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Welsh Government  
Consultation Document

## School improvement guidance

### Framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.

# School improvement guidance

## Overview

This consultation is seeking views on draft school improvement guidance. This guidance 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 evaluation and improvement arrangements whilst implementing the new curriculum and associated reforms.

## How to respond

This is a written, electronic consultation. Questions can be found at the end of this consultation document and you can complete the form online, download and complete a hard copy of the form and post it to us at the address provided below.

## Further information and related documents

**Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.**

The consultation documents can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at [gov.wales/consultations](http://gov.wales/consultations)

## Contact details

For further information:

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In order to show that the consultation was carried out properly, the Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then redact them before publishing.

You should also be aware of our responsibilities under Freedom of Information legislation

If your details are published as part of the consultation response then these published reports will be retained indefinitely. Any of your data held otherwise by Welsh Government will be kept for no more than three years.

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Under the data protection legislation, you have the right:

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- to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) who is our independent regulator for data protection.

For further details about the information the Welsh Government holds and its use, or if you want to exercise your rights under the GDPR, please see contact details below:

Data Protection Officer:  
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Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
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e-mail: [Data.ProtectionOfficer@gov.wales](mailto:Data.ProtectionOfficer@gov.wales)

The contact details for the Information Commissioner's Office are:

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0303 123 1113

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## Introduction

This consultation has been devised to seek your views on the proposed framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability for schools in Wales, set out in the draft non-statutory school improvement guidance.

There will be a new curriculum for schools and funded non-maintained settings in Wales from September 2022. At the heart of the new curriculum are the four purposes, which set out the aspirations for all children and young people. These four purposes, which are a part of the statutory framework for the Curriculum for Wales, specifically support learners to become:

- enterprising, creative contributors;
- ambitious, capable earners;
- healthy confident individuals; and
- ethical, informed citizens.

For the Curriculum for Wales to be successful, it is crucial that all aspects of the schools system align with and support the curriculum and its underlying principles.

Robust evaluation and accountability arrangements that support a self-improving system have been identified as one of the key enabling objectives of the new curriculum. Welsh Government has therefore developed a new framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability in schools which is designed to align with the new curriculum. This is set out in the school improvement guidance.

The guidance is also intended to replace the Welsh Government guidance, *School Development Plans*, which accompanied the School Development Plans (Wales) Regulations 2014. The Regulations remain in force, and the draft school improvement guidance places their requirements in the context of the new framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability.

At this stage the guidance is non-statutory, in order to provide schools and others in the education system time to test the new approaches to school improvement and accountability, and start to change and embed practice to support the transition to the new curriculum in September 2022.

## Background

Since the publication of 'Our national mission' in 2017, there has been a strong consensus that elements of the previous evaluation, improvement and accountability system needed to change, as they incentivised the wrong behaviours. In doing so, they risked holding back the realisation of the new curriculum.

The Welsh Government has already responded to some of the negative, unintended consequences of our previous evaluation and accountability arrangements, and related performance measures. These unintended consequences included:

- a narrowing choice of the curriculum at both primary and secondary sectors;
- the Level 2 inclusive measure placing an excessive focus on the GCSE

C/D boundary (not recognising the achievements of learners either below or above that threshold);

- the way in which benchmarking drove competition between schools and local authorities rather than encouraging collaboration; and
- increased and unnecessary workload for teachers and others in the system, without the necessary impact or benefit for learners.

In 2019, Welsh Government published draft evaluation, improvement and accountability arrangements for Wales, as well as taking a number of 'enabling steps' to transition to a new evaluation, improvement and accountability system. These steps included:

- Ceasing the routine publication of data from teacher assessments and national tests at a school and local authority level, and their use in school performance measures, which has ensured the integrity of their intended purpose;
- The implementation of interim Key Stage 4 performance indicators, to help address some of the most pressing unintended consequences of previous measures, whilst the longer-term arrangements are considered;
- Amendments to Key Stage 4 target setting requirements. This signified a move away from a disproportionate emphasis on a small number of performance measures to a wider range of information, which better captures the whole learning experience, learner progress and our ambitions for the new curriculum, whilst enabling all schools to be considered within their own context.
- Changes to the All Wales Core Data Sets for local authorities, removing comparisons of local authority aggregate performance information. This is to avoid the risk that, by focussing on aggregated data at a local authority and regional level, schools are held to account solely on the basis of how their data compares to those averages, with insufficient consideration of their wider data and context.

