

School improvement guidance: framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability

Draft guidance

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School improvement guidance

Audience	This document is aimed at governing bodies of maintained schools (including nurseries and local authority management boards of pupil referral units); headteachers and school staff; regional consortia, local authorities; diocesan authorities; Estyn; education unions and other interested parties.
Overview	This document provides non-statutory guidance on school improvement and sets out the new framework for Evaluation, Improvement and Accountability, and its implementation. The document provides a guide to schools and those who support them in embedding effective improvement arrangements whilst implementing the new curriculum and associated reforms.
Action required	Schools, local authorities, regional consortia and Estyn to have regard to this guidance when dealing with school improvement arrangements.
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Additional copies This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at <https://gov.wales/school-improvement-guidance>

Related documents Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014;
The Education (Pupil Referral Units) (Application of Enactments) (Wales) Regulations 2007 – as amended;
The School Governors' Annual Reports (Wales) Regulations 2011 – as amended;
The School Teacher Appraisal (Wales) Regulations 2011 – as amended; Education Act 1996;
School Standards and Framework Act 1998;
Education Act 2005;
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015;
Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill;
Schools causing concern – statutory guidance for schools and local authorities: guidance document no: 222/2017.
The Equality Act 2010
The Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance - What equality law means for you as an education provider: schools
Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers
The Welsh in education strategic plans (Wales) Regulations 2019
School categories according to Welsh medium provision draft non-statutory guidance

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

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School improvement guidance: framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability

Introduction

Curriculum for Wales

There will be a new curriculum for schools and funded non-maintained settings in Wales from September 2022 known as the Curriculum for Wales (referred to in this guidance as the 'new curriculum'). The new curriculum is designed to prepare young people to thrive in a future where digital skills, adaptability and creativity - alongside knowledge - are crucial.

Fundamental to the new curriculum are the **four purposes**: the shared vision and aspiration for every child and young person. The aim of a school's curriculum is to support its learners to become:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Another defining feature of the new curriculum framework is the emphasis placed on **learner progression**, supported by assessment arrangements that enable each individual learner to make progress at an appropriate pace, taking into account their diverse needs.

The introduction of the new curriculum contributes to our goals as a nation as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The underlying importance of **promoting well-being** is a theme that runs through the new curriculum: it is never a secondary consideration. This will be strengthened by the finalisation of an all-Wales framework for a **whole-school approach** to health and well-being. The new curriculum also supports another of the Act's overarching goals, namely 'A Wales of vibrant culture and **thriving Welsh language**'. *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers* is our strategy for realising this ambition.

'Robust evaluation and accountability arrangements to support a self-improving system' is one of the four enabling objectives of the new curriculum. To be successful, it is crucial that all aspects of the schools system are aligned with and support the new curriculum and its underlying principles. The OECD's report to Welsh Government, 'Achieving the new curriculum for Wales', emphasised this point. The report is clear that the accountability framework, along with school-leaving qualifications, need to align with the new curriculum principles in order to avert the risk that misaligned accountability and qualification measures undermine the curriculum.

This guidance therefore aims to drive behaviours that positively support and enable our vision for the new curriculum and assessment, including the centrality of the four purposes, the emphasis on learner progression and the importance of well-being.

School improvement guidance¹

The overarching purpose of school improvement is to help schools give learners the best possible learning experiences and outcomes. Within the context of the new curriculum, this guidance aims to foster sustainable school improvement through a clear framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability.

Within this framework, there is a clear distinction between **evaluation and improvement activities** and **accountability**. The majority of the energy and focus in the system should be on delivering school improvement, guided by effective self-evaluation, improvement planning² and support in all schools. As part of evaluation and improvement, practitioners and school leaders should have the support and confidence to learn and improve their practice continually. This will enable them to thrive in a supportive and collaborative environment that will raise standards and ensure every young person can fulfil their potential.

Fundamental to the new arrangements is robust and continuous **self-evaluation** by schools. Our inspectorate, Estyn, have identified that currently self-evaluation is an aspect of school leadership that needs improvement. To this end, we have developed a national evaluation and improvement resource (NEIR) which will support schools in undertaking robust, enquiry-based, self-evaluation.

Effective self-evaluation will be complemented by professional dialogue between schools, local authorities, diocesan authorities where relevant, and regional consortia, to agree on schools' **improvement priorities and support**. Informed by this, all schools will have a single, School Development Plan³ they are working towards. Underpinning the arrangements will be a broad range of high quality information about schools, and other parts of the system, which will need to be used in a timely, intelligent and supportive way.

The **accountability system**, in contrast, is the safety net for when evaluation and improvement is not functioning effectively. It should not drive school improvement activity, although it should ensure that problems are identified and addressed. Therefore, alongside the improvement and support roles played by local authorities and regional consortia, the system requires effective democratic accountability and governance arrangements. Similarly, the role of Estyn in delivering regular, consistent, comprehensive and accurate inspections of schools, local authorities and regional consortia will be crucial to ensure robust accountability within the system.

An important part of both improvement and accountability is clarity and understanding about **roles and responsibilities**. Welsh Government also recognises the importance of an effective school improvement infrastructure, as a

¹ Issued under Section 10 of the Education Act 1996.

² This guidance uses the phrase 'improvement planning'; this is understood to have the same meaning as 'development planning'.

³ This guidance refers to School Development Plans, which is consistent with the School Development Plans Regulations 2014. The term 'School Development Plan' is interchangeable with 'School Improvement Plan'.

key influence to reduce variation in the quality of teaching and learning to support delivery of the new curriculum in schools.

This guidance therefore provides a new point of reference for schools, local authorities, diocesan authorities, regional consortia and Estyn, outlining Welsh Government's expectations of them in contributing to school improvement, in the context of their wider legal duties. It is vital that schools, especially those in need of greater support, are able to receive effective support from peers, regional consortia and local authorities, in order to bring about sustainable improvement.

Overall, the guidance aims to:

- support the principles and practices of the new curriculum, and create the significant system and culture changes necessary for the new curriculum to succeed, helping to raise standards for all;
- develop and encourage a continuous improvement culture across all schools;
- underpin the ongoing development of the self-improving system;
- support collaboration between schools, rather than competition;
- focus school evaluation and improvement on a wider range of evidence, which better captures the whole learning experience, learner progress and well-being;
- clarify how the accountability system should help to increase standards, without having a negative impact on evaluation and improvement; and
- bring clarity to the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in assisting the improvement of schools.

It is ultimately through the successful implementation of the new curriculum, supported by effective and aligned evaluation, improvement and accountability, that we will raise the standards for all and help to tackle the attainment gap between learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers.

'Our national mission' has been implemented in accordance with the five principles of working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015 and seeks to support Welsh Government's well-being objectives. Effective and aligned evaluation, improvement and accountability will also contribute to the well-being goals set out in the 2015 Act, most notably the goals of a prosperous, a more equal and a healthier Wales.

A self-improving system, which enables schools to focus evaluation and improvement on a wider range of evidence, will also help and encourage them to consider how they can contribute towards well-being goals when designing, adopting and implementing their curriculum and engaging learners. This will be increasingly important as schools embed a whole-school approach to health and well-being.

By issuing separate, non-statutory, school improvement guidance now, we are providing schools, local authorities, regional consortia, Estyn and diocesan authorities, with time to test the approaches to school improvement and accountability, and to change and embed practice to support the transition to the new curriculum, ready for September 2022.

