

Supplementary guidance:

the evaluation of
very strong, sustained
performance and practice

Autumn 2017

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- ▲ primary schools
- ▲ secondary schools
- ▲ all-age schools
- ▲ special schools
- ▲ pupil referral units
- ▲ independent schools
- ▲ further education
- ▲ independent specialist colleges
- ▲ adult community learning
- ▲ local authority education services for children and young people
- ▲ teacher education and training
- ▲ Welsh for adults
- ▲ work-based learning
- ▲ learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

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:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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What is the purpose of this supplementary guidance?

To provide updated guidance for inspectors on the evaluation of very strong, sustained performance and practice

For whom is it intended?

Inspectors of maintained and independent schools, non-maintained settings and Post 16/FE.

From when should it be used?

September 2017.

Supplementary guidance

The key Estyn documents that guide inspection activity are the inspection guidance handbooks for each sector. However, we also produce supplementary guidance to help inspectors to consider specific aspects of education and training further.

The supplementary guidance documents set out some key principles, considerations and resources for inspectors. They relate to all sectors that Estyn inspects, unless they state that they are for a specific sector. They expand on certain aspects of education/training (e.g. the inspection of literacy) or on ways of conducting inspections (e.g. the use of learning walks) or specific inspection arrangements (e.g. guidance on inspecting church schools).

The supplementary guidance documents do not aim to be comprehensive. Inspectors are not required to work through them exhaustively when covering any specific aspect on an inspection. However, inspectors may find them useful when responding to specific emerging questions that arise during inspections or when they wish to reflect or investigate further.

The supplementary guidance documents may help providers gain an understanding of Estyn's inspection arrangements. They may also be helpful to providers in evaluating specific aspects of their own provision.

Our inspection work is based on the following principles:

- Inspectors will approach inspection with a positive mindset to ensure it is the best possible professional learning experience for the staff in each provider
- Inspectors will take a learner-focused approach to inspection
- Inspectors will always focus strongly on the quality of teaching and learning
- Inspectors will seek out well-considered innovative practice
- Inspectors will tailor the inspection activities according to the circumstances in each provider as far as possible
- Inspectors will be agile and responsive to emerging findings and will use the increased range of inspection tools and approaches available
- Inspectors will consider everything in the inspection framework, but will only report on the key strengths and weaknesses within each provider

Guidance on the evaluation of very strong, sustained performance and practice

If a provider gains an 'excellent' judgement for any of the inspection areas, then the inspection team will have identified examples of very strong, sustained performance and practice at the provider. When discussing this possibility during team meetings, inspectors will need to have clear evidence that the provider's performance and practice is very strong and sustained. The points below provide guidance for the inspection team when considering an 'excellent' judgement under the new inspection arrangements.

- 1 It is very important that there is continuity in how we apply judgements between the current (pre-2017) arrangements and the new framework. Estyn's expectations of the quality of work required to gain an 'excellent' judgement have not changed. It should not be the case that the new framework represents a harsher or more lenient approach overall.
- 2 Very strong practice must be highly effective, and the effectiveness should be seen in terms of its clear impact on learners' progress, achievement and wellbeing. Sustained performance and practice means that there will be clear evidence of the impact of practice on learners' progress, achievement and wellbeing over time. However, it also refers to how well established practice is across all areas of the provider's work. Inspectors will need to consider carefully how consistent teachers and leaders are in the practice that supports positive outcomes and high levels of wellbeing for learners.
- 3 Very strong performance and practice means that the quality of outcomes and provision is at the forefront of the sector. So, inspectors need to ask themselves if this is among the best they have observed in the sector.
- 4 Where performance and practice within an inspection area still contain elements in need of minor improvement, inspectors will need to consider whether the shortcomings lean the judgement more towards 'good' rather than 'excellent'. In coming to their judgements, inspectors will need to weigh the significance of any shortcomings and their impact on pupils' progress, achievement and wellbeing. Overall, very strong and sustained practice indicates outcomes and provision of high quality, often alongside features of good quality. Where there are also features of adequate quality only, then the judgement of excellent overall is unlikely.
- 5 When considering a judgement of 'excellent', inspectors should first be clear about the strengths of the performance and practice before moving to a consideration of whether it has also been sustained.
- 6 Strong performance and practice which is not sustained should not secure an 'excellent' judgement. For example, inspectors should report positively on recent initiatives which are having a very strong impact on pupils' progress and wellbeing, but these may not in themselves secure an excellent judgement as there is unlikely to be sufficient evidence of their sustainability and their impact over time at this early stage in their implementation.

- 7 Very strong, sustained performance and practice also means that the provider should be able to use such practice to offer leadership to the sector so that the practice can be influential as an exemplar of work that is of high quality. Inspectors will need to consider whether such practice is worthy of dissemination for this purpose. The provider does not need to have already shared its practice in order to be awarded an excellent judgement.
- 8 Very strong, sustained performance and practice may include innovative and cutting-edge work that pushes at the boundaries, but this may not be the case. Where very strong practice has been sustained over time then it is possible that it may not be innovative or unique. However, it must be highly effective.
- 9 Estyn does not have a pre-set quota on the number or proportion of 'excellent' judgements inspectors can make. Inspectors are free to make any judgement so long as it is based securely on the criteria within the inspection guidance handbooks and the evidence before them. Estyn's quality assurance processes involve rigorous validation and moderation of all judgements. This involves checking the evidence that supports the judgements as well as cross-referencing with similar judgements made on other inspections.