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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

National School Categorisation System

Frequently Asked Questions

General

What is the National School Categorisation System?

The National School Categorisation System aims to provide a clear structure to review how well a school is performing. It takes into consideration how effectively the school is led and managed, the quality of learning and teaching, and the level of support and challenge it needs to do better.

The system offers a holistic approach to school improvement, which allows the regional consortia challenge advisers to take the context of the school into account when determining the level of support a school requires to improve.

Why do we have categorisation?

Its primary purpose is to identify schools that are most in need of support, to ensure that, in partnership with local authorities, regional consortia and schools, we direct our support and resources most effectively to secure the improvements necessary within our school system.

National School Categorisation is not about labelling, or creating crude league tables. It is about helping schools identify what are the factors that contribute to their progress and achievement, and what areas to focus on to achieve further development.

The colour code of a school tells you the level of support the school will receive in order to support its development.

Who is included in the National School Categorisation System?

All primary, middle, secondary and special schools are included in the system for 2018 outcomes.

How about infants-only and juniors-only schools?

All infants-only and juniors-only schools are included, in addition to all primary schools.

What about new and amalgamated schools?

For new and amalgamated schools (where pupils have transferred in from other schools), Steps two and three will be published.

How does the system work?
The system is based on three simple steps:

Step one – Outcome Indicators
Until 2017, the Welsh Government used a set of information (such as GCSE results and information on attendance) to analyse schools' performance and place them in one of four standards groups. From 2017 onwards, the Welsh Government no longer calculates or publishes a standards group for schools. Instead schools will now use a broader set of performance information, in the form of outcome indicators to evaluate how they are doing, which will take into account their local context. This will form the starting point of discussions with their regional consortium challenge advisor about their performance and area for improvement.

Step two – Improvement capacity
Challenge advisers from regional consortia evaluate the school's capacity to improve, taking account of evidence about the standards achieved and the quality of leadership and learning and teaching. They will also use information from the Welsh Government to inform this evaluation and discussions with schools. Schools will be placed in one of four groups, A to D. Schools where the judgement is an A show the greatest capacity to improve along with the ability to support other schools. Those where the judgement is D need the most support.

Step three – Support category
The outcomes from step two are used to decide on each school's final support category. The final categorisation is a colour code that shows the level of support a school needs - green, yellow, amber or red. It is led by regional consortia and agreed with the local authority. The coloured support category for each school triggers a bespoke programme of support, challenge and intervention. The support category is also used by regional consortia to plan and deploy their resources.

Schools where the judgement is A show the greatest capacity to self-improve along with the ability to support other schools. Those where the judgement is D require the most support.

The categorisation colour indicates the level of support a school requires – green, yellow, amber or red (with the schools in the green category needing the least support and those in the red category needing the most intensive support).

What happens after a colour support category has been assigned?
The colour category triggers a bespoke programme of support for each school. The categorisation is also used to plan the targeting and deployment of resources by regional consortia and the Welsh Government in respect of national capacity building programmes.

What if a school disagrees with their outcome?
Schools, through engagement with their challenge adviser, will be aware of their provisional categorisation outcome at an early stage. There are formal procedures in place for schools to log disagreements with the regional consortia. The school can speak to their challenge adviser who will be able to provide further advice on how to formally log the disagreement.

Does the National School Categorisation System result in more work for schools?
No, it shouldn't. The judgement of a school's ability and capacity to self-improve by the regional consortia's challenge advisers will be based on the school's own self-evaluation, which it should already be undertaking on an annual basis. The judgement on capacity to improve is to do with the school's ability to drive its own improvement for the future and focuses on leadership, and the quality of learning and teaching.

How will you guarantee consistency within and across regional consortia?
The four regional consortia have worked closely with each other, along with the Association of Directors of Education (ADEW), to ensure that the categorisation process is consistently and robustly applied across Wales. One set of guidance is used by all challenge advisers to further ensure that the National School Categorisation System is applied consistently across all four regional education consortia.

A system of regional moderation and national verification will take place every year, once categorisation outcomes for all schools have been completed. Both processes ensure that the categorisation process is fair, consistent and transparent.