It is our intention to update the guidance, building on learning in 2021/22, and to issue it as statutory guidance to come into force in September 2022, alongside the new curriculum.

Framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability



What is Welsh Government's vision for each aspect of the framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability?

A) Information and evidence

A broad range of high quality, relevant and timely information and evidence underpins all aspects of the framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability. It is used for three purposes: improvement, accountability and transparency.

For improvement, schools use the widest and richest possible range of evidence available to inform self-evaluation and improvement planning within their own context.

Through an intelligent and sophisticated use of evidence, based on rigorous, enquiry-based approaches, schools can accurately identify their strengths and areas for development as a basis for sustainable school improvement.

B) Evaluation and improvement

1) Self-evaluation

Schools carry out honest and thorough self-evaluation, through rigorous, enquiry-based analysis of the evidence available, as part of a culture of continuous improvement.

The whole school community has the opportunity to contribute appropriately to the process.

2) Improvement priorities and school development plan

Schools identify clear, manageable improvement priorities as a consequence of effective self-evaluation processes.

Improvement priorities are drawn together in a single, strategic school development plan.

3) Support, collaboration and improvement

With schools' self-evaluations and development plans as the starting point, regional consortia and local authorities agree with the school the additional support it needs to improve and to build its own capacity.

Through their engagement with schools, regional consortia also identify where schools have strengths and capacity to support other schools within the region to improve.

C) Accountability

1) Democratic accountability

Governing bodies are the accountable bodies for their schools. They are therefore responsible for strategic leadership of the school, for its effective governance and ultimately for driving improvements in their schools for the benefit of learners.

Local authorities have the power to intervene in 'schools causing concern'. However, for the majority of schools, governing bodies should be free to oversee the evaluation and

improvement process in their schools, supported by advice, resources and services from local authorities and regional consortia.

Alongside clarity about where accountability resides, there is a culture of collective responsibility for the quality of education provided to all children and young people.

2) Inspection

Schools will be inspected more regularly by Estyn. Inspections will provide fair and rigorous evaluations of the quality of leadership, teaching and learning at the school, including the curriculum and well-being of teachers and pupils.

Inspection reports will have sufficient explanatory narrative about the performance of schools, supporting schools' improvement planning in response to inspections, without including summative judgements.

Information and evidence

This guidance sets out the key principles determining the use of information for different purposes and at different tiers of the education system.⁴

These are the three main purposes for the use of information in the new system. Often, different types and levels of information will be relevant and appropriate for the different purposes.

Improvement – is for the learner. A wide range of information supports effective self-evaluation and improvement at all tiers of the system. At school level, it supports schools to continually improve and to give all learners the best possible education. It will therefore include information covering the whole school, as well as at an aggregate and individual pupil level. For other tiers of the system, a wide range of information will be used to support self-evaluation and continuous improvement of service delivery to support the education system.

Accountability – is for governance purposes. Information available and used for this purpose will help governing bodies, local and diocesan authorities and regional consortia to oversee the quality of delivery by their own organisations and, in doing so, to fulfil their democratic accountability functions. While not all of the information that is used to inform accountability processes needs to be publically available, we would expect the outcomes to be. For example, via Governing Body reports or local authority Scrutiny Committee minutes.

Transparency – is for the wider citizen, telling us about how well both individual bodies and the system is doing. It will include national level information (e.g. PISA data), as well as some information at a sub-national and school level (e.g. Estyn inspection outcomes), and be easily accessible. This should build and secure public confidence in the Welsh education system.

Under each of these main purposes for information, the Welsh Government's aim is to:

- Increase the use of the widest and richest possible range of information to inform self-evaluation and improvement within schools' own context;
- Clarify the use of information for accountability purposes, so that this does not inhibit schools' improvement or drive negative behaviours;
- Increase the range and quality of information available publically about schools and the wider system to increase transparency and public confidence;
- Set clear expectations about the ownership and use of information.

While the immediate aims may differ, all three purposes should ultimately contribute to improving the learning experiences and outcomes of pupils.

⁴ The Welsh Government is commissioning independent research, which will include engagement with stakeholders, to consider some of the detail about what additional or different information should be used in the context of this approach.

What are Welsh Government's expectations of schools, local authorities, diocesan authorities, regional consortia and Estyn?

In using information, schools, local authorities, diocesan authorities and regional consortia should:

- Reduce their reliance on narrow measures of student attainment to evaluate schools.
- Use a balanced approach that draws on a coherent and comprehensive set of qualitative and quantitative information, aligned to the new curriculum, in a non-hierarchical manner. This information will be unique to each school.
- Ensure that school leaders, teachers and support staff are not distracted from their work with learners to gather and retain often considerable and unnecessary, quantities of evidence to satisfy different requirements.

Schools should:

- Use a wide range of information to look at the progress of all pupils and the systems that support them, in order to arrive at a holistic view of learner progression.
- Draw on a wide range of different types of information, covering the breadth of school activity – including learner progress, well-being and the realisation of the four purposes – to inform self-evaluation (consistent with the principles in the next chapter)
- Select information used for self-evaluation dependent on their own context, needs and priorities.
- Consider carefully, and within context, the use of comparative information, and consider how it can support increased collaboration between schools and the sharing of effective practice.
- Make effective use of information they hold themselves for the purpose of self-evaluation, as well as using a wide range of evidence either made available to them by others or which they have sourced.

Local authorities and regional consortia, and diocesan authorities (where appropriate), should work in partnership to:

- Make available to schools any information they hold which would be beneficial for schools' self-evaluation (e.g. attendance analyses produced by the local authority), as part of a culture of partnership working.
- Share relevant information and intelligence about schools between each other, reinforcing their professional partnership.
- Consider school level evidence and information to:
 - help determine schools' support needs and capacity to support others; and
 - contribute to their own self-evaluation of their services to support schools (e.g. direct support; professional learning; use of intervention powers). This, in turn, should inform Councils' review of their performance at a corporate, strategic level.

Estyn should ensure that their inspection framework and arrangements are consistent with the principles and expectations set out for the use of information in this guidance.

Use of learner assessment information

Learner assessment information should not be used for accountability purposes. The purpose of assessment is to support individual learner progression. Local authorities and regional consortia must not, therefore, collate and aggregate school level data or create specific local arrangements to gather individual pupil level information.

Information from school's assessment arrangements should, however, inform school self-evaluation arrangements and guide improvement in teaching and learning. It will also support discussions within clusters and wider networks, where appropriate, in order to build collaborative approaches for learner progression within the new curriculum.

For example, assessment information should enable practitioners and leaders within the school to understand whether different groups of learners are making expected progress, and to consider any gap between disadvantaged and their peers. This analysis should be used to identify strengths and areas for improvement in both the school curriculum and teaching practice, thus contributing to self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

While the use of assessment information is not for external reporting and accountability, using it effectively to support learner progression and to help improve teaching practice, is a core professional responsibility of a school's teaching staff. Headteachers should therefore use the [assessment guidance](#) as a basis for professional discussions and learning within their schools.

The responsibility for implementing the assessment guidance is for headteachers and governing bodies of all maintained schools.