## **Why are we introducing this guidance?**

Welsh Government wants to ensure that the framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability drives behaviours and a culture that align to the new curriculum. This guidance therefore sets out clear expectations of the different bodies in the school system with regards to evaluation, improvement and accountability, alongside a vision for how the system as a whole should operate, in the context of the new curriculum.

This guidance also forms part of our response to the OECD's report to Welsh Government, 'Achieving the new curriculum for Wales', published in October 2020, and contributes to 'Our national mission update'. The OECD report emphasised the importance of the accountability framework aligning with the new curriculum principles. It also referred to ways in which perceptions of the national categorisation system 'have tempered schools' confidence and even their capacity to engage in enquiry, experimentation and innovation'.

## **What changes does the guidance propose?**

The guidance proposes to:

### **Strengthen the importance and effectiveness of self-evaluation and improvement planning by schools, which draws on a broad range of evidence**

A key principle of the approach to evaluation and improvement is that schools' self-evaluations and improvement priorities should be the starting point for work with local authorities and regional consortia.

School performance will be considered in its widest sense, with schools evaluated in their own context, supported by a broad range of evidence, bespoke improvement planning and support. The four purposes, progress of all learners and well-being are all likely to be important features of this work. The self-evaluation processes should identify areas of strengths and priorities for improvement, which are drawn together in a single, strategic school development plan. Welsh Government is developing a National Evaluation and Improvement Resource which will support schools in undertaking robust, enquiry-based self-evaluation.

Building on their own self-evaluations and development plans, schools will work with local authorities and regional consortia to agree the additional support they need to improve. Through their engagement with schools, regional consortia will also identify where schools have strengths and capacity to collaborate with other schools to support them.

Recognising the importance of a school's improvement priorities and development plan, schools should publish a summary of their plan which includes priorities, actions, milestones and planned support for the current academic year, as well as a report on progress against the previous year's priorities.

### **Replace the national categorisation system with a similar support process, led by regional consortia, that does not require the publication of school categories**

We propose ending categorisation as a formal national process with published outcomes. The core purpose of categorisation – determining what support schools need to improve – will remain, but categorisation itself will be replaced by a support process, led by regional consortia, in which consortia agree with schools the support they need to improve.

The guidance proposes that regional consortia consider the elements of a school that are 'Leading', 'Improving' or 'Needing more intensive support', starting from their self-evaluation. This will help inform the deployment and brokering of support to schools in a way that is proportionate to their needs and flexible. Schools would not be given a fixed support category that is published. However, the support they will receive should be included in the published summary of their school development plan.

### **Strengthen and provide clarity about the separation and distinction between evaluation and improvement activities and the accountability system**

The draft school improvement guidance provides clarity about where accountability resides in each level of the education system. It emphasises that accountability should be seen as separate, if related, to evaluation and improvement activities.

The guidance makes clear that whilst local authorities have the power to intervene in 'schools causing concern', in the majority of cases governing bodies, as the accountable body for their school, should be free to oversee the evaluation and improvement process, supported by advice, resources and services from local authorities and regional consortia.

In order to ensure that accountability remains robust, schools will be inspected more regularly by Estyn. Inspection reports will also have greater explanatory narrative about the performance of schools, supporting schools' improvement planning, without including summative judgements.

### **Clearly assign the roles and responsibilities of different bodies 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. The guidance therefore sets out Welsh Government's expectations of the role and responsibilities of the different bodies, in relation to evaluation, improvement and accountability, in order to help the self-improving system to function efficiently and effectively