of these visits would be a core inspection and the other would be a visit focussing on compliance with the Independent School Standards and Regulation (Wales). What are your views on this proposal?



*207 responses received in total (46% of all respondents)

Over a third of those who responded were 'Unsure / no opinion'. Only a very few of those who responded (11) currently work in the independent sector. Of those who currently work in the independent sector, 64% strongly agreed or agreed with this proposal.

Of those who answered and stated an opinion, there was support for this proposal – with over three quarters of those who answered, and stated an opinion, agreeing (either strongly agreeing or agreeing). Just under a fifth of those who answered, and stated an opinion, disagreed with the proposal (either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

Those who supported the proposal did so on the basis that more frequent visits would be 'light-touch' and 'supportive' – anything more would result in 'too much additional work' – very few comments received.

Very few respondents felt that two visits per inspection cycle would be 'an overkill' and 'unnecessary'.

4.2 Wider implications of the proposals and other considerations

4.2.1 We asked respondents how should we involve parents, carers, children and young people in the new inspection arrangements, from 2024 onwards?

The most common response to this question was to keep asking for opinions - 'especially outside the regular visit window of a school'. The most popular response, although less than 10% of all respondents, felt that a questionnaire or similar would help capture the general 'feel' at each school. Also, face to face meetings were an invaluable way of collecting opinions.

Sharing information from visits and reports, in the form of online reports (simplified versions if necessary) was seen as a vital way of keeping people informed as to how

schools are performing, but also how Estyn is working with schools to improve performance.

There were some concerns (a very small number of comments) that ‘those who shout loudest are not always the best benchmark to the opinion of the majority’.

4.2.2 We asked respondents what information would be helpful to include in an inspection report?

Again, comments were received from only a minority of all respondents. Some of those who submitted comments felt that the current reports provide a good basis from which to improve. However, respondents noted that reports need to be more ‘concise’ and ‘punchy’ – these constitute a very small number out of the whole responder population. Also, very few comments were received which stated that the reports are in ‘Estyn speak’ and not in ‘everyday language’ (this comment was received in both English and Welsh feedback).

As well as recommendations as to what the school needs to focus on in order to improve, there should also be information included on the ‘positive aspects’ of the school. Sometimes the reports can read as if they are overly critical – some ‘high-points’ would add much needed context and positivity. Information on the ‘improvements made already’ (since the last report) could help show that the inspection process works and is aimed at achieving improvements, and ‘it is actually delivering them’.

More focus on ‘staff and pupil happiness / satisfaction’. For some, very few, these are as important, if not more important, than some of the more ‘educational’ metrics.

4.2.3 We asked respondents what other methods should we use to feedback messages from an inspection report to different audiences?

Very few comments received although the most popular responses were that the current reports themselves were, generally, a good way to communicate information but that they were:

- Often too verbose
- Written in very formal language (both in English and in Welsh)
- Often too long for specific audiences (e.g., a parent will, generally, not want to read a report to the same level of detail as, say, a Headteacher)

The methods of distribution could be improved / modernised to include:

- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter etc.)
- QR codes
- Links in e-mails to audience-specific versions of reports

4.2.4 We asked respondents to think of new ways of sharing effective practice found during inspections, which encourages learning from each other.

A 'centralised point from where to access all information' was, the most popular response, although fewer than 10% of all respondents mentioned this. A small handful of respondents suggested using HWB to store a range of materials which document and display examples of best practice. These include:

- Reports detailing 'what good looks like' based on the performance of high achieving schools
- Good practice case studies
- Videos and guides in other 'non-standard / non-typical' formats i.e. not written reports
- Links to useful social media content

Very few respondents mentioned that sharing information between schools through 'conferences' (both face-to-face and online) and other less formal methods e.g. the ability to 'chat to discuss problems / solutions' would be useful (again both face-to-face and online).

4.2.5 We asked respondents for feedback on any other aspects of Estyn's inspection arrangements.

There was a mixture of responses: a very small number of responses, could see the benefits of the process but feeling that it 'lacks consistency and transparency' and again a very small number seeing any interaction with Estyn as 'stressful'.

Other responses received (extremely small numbers) stated that the mention of Estyn brings 'fear and dread' and that 'we should all be working together to improve education' and that it shouldn't be an 'us and them' approach.

Respondents acknowledged the need for an inspection process but feeling that current arrangements are not constructive or appropriate – very small in terms of number of comments. There needs to be more 'collaboration and dialogue' as well as more 'empathy' to the individual circumstances of each school.

There were some positive comments, for example, 'The last inspection process that we went through was so much different in a positive way than previously. It [was] much more of a dialogue and a process that looked for the positives.'

4.2.6 We asked respondents for their views on the effects that the proposals in this consultation would have on the Welsh language.

The consensus, based on the responses received, was that the proposals should not have a negative impact on the Welsh language.

There were a handful of more general comments about Welsh in the context of Education within Wales; some supporting the current approach:

- 'The inspection process should work equally, in both English and Welsh'

- 'Being in a first language Welsh...both languages are given equal consideration, already, when we are inspected.'

There were some concerns highlighted regarding the ability to provide education in Welsh:

- 'Recruitment and retainment of quality/or any Welsh teachers in the secondary sector is so challenging, that it is unfair to judge schools when improvement is so difficult.'

4.2.7 We asked respondents for their views on the effects that the proposals in this consultation would have on issues of equality, discrimination, promotion of equality of opportunity and fostering of good relationships between different people.

Where responses were received, and addressed the question, (low numbers) there was agreement that the proposed changes would not negatively have an impact on issues of equality, discrimination, promotion of equality of opportunity and fostering of good relationships between different people.

5. Next Steps

The findings of the consultation will help inform the new inspection arrangements for schools and PRUs from 2024 onwards.