External examinations data

To reflect the new curriculum and meet the future needs of learners, qualifications for 14- 16 year olds are being reviewed and reformed. New qualifications will be rolled-out for first teaching from 2025, with the first awards being in 2027. To develop the qualification offer for 14-16 year olds, Qualifications Wales is running a series of public consultations between 2019 and 2022.

The outcomes of independent external qualifications are of legitimate and valid public interest. They have, therefore, routinely featured in the range of information made publicly available about schools, and will continue to do so. This practice is for transparency. It is not for accountability (as outlined in this guidance), though it has previously been perceived and used as such.

This data has previously been described as school performance measures. In reality, it is data about one aspect of a school's performance – the performance in external examinations of specific cohorts of a school's learners - that cannot be understood or analysed in isolation. Therefore, for the purpose of this guidance, we will describe it as 'external examinations data'.

Published external examination indicators are designed for a specific purpose, which is to frame data in a manner appropriate for self-evaluation and as a starting point for analysis and planning. The information is, therefore, limited by design in what it can convey. It should not be used in isolation or out of context, nor presented as evidence of how effective a school is. In this way, the information is useful for self-evaluation, but should not be used in isolation, either for this purpose or for accountability.

There will be cases where external examinations data is relevant for accountability purposes. Where schools fail to use external examinations data, appropriately triangulated and contextualised, to self-evaluate and improve, then they may need support to do so in the first instance; and ultimately to be held account by their governing body and/or Estyn.

However, using external examinations data, out of context, for accountability purposes can lead to perverse behaviours and choices by schools that are not necessarily in the best interests of learners. Instead, it is important for schools, governing bodies, local authorities and regional consortia to consider and engage with the wider policy and new curriculum intentions that sit behind published data and measures. In particular, schools should be mindful of the need to offer a broad and balanced curriculum and to ensure that the progress made by every learner is their priority.

Information for transparency

There is considerable public interest in information about schools. The provision of information to the public is for transparency. It is not for accountability, but has often been perceived as such by the schools sector. As this guidance sets out, accountability is a process underpinned by effective governance within schools, democratic scrutiny and inspection, not simply the release of information into the public arena. The frequent conflation of transparency and accountability has not been helped by the use of the same information for multiple purposes.

Schools

Information should be made publicly available about schools by: the schools themselves (e.g. on their websites and in prospectuses, governors' annual reports and school development plans); local authorities (e.g. in composite school prospectuses); diocesan authorities (e.g. section 50 inspection reports); Welsh Government (e.g. in Official Statistics and on the My Local School website); and Estyn (e.g. in inspection reports).

The information made publicly available should enable a school's context to be understood and appreciated. The Welsh Government ensures that a consistent set of contextual information is available about schools learners (e.g. equalities characteristics, free school meal eligibility, additional learning needs, language category of the school according to Welsh-medium provision) and operations (e.g. teacher numbers, pupil-teacher ratio, budget per pupil). This should help enable the consideration of contextual information alongside that on learner outcomes.

The outcome of a school's ongoing self-evaluation for continuous improvement provides more meaningful transparency about areas of strength and priorities for improvement, which will be reflected in their school development plan, than un-contextualised examination data. To help increase confidence in and commitment to the school and its development plan, the school should publish the summary copy on its website (see 'Summary of improvement priorities and development plan').

In this way, parents and learners will be able to access standardised information that is available for all schools (e.g. contextual information and external examination data), along with information that is specific to their school (e.g. Estyn reports and summary development plans). Importantly, parents and learners should not only be passive recipients of information about their school, but should be able to participate in schools' evaluation and improvement themselves.

Local authorities and regional consortia

Information should be made publicly available by local authorities and regional consortia that is relevant to the services they deliver to support schools and learners. This should not be based on aggregations of school level information.

As for individual school development plans, local authorities and regional consortia should publish their service delivery plans, as these will provide more meaningful information to the public about their strengths and priorities for improvement, with respect to the services they provide.

They should also publish the minutes of their Principal Council and Scrutiny Committee meetings (for local authorities) and of their Joint Committee / Executive Board meetings (for regional consortia), as a public record of their accountability arrangements that relate to schools and the services they provide them. Similarly, the decisions of local authority executives, their committees and individual members of the executive must be made public.

Welsh Government

Information is also made publicly available at a national level that is relevant to the effectiveness of the education system in Wales and Welsh Government policies. This includes Wales' participation in PISA, Estyn's annual report and thematic reviews, independent evaluation of policy reforms (e.g. by the OECD).

Self-evaluation for continuous improvement

What is Welsh Government's vision for the role of self-evaluation in the framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability?

- All schools will have honest, robust, enquiry-based self-evaluation arrangements in place, building on the range of information and evidence available, as part of their strategic improvement process.
- The whole school community – learners, teachers, support staff, governors, parents and the local community – contributes to the process.
- Through high quality self-evaluation, drawing on enquiry-based methods, schools will develop further their learning and teaching to ensure they are effective in supporting learner progression.
- Self-evaluation will also identify a school's strengths, allowing them to contribute to system-wide improvement.
- All parts of the schools system will see self-evaluation as a mechanism for improving individual schools and the wider schools system, rather than as a compliance exercise within an all-encompassing accountability system.

What are Welsh Government's expectations of schools, local authorities, diocesan authorities and regional consortia?

Schools should use self-evaluation to:

- evaluate how well they are performing, covering all aspects of school operations;
- inform the school's improvement planning – both priorities and actions – and improvement processes;
- support sustained improvements in teaching and learning, and leadership, not short-term 'quick fixes';
- identify areas of strength to be shared with others;
- promote professional reflection and discussion; and
- inform professional learning.

Schools should decide which aspects of their operations to evaluate in detail. (The discussion prompts, which form part of the NEIR, can be used to support schools in this process.)⁵ Areas they should consider in doing so include:

- Vision and leadership
 - Leadership capacity (including governing body)
 - Evaluations of the impact and use of existing improvement strategies
 - Evaluations of the impact and use of support received
 - Financial management and use of resources;

⁵ See Annex B

- Curriculum
 - Implementation of the new curriculum (including the planning of Welsh-medium education)
 - Realisation of the Four Purposes
 - Family and community engagement⁶
- Learning and teaching
 - Learner progress, including the progress of different groups e.g. vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, and any gaps between them, and progression in Welsh within school settings other than Welsh-medium
 - Feedback from parents and learners
 - Workforce capacity, professional learning and capability
- Well-being
 - Progress in embedding a whole school approach to mental health and emotional well-being⁷
 - Learner well-being
 - Staff well-being
 - Arrangements to safeguard learners

Schools should take into account the following principles and guidance when designing and carrying out self-evaluation:

- Self-evaluation is most effective when it:
 - is continuous and aligned with improvement planning as an integrated process;
 - is reflective, honest and inclusive, using rigorous enquiry-based approaches that take in a wide range of views from across the school (including learner voice), the wider community and peers;
 - uses evidence-based practice to innovate and improve, while driving the sharing of effective practice within and between schools;
 - is based on a wide range of evidence, using data proportionately alongside first-hand evidence, to evaluate their own strengths and areas for development and improvement; and
 - keeps progress against improvement priorities under review.
- The analysis of data and information is important but should not be valued more highly than other aspects and methods of self-evaluation (e.g. listening to learners; observing teaching). Where it is used, it is most effective for self-evaluation and improvement when it:
 - focuses clearly on learner progress and well-being;
 - takes into account a wide range of evidence, not just one 'narrow' set of data;
 - takes the school's context into consideration;
 - considers the achievement of learners rather than their attainment;
 - is used to evaluate the progress and well-being of all learners and groups of learners; and
 - is based on reliable and accurate assessment.

⁶ <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2020-07/Community%2520Schools%2520en.pdf>

⁷ <https://gov.wales/embedding-whole-school-approach-mental-health-and-well-being>

Schools should refer to the national evaluation and improvement resource (see Annex B) for more practical guidance about how to meet the expectations set out in this section and how robust, enquiry-based self-evaluation can be undertaken.

Both local and diocesan authorities and regional consortia should:

- Make available to schools any data and information they hold that could enhance schools' self-evaluation, where it is appropriate to do so.
- Support school leaders and governing bodies to identify areas where they may require additional support without fear that this will count against them for accountability purposes.

Regional consortia should:

- Advise schools on effective self-evaluation based on robust, enquiry-based approaches, and provide support to schools where needed (this might include helping schools to use the national evaluation and improvement resource);
- Facilitate relevant professional learning;
- Promote the culture of open and honest reflection and evaluation for improvement.

Summary of improvement priorities and development plan

What is Welsh Government's vision for the role of improvement planning in the framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability?

- Schools identify clear, manageable improvement priorities as a consequence of effective self-evaluation.
- Each school will have their own unique set of priorities, based on their own context, self-evaluation, needs and improvement journey, which should ultimately seek to have a positive impact on learner outcomes.
- Improvement priorities are drawn together in a single, strategic school development plan, helping to reduce workload, streamline schools' strategic planning processes and avoid unnecessary duplication and bureaucracy.
- Schools' own improvement priorities and development plans are published in summary form for the benefit of learners, parents and other stakeholders. This supports a culture in which schools are open about the support they need, where middle tier partners work with schools in a supportive, non-judgemental way.

What are Welsh Government's expectations of schools, local authorities and regional consortia?

Based on the School Development Plans Regulations, governing bodies must:⁸

- prepare a school development plan that covers a period of at least three years and is continuous.
- cover the areas set out in the Schedule (see Annex C) in their school development plan;
- revise the plan at least annually, and following an inspection by Estyn;
- consult the following people when preparing or revising the plan:
 - the headteacher of the school (if that person is not a member of the governing body);
 - registered pupils at the school;
 - parents of registered pupils;
 - school staff; and
 - such other persons as the governing body considers appropriate.
- publish the plan by providing copies to each member of the governing body and school staff. They may also choose to make the whole plan available on request to parents.

⁸ The School Development Plans (Wales) Regulations 2014 came into force in October 2014; all schools were required to comply with their requirements from 1 September 2015. They were accompanied by Welsh Government guidance, *School development plans*, which was intended to 'support schools in embedding a robust strategic planning approach to delivering improvements in learner outcomes'. The Regulations remain in force, but this guidance replaces the October 2014 guidance. It places the requirements of these Regulations in the context of the new framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability.

Overseen by governing bodies, schools should also:

- use its conclusions from self-evaluation arrangements to identify a manageable number of specific improvement priorities, which are designed to deliver sustainable improvement;
- include detailed priorities, targets and strategies for year one of the school development plan;
- capture higher level priorities and targets for years two, three and any further years;
- refresh improvement priorities at least annually, but take account of the impact of self-evaluation and new information on priorities throughout the year;
- plan focused actions to bring about improvements in these areas, identify necessary resources or funding where applicable, agree suitable milestones and success criteria, and set out how and when it will monitor and evaluate progress made;
- consider how they can both build on their existing strengths and learn from those of other schools, being alert to opportunities to work collaboratively and share best practice.
- specify who will provide the support, where this is necessary, to implement the improvements;
- use the school development plan to provide a context for the performance management process for all staff;
- via the accountability arrangements of the governing body, scrutinise and agree the improvement priorities, the outcomes expected, progress made against the school development plan, and support required to deliver the priorities;
- use its self-evaluation processes to evaluate regularly the progress made against its improvement priorities; and
- clearly report on progress against the previous year's priorities at least annually.

To further enhance their improvement planning, schools may:

- engage peers in the self-evaluation process to gain external perspective on improvement priorities - the principles of which will be contained in the guidance (see Annex D).

Local authorities should:

- not set predetermined common priorities for schools;
- work in partnership with their regional consortia, based on a shared understanding of their respective roles in supporting schools, to engage with schools on their development plan. (For example, where schools have improvement priorities around behaviour or attendance, it is likely the local authority will have more involvement than if curriculum or teaching and learning is the focus.)
- agree with schools what support they will provide on Human Resources (HR), Finance, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) , attendance and behaviour, buildings and other areas; and
- communicate any concerns they have about the appropriateness of schools' identified improvement priorities, or schools' judgements on progress against prior improvement priorities, to schools' governing bodies (the accountable body for the school). As above, this should be done in partnership with their regional consortia, and involve the diocesan authority where relevant.

Regional consortia should:

- not set predetermined common priorities for schools.
- provide support, feedback and guidance to schools on the content, quality and impact of their self-evaluation arrangements, the appropriate identification of improvement priorities, and on school development plans;
- agree with schools what support they will provide or broker on teaching and learning, leadership and professional learning, curriculum planning, and any other area.
- work in partnership with local authorities when engaging with schools on their development plans.
- communicate any concerns they have about the appropriateness of schools' identified improvement priorities, or schools' judgements on progress against prior improvement priorities, to schools' governing bodies.

Estyn should:

- rely on the above arrangements in each school, local authority and region in order to use schools' Development Plan as pre-inspection information;

In addition and jointly agreed, local authorities and regional consortia may provide Estyn, by exception, with a short note of any issues which may affect the inspection.

Published summaries

Governing bodies must make a summary copy of their school development plan available via the School Governors Annual Report.⁹

To help increase confidence in and commitment to the school and its development plan, and for transparency, the school should publish the summary copy on its website. The summary should include:

- High level priorities, actions, milestones and planned support for the current academic year
- A report on progress against the previous year's priorities.

Post-inspection

Following a school's inspection, the school development plan must be amended to reflect post-inspection feedback, findings, recommendations and proposed action. This should be done within 20 working days, as set out in the Inspection of the Careers and Related Services (Wales) Regulations 2006 as amended by the Education (Amendments Relating to the Inspection of Education and Training) (Wales) Regulations 2014 and distributed to relevant parties, as specified in the Education Act 2005 and the Education (School Inspection) (Wales) Regulations 2006.

Once the school's development plan has been updated, the summary published on the schools website should also be updated.

⁹ Regulation 11 of the SDP Regulations amended the School Governors' Annual Reports (Wales) Regulations 2001 to include provision to that effect.

Support, collaboration and improvement

What is Welsh Government's vision for the role of improvement planning in the framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability?

- With schools' self-evaluations and development plans as the starting point, regional consortia and local authorities agree with the school the additional support it needs to improve and to build its own capacity.
- The wider range of information being used at school level to evaluate improvement and identify priorities, will support regional consortia and local authorities to identify schools' support needs, as well as helping them to identify their own improvement priorities in order to improve service delivery.
- Schools have access to high quality and timely support from both local authorities and regional consortia, as well as from other schools. This will be enhanced by increased collaboration and communication between schools, local authorities and regional consortia.
- The agreed support schools will receive is incorporated in their development plans, including published summaries, providing an incentive for schools to ask for the help they need and enhancing transparency.
- Through their engagement with schools, regional consortia also identify where schools have strengths and capacity to support other schools to improve.

What are Welsh Government's expectations of schools, local authorities and regional consortia?

The support system described below is underpinned by the following principles:

- The process should be jointly constructed and collaborative, and should draw upon robust, enquiry-based approaches, starting with the school's self-evaluation and school development plan, and responding to feedback from schools and individual school needs. (This should also help to keep requirements for additional school preparatory work to a minimum.)
- Support should be designed to build schools' capacity, with schools making incremental improvements over time; it should not encourage a dependency culture.
- Importance of early identification of schools that are declining and in need of support, to prevent them becoming a 'school causing concern'.
- Support provided to schools is proportionate and flexible to their needs, with more support provided to schools that require it most.
- To focus on improving standards of achievement and attainment and improving learners' progress, well-being, learning, teaching and leadership.
- To promote and encourage peer working, collaboration and support between schools.
- To support the principles of the national evaluation and improvement resource and Schools as Learning Organisations work.

Support to schools from regional consortia and local authorities

Regional consortia will provide feedback and advice to schools on their self-evaluation arrangements, their impact on improvement and on schools' capacity to improve. Working in partnership with the school, using the school's self-evaluation as a foundation, the regional consortia and school will agree what specific support the school needs. The fundamental role of the regional consortia is not primarily to challenge the school, but to be a professional partner in the school's improvement, drawing on external expertise and experience. While there will be an element of challenge in any professional dialogue, it should not be the focus of the relationship.

All schools will be entitled to professional learning from the regional consortia that builds their own capacity to improve. This is likely to include their self-evaluation arrangements, the use of enquiry-based approaches for monitoring and evaluation, curriculum development, and development of leadership capacity.

They will also be entitled to additional bespoke support based on their self-evaluation and improvement priorities, working with regional consortia to determine the type and level of support required, relative to other schools.

The support provided to schools should not be determined by fixed time allocations or rigid, pre-determined professional learning offers.

Schools are also entitled to targeted support from their local authority where required. This may include: HR support for the governing body on recruitment and retention, and performance management; finance support and advice; advice and specialist support on ALN; behaviour and attendance support etc.

Working with the school, the regional consortia will be responsible for brokering support for the school. This is likely to be drawn from both within the consortia and local authority, as well as from other schools in the region, based on consortia's knowledge of their strengths and capacity.

Regional consortia may also, of course, broker support from schools outside of their region, particularly for Welsh Medium schools, schools with a religious character, special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRU). . When brokering support for schools with a religious character outside of their own region, the relevant Diocesan Directors of Education should be informed.

Overseeing and brokering school-to-school collaboration and cluster working should be an increasingly important role of regional consortia in a collaborative, self-improving system (see 'School to school support' below). Regional consortia will also need to quality assure the support they broker for schools.

The local authority and regional consortia will jointly agree the rationale for the range of support made available for a school, and agree this with the school. The support being provided to schools by regional consortia and local authorities should be integrated in their school development plan, linked to the relevant improvement priorities. This should also form part of the published summary of the school's development plan, which is published as part of the Governors' Annual Report and on its website. In this way, learners, parents and the wider community will be able to see and understand how their school is being helped to improve and by whom. (It also allows regional consortia and local authorities to monitor the effectiveness of their own support.)

School to school support

An important feature of the self-improving system is the central role of schools and teachers in supporting other schools, so that strengths are spread across the system and areas for improvement are addressed through collaboration between peers. While this may happen organically in many cases, through existing relationships and structures, there is an important role for regional consortia in helping to facilitate this.

Both regional consortia and local authorities should champion collaboration between schools, encouraging a new system of collaborative working in which school leaders see their role as improving the whole system, as well as their individual institution.

'*Our national mission*' described how the 'Welsh self-improving system needs every professional and institution to become aware of their own strengths and areas for improvement, and with this knowledge seek support their own improvement and offer support for others to improve.' It is unlikely to be the case, however, that individual schools know where their strengths can best be deployed to support others.

Therefore, in their engagement with all schools, in addition to brokering them support, regional consortia will also assess what strengths schools have, and in what areas, to provide support to other schools. In order to do so, regional consortia should consider the elements of a school that are 'Leading', 'Improving' or 'Needing more intensive support'. As above, the starting point for this work should be schools' own self-evaluation.

Regional consortia and local authorities should recognise the continuum between these descriptions. The continuum assumes that it is likely that all schools have strengths and good practice to share and contribute to system wide improvement, while the strongest schools will have areas to improve and develop. Leading schools, in particular, will be well placed to provide peer support for others.

For the purpose of internal resource allocation, schools should be identified by regional consortia and local authorities as being on an improvement continuum for different areas of focus e.g. leadership capacity, curriculum design, or learning culture and behaviour. This will also help match those schools that need specific support with those best placed to offer it.

The schools would not be fixed in any given position, but may move when less or greater levels of support are required at any time during the year, for different purposes. The model would be multi-dimensional and allow schools to receive support in-line with a specific area of need.

Given the flexibility of the system, regional consortia would not need to moderate their identification of school strengths and areas for development across regions, nor should the output of this work be published. They should, however, establish an internal quality assurance process for their improvement work with schools, to check that schools are getting a level of support that is proportionate to their needs. Regional consortia should also collaborate and share good practice between each other, in line with the principles of evaluation and continuous improvement set out in this guidance for schools.

What can schools expect from the new system?

All schools:

- are entitled to ongoing professional dialogue and support from a named professional in the regional consortia who can advise and broker support (including on self-evaluation and improvement planning; leadership; curriculum implementation; and other relevant professional learning).
- will include in their school development plan what the local authority, regional consortia and other schools will provide to support them to meet their improvement priorities.

It is anticipated that all schools will:

- have at least one strong area of practice to share, and draw attention to this in the governing body's annual report;
- work with other schools in a supportive and collaborative way, where they have the capacity to do so, in order to raise standards for all learners and to drive system improvement.

Schools needing more intensive support would also:

- be entitled to greater support, focused on key areas identified;
- receive multi agency support through a support plan agreed by all parties (governing body, local authority, diocesan authority where relevant, regional consortia, and, in some cases, Estyn and Welsh Government);
- note the additional support in the governing body's annual report to parents; and
- be discussed through Estyn's local authority link inspector work.

In schools needing more intensive support, local authorities should not reduce or change the levels of support they are providing for ALN, behaviour, finance and HR without discussing and agreeing this with the governing body.

Schools causing concern

One of the objectives of this guidance is to describe the evaluation, improvement and support system that schools, local authorities and regional consortia should work within, in order to prevent schools getting to the point where they are 'causing concern'. There will still, however, be cases where local authorities or Welsh Ministers do need to intervene in schools.

The Welsh Government has issued revised statutory schools causing concern guidance: 'Schools Causing Concern: statutory guidance for schools and local authorities' 222/217. The guidance sets out the legislative requirements and powers available to local authorities and Welsh Ministers for intervening in schools causing concern, as prescribed in the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. The schools causing concern guidance describes the formal process and various types of intervention available for both local authorities and Welsh Ministers when specific grounds for intervention exist.

Local authorities may determine, through their engagement with schools and regional consortia on evaluation and improvement, that the grounds for issuing a warning notice have been met. (This will include, but not be restricted to, a use of school-level information to inform their judgement of how effectively school governing bodies' are discharging their own duties.) At that point, the powers of intervention and the guidance will become relevant.

The principles and processes set out in this guidance continue to apply for schools causing concern. For example, schools causing concern are very likely to be classed as 'needing more intensive support' for some areas of activity in the support continuum described above.

Accountability

What is Welsh Government's vision for the role of accountability in the framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability?

- Governing bodies are the accountable bodies for their schools. In this role, they take responsibility for strategic leadership of the school, for its effective governance and ultimately for driving improvements in their schools for the benefit of learners.
- For the majority of schools, governing bodies should be free to oversee the evaluation and improvement process, supported by advice, resources and services from local authorities and regional consortia. However, where schools are causing concern, local authorities take swift and effective action, advised and supported by regional consortia.
- Democratic accountability in local authorities (Councils and Scrutiny Committees) and in regional consortia (Joint Committees and Company Board) is critical to strengthening the middle tier's role in supporting schools and to monitor, challenge and improve the work it does as part of this role.
- Alongside clarity about where accountability resides, there is a culture of collective responsibility for the quality of education provided to all children and young people.

What are Welsh Government's expectations of schools, local authorities and regional consortia?

Governing bodies and schools¹⁰

School governing bodies are responsible for the strategic leadership of their school. They decide what they want the school to achieve and set the strategic framework for getting there.

The school development plan, along with the governing body's agreed policies, will generally provide the strategic framework. Governing bodies monitor progress and regularly review the framework for the school in the light of that progress.

Separately, governing bodies must provide an annual report to parents about progress made over the year against the strategic framework, under The School Governors' Annual Reports (Wales) Regulations 2011.

With regards to evaluation and improvement more generally, governing bodies should:

- use the principles and approach to self-evaluation set out in this guidance in order to evaluate their own effectiveness, strengths and areas for improvement;

¹⁰ Detailed information about the roles and responsibilities of PRU Management Committees is set out in 2014 [Statutory Guidance](#). Local authorities should take account of the role of management committees of pupil referral units and to the requirement under the Education (Pupil Referral Units) (Management Committees etc) (Wales) Regulations 2014 for local authorities to delegate functions in those regulations to management committees.

- ensure that the school development plan is a fair and well understood reflection of the strengths and areas for development in the school;
- approve the school's improvement priorities and agree the support expectations proposed by the local authority and regional consortia;
- ensure a summary of the school development plan is published on the school's website, and updated post-inspection.

As the accountable body for a school, governing bodies should:

- Monitor delivery of school development plan and take action where progress against improvement priorities is unsatisfactory.
- Use the school development plan to provide a context for the performance management process for all staff, so that all staff are accountable for their role in delivering against the plan.
- Provide challenge to the headteacher and hold the headteacher to account for the overall performance and effectiveness of the school.

Local authorities

In their role 'maintaining' schools, local authorities provide a range of core services and support to schools. This typically includes: HR; finance; estates and buildings; school organisation and admissions; (including planning of Welsh medium education¹¹ALN.¹²

Scrutiny committees within local authorities oversee the work of the council in delivering statutory functions and wider services. Scrutiny is undertaken by elected Members who do not hold executive positions within the council. Effective scrutiny should enhance both improvement, accountability and transparency within the local authority.

In this context, Councils should:

- put arrangements in place to set expectations and manage the quality and impact of any shared service providing support to schools;
- make arrangements to implement sustainable improvement strategies to support schools, both in delivering their own direct services and in partnership with their regional school improvement consortium;
- use the information it holds about the performance of its Education function to inform the broader strategic level understanding of how the council is operating as a whole, is using its resources, and delivering for the people in its area;
- use a broad range of information to monitor and understand well the performance of schools in their area, rather than a narrow focus on pupil attainment measures;
- build on this broad range of information to support schools and, where necessary, to identify and intervene in schools causing concern, using the full range of statutory powers;

¹¹ Section 84 of *The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013* requires a local authority to prepare a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and outlines that a Plan must outline how the local authority will improve the planning of the provision of education through the medium of Welsh and also the standards of Welsh-medium education and of the teaching of Welsh in its area.

¹² In voluntary aided and foundation schools, the governing body employs the staff and sets the admissions criteria.

- not put pressure on schools to make short term gains in KS4 examination outcomes, in a way that may not be sustainable or in the interests of all learners;
- support head teachers to improve their schools and build capacity, taking into account the level of challenge. (They should not, for example, place unrealistic expectations on newly appointed school leaders in schools with longstanding issues.)

Scrutiny committees should:

- hold Cabinet members to account for the quality and impact of the Council's services to support schools;
- scrutinise the work of the Council with regard to the services provided to support schools, rather than using their accountability arrangements to hold schools to account;
- scrutinise how effectively the local authority works with the regional consortium, understanding that accountability for regional consortia is through their Joint Committee or Company Board (see below);
- monitor and scrutinise the use of statutory powers to support and improve schools causing concern, in particular secondary schools.
- consider the impact of decisions to reorganise schools on the improvement of schools.

Regional consortia

The regional consortia governing structures are all comprised of their member local authorities. They therefore carry out activities that derive from local authorities' statutory functions and duties in relation to school improvement. While the consortia have their own governance structures, they are all directly accountable to their constituent local authorities through their structure.¹³

Local authorities and regional consortia should therefore work in partnership to deliver the underlying local authority duties and functions in relation to education. Given the in-built accountability mechanisms described above, local authorities do not need to create additional processes to oversee the work of regional consortia. Instead, regional consortia should be held to account through their governing structure, which includes elected local authority Members.

Regional consortia Joint Committees / Joint Executive Group should:

- lead and monitor the work of regional consortia with regard to the services provided to support schools, and to inform and support local authorities to fulfil their statutory functions and duties; and

¹³ EAS is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, that was set up by the five local authorities in the South East Wales regional consortia 'to improve the standard of education' in the regional consortia by providing services to the local authorities and their schools. The voting members of the EAS company board are Cabinet Members from each local authority, who do not hold the education portfolio. The operation of EAS is overseen by the Joint Executive Group which includes the Education Portfolio holders for each local authority.

CSC, ERW and GwE are overseen by a Joint Committee of their constituent local authorities, under section 102 of the Local Government Act 1972. Joint committees are the decision-making body within these regional consortia, and it is the local authority Members (leaders or education portfolio holders) who hold full voting rights.

- monitor and review the quality and timeliness of their advice to local authorities on the use of statutory powers to support and improve schools causing concern, particularly for secondary schools.

Welsh Government

Welsh Government has overall responsibility for the design and operation of the schools system in Wales. One of its main roles is planning and policy-making, through evidence-based collaboration and co-construction with all tiers of the system.

It also has a responsibility to support the framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability through its actions and behaviours. This includes helping to build capacity to support system improvement, and being clear about where accountabilities lie.

While Welsh Government does not have a direct accountability function with regards to individual schools, Welsh Ministers are rightly held to account by the Senedd and the Children, Young People and Education Committee for the overall performance and operation of the schools system. This scrutiny is an important way democratic accountability is discharged within the overall framework, while also enhancing transparency.

Welsh Government will continue to hold termly 'Evaluation and Improvement' meetings with regional consortia and local authorities (one per region). These meetings will allow Welsh Government to interrogate and understand how the evaluation and improvement system is operating in practice, informing what is needed for system-wide improvement. They will also provide Welsh Government with relevant intelligence to inform its own scrutiny in the Senedd. Given the high proportion of secondary schools causing concern, part of the focus of each meeting will be on these schools' progress and the impact of the support being provided to them.

Annex A provides a fuller description of the respective roles and responsibilities of schools, governing bodies, local authorities, regional consortia and Estyn, including their statutory underpinning.

Inspection and advice

The main purpose of inspection is to provide objective, independent, and impartial information. It is a fundamental part of accountability within the system.

At the same time, the information provided through inspections and inspection reports should be used for all three main purposes of information described in this guidance.

- Evaluative inspection reports on schools, local authorities and regional consortia will inform and underpin subsequent **improvement** work.
- At the same time, inspections and reports provide important evidence to governing bodies, local authority councils and regional consortia joint committees / company boards in fulfilling their **accountability** functions within their respective organisations.
- And **transparent**, published inspection reports tell parents and communities about how well individual schools and the wider system is doing.

Estyn's inspection activity must take account of the principles around evaluation, improvement and the use of information set out in this guidance. Schools will be judged within their own context and using their own self-evaluation arrangements and school development plan as a starting point. The quality of schools' curricula, the progress of all learners and well-being will be important elements of all inspections.

From September 2021, Estyn will introduce a revised school inspection framework that closely aligns with schools' implementation of the new curriculum. Following the recommendations from '*A Learning Inspectorate*', summative judgements will be removed from inspection reports. Headline judgements too often over-simplify and mask areas and findings that are important. Instead, summative judgements will be replaced with deeper evaluation of a school's work within reports, providing better information for parents, governors and schools about the performance of a school, its strengths and areas for improvement. Schools judged to be in the statutory categories of special measures or significant improvement, however, will continue to be clearly identified.

The academic year 2021-22 will be an opportunity for Estyn to test the new framework and to make any improvements and revisions ahead of the introduction of the new curriculum in September 2022.

It is likely that the Estyn school inspection framework will continue to evolve over time as schools' implementation of curriculum reform develops. From 2024, we anticipate that more real time inspection intelligence will be available in the education system to inform improvement and support plans, to give regular assurances and to ensure robust accountability to parents and other stakeholders, including schools themselves, about the standards being achieved and priorities for further improvement.

The intention is that Estyn will inspect schools more frequently within a six-year inspection period from 2024, on average twice within a cycle, at times determined by Estyn. Inspections will have a stronger focus on schools' capacity to self-evaluate effectively and self-improve, and on how they are implementing curriculum reform.

Estyn's inspections of local authorities and regional consortia will also be regular. The focus should be on the quality and impact of governance and accountability arrangements with regard to schools and the effectiveness of local authority and consortia services to support schools and learners. This will include evaluating the effectiveness of democratic accountability arrangements in supporting school improvement.

Estyn will continue to produce annual reports and thematic reports. They will also produce a state of the nation report every three years, which will provide national overviews of various parts of the education system. These will be available publicly.

Section 50 inspections of schools with a religious character

The Education Act 2005 states that the governing body of any voluntary aided, voluntary controlled or foundation school in Wales, which has been designated as having a religious character, must arrange for the inspection of the content of the school's act of collective worship and any denominational religious education provided for learners.

The inspection must report on the content of the school's act of collective worship and any denominational religious education provided for learners. It may also report on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners at the school.

As for inspections by Estyn, section 50 inspections fulfil an accountability function for voluntary and foundation schools in Wales, although their scope is considerably narrower. The inspection reports will also be used by schools as a source of evidence for their self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Annex A –

Roles and responsibilities in a self-improving system

Within a self-improving school system, it is important that the different bodies – principally schools and governing bodies, local authorities, and regional consortia – understand their own roles and responsibilities, those of others, and the relationship between them. Without such an understanding, the system is unlikely to function efficiently or effectively. There is also a greater likelihood of conflict between the different bodies, drawing energy and focus from the underlying goal of continuous improvement for the benefit of learners.

Governing bodies and schools

Schools have the central role in driving improvements in the quality of learning and the standards and well-being achieved by young people. They also have a responsibility to drive their own improvement through self-evaluation, performance management and improvement planning, and for making the best use of the support available to them.

School governing bodies are responsible for the conduct of their school; and the Education Act 2002 states that ‘the governing body shall conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement at the school’. Their role therefore includes ensuring that the school has an effective process for reviewing performance in relation to their aims and objectives, identifying improvement priorities, taking action and monitoring process with a view to raising standards and improving well-being. The relationship between the local authority and the governing body should support this role.

In general, the governing body should carry out its functions with the aim of taking a broadly strategic role in the running of the school.

A strategic role means the governing body decides what they want the school to achieve and set the strategic framework for getting there. It should establish the strategic framework by:

- setting aims and objectives for the school;
- adopting policies for achieving those aims and objectives;
- setting targets for achieving those aims and objectives; and
- reviewing progress towards achieving the aims and objectives.

The headteacher, with other senior members of staff, has responsibility for leadership, direction and management of the school within the strategic framework established by the governing body. The headteacher is responsible for the internal organisation, management and control of the school; and for advising on and implementing the governing body’s strategic framework. In particular, headteachers formulate aims and objectives, policies and targets with the governing body, for them to consider adopting; and report to the governing body on progress each term.

Local authorities

Local authorities have broad duties in respect of education. They have a general duty to maintain relevant maintained schools under section 22 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. They also have a variety of oversight functions, which include:

- A 'general responsibility for education' in their area by contributing 'towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community by securing that efficient primary education, and secondary education... are available to meet the needs of the population of their area'. [Section 13, Education Act 1996]
- A duty to promote high standards, and the fulfilment of learning potential, in the exercise of their education functions. [Section 13A, Education Act 1996]

While governing bodies are responsible for the leadership of schools, local authorities 'maintain' schools, which means they have an interest in them being managed well and that, as a whole, schools in the authority area deliver effective and efficient provision. Local authorities should therefore support governing bodies' leadership of schools through advice and resources.

The relationship between an authority and school is captured in a partnership agreement, which sets how a local authority and the governing body of a school will act to discharge their functions in relation to the school. Local authorities are required, by The Maintained Schools (Partnership Agreements) (Wales) Regulations 2007, to enter into an individual partnership agreement with each governing body.

Regional consortia

Regional consortia were established by local authorities, with the encouragement of Welsh Government. Their fundamental role is to provide services on behalf of local authorities to support schools, helping to create a self-improving school system, with collaboration between all elements of the system at its heart.

The National Model for Regional Working, first established in 2013, was intended as a document to guide developments in the school improvement system by articulating the activities that regional consortia would deliver on behalf of local authorities, as well as the necessary governance and accountability arrangements. It acknowledged that there would be 'both structural and operational variations between the four regions, and that this flexibility is necessary to ensure that consortia are able to meet the distinct needs of their own regions'.

Because regional consortia are non-statutory bodies, no statutory education functions or duties have been passed to them from local authorities. For example, local authorities retain the duty 'to promote high standards' referred to above. This has created some tensions in the system – although not necessarily in all regions – exacerbated by a culture of high stakes accountability that we want to leave behind. This is not helpful to schools and, more importantly, to children and young people.

This guidance intends to move beyond the National Model to provide clarity to local authorities and regions about their role in supporting improvement in our schools, as well as the operation of accountability within the system.

Our national mission was clear that to be successful, we need a commitment to effective collaboration and honest engagement by all parts of the education system. While this does

not require uniformity of approaches in every local authority in Wales, it does require openness and clarity with schools about who will do what, in accordance with the principles in this guidance.

We know that regional consortia, local authorities, governing bodies and head teachers working in partnership can have a powerful impact in improving schools. But, to succeed, such partnership must be based on a mutual recognition of the functions and contributions of each party, as well as trust.¹⁴

Diocesan authorities

Diocesan authorities oversee and support schools with a religious character to ensure they are acting in conformity with the teachings and regulations of their Church. They support their schools' professional learning, for example in areas relating to well-being, spirituality and curriculum development. In addition, diocesan authorities have an important role in appointing foundation governors, giving them a good understanding of the effectiveness of leadership and governance in their schools.

Given the range of their involvement with schools with a religious character, diocesan authorities should therefore play a role in supporting their evaluation and improvement, working in partnership with both the school, local authorities and regional consortia.

Estyn

Estyn is a crown body, independent of the Welsh Government, led by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales (HMCI).

Estyn has three main objectives.

- Providing public accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales through inspection activity. It inspects a number of different sectors, including schools and local authorities.
- Informing the development of national policy by providing advice and guidance to the Welsh Government on quality and standards in education and training in Wales through a variety of ways. These include commissioned thematic reports; the HMCI's Annual Report; and, involvement in education reforms and policy development.
- Building capacity in the improvement and delivery of education and training in Wales through inspection evidence; promoting the spread of best practice through case studies; information sharing; and celebrating excellent practice.

¹⁴ The current Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill provides for a consistent mechanism and governance structure to facilitate regional working amongst local authorities: Corporate Joint Committees. Unlike existing regional consortia, Corporate Joint Committees will have a legal personality, enabling them to have functions vested in them through legislation, to employ staff directly and to manage and hold budgets. The Bill provides an opportunity for local authorities to place their existing regional arrangements for school improvement on a statutory footing should they wish to do so. It also allows them to bring wider education activities in scope of regional working where there are clear benefits to doing so. Any proposals by local authorities would need to be agreed by Welsh Ministers.

The Bill will also give Welsh Ministers a power to seek to establish Corporate Joint Committees with responsibility for 'improving education'. A Corporate Joint Committee with the responsibility for 'improving education' would provide greater clarity of accountability for different functions at the regional and local level. Ministers might exercise this power in order to provide more consistency in the delivery of regional support for schools, particularly where this might help improve the effectiveness of the regional support itself.

Annex B

National evaluation and improvement resource

The national evaluation and improvement resource (NEIR) has been developed by schools, Estyn, regional consortia and local authorities in Wales, with input from the OECD. It provides schools with a range of principles and approaches, as well as practical case studies and resources, to support effective self-evaluation for improvement in line with the wider principles set out in this guidance. Schools are encouraged to make use of the NEIR to develop their approaches to self-evaluation.

The resource shows that there are different ways that a school can structure its self-evaluation processes depending on its context and that there is no one prescribed way of doing things. Critically it moves self-evaluation from a process that is undertaken for an external audience (e.g. Estyn) to showing that it is the process that is important, leading to improved outcomes for learners, not the documentation.

The NEIR has not been developed as a stand-alone resource. There are significant links across self-evaluation relating to curriculum development, pedagogy, professional learning and the schools as learning organisations model. As such the NEIR will support schools in developing the new curriculum and as they develop to become [learning organisations](#)

It also provides additional detail to support self-evaluation processes that underpin the [professional learning journey](#) and incorporates the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership and for assisting teaching throughout. Effective evaluation of teaching and learning, at the core of the NEIR, will also support schools in engaging with the pedagogy conversation through the national pedagogy project.

Note: At time of consultation, the NEIR is still under beta testing and development with a selection of pilot schools. There will be a phased release throughout the 2020-21 academic year, with it being made more widely available in summer 2021. Further information will be released with some exemplar resources during the spring term 2021.

Annex C -

The Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014 – Schedule

(<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2014/2677/schedule/made>)

Contents of a school development plan

School improvement priorities

- 1.—(1) The school improvement priorities for the current school year.
- (2) The school improvement priorities for the two school years immediately proceeding the current school year.
- (3) In setting the school improvement priorities the governing body must take account of the national priorities.

School improvement targets, expected outcomes and strategy

2. A brief statement setting out the school improvement targets and expected outcomes and the governing body's strategy to meet those targets.

Professional development strategy

3. Details of the governing body's strategy for the current school year as to how it will further the professional development of staff at the school in order to meet the school improvement targets.

Working with the community

4. Details of how the governing body will seek to meet the school improvement targets for the current school year by working with—
 - (a) pupils at the school and their families; and
 - (b) people who live and work in the locality in which the school is situated.

School staff and school resources

5. Details of how the governing body will make best use of the—
 - (a) current school staff and school resources (including its financial resources) to meet the school improvement targets for the current school year; and
 - (b) school staff and school resources (including financial resources) the governing body anticipates will be available to it to meet the school improvement targets for the next two school years immediately proceeding the current school year.

Previous targets

6. A brief statement setting out the extent to which the school improvement targets for the previous school year beginning with school year 2015 to 2016 were met and where they were not met fully a brief explanation as to the reasons for that failure.

Annex D

Principles of peer review

Peer review is the partnership and active involvement of current practitioners in a school's self-evaluation and improvement process supported by the school's Challenge Adviser/Improvement Adviser. It provides an additional perspective and engages partners in a constructive dialogue to support continuous improvement for learners.

The purpose of peer review is to improve outcomes for all learners through:

- improving the accuracy of the self-evaluation utilising the national evaluation and improvement resource
- accurately identify strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement
- contributing to the sharpening (identification of support requirements) of support/actions
- aiding collaboration across the school system
- improving the capacity and ability of leaders across the system to accurately self-evaluate.

Peer review is.....	Peer review is not.....
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A collaborative process • Evaluative, supportive and developmental • An external perspective from fellow practitioners • An opportunity for meaningful continual professional learning and enquiry • A process for all schools • An integral part of the evaluation and improvement cycle • A process focused on planning and delivering for improvement • Responsive to the needs of the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A process done to the school • Judgmental • An inspection • A directive model of improvement • For a selected number of schools • An isolated process • A time consuming bureaucratic process • A one size fits all process

There are important key principles for effective peer review:

- Peer review needs to be an on-going commitment to continuously improving practice and systems through cycles of collaborative enquiry (as the system matures);

- Peer review should be evaluative but non-judgemental;
- Peer review should be a robust process supported by constructive professional dialogue;
- The peer review process should go beyond school leaders, to include the whole school community;
- Within the peer review process, transparency, trust and honesty are a professional obligation;
- All involved work together with each participant feeling valued, motivated, responsible and having the opportunity to contribute to the collective outcomes of the process;
- A willingness and commitment to learn from a range of critical perspectives.

Expected behaviours:

- The process will be conducted with integrity and trust and should support the school to identify its priorities for improvement.
- All discussions will be confidential, and any documentation created will be owned by the school.
- All partners should come to the process with a commitment to learn from the process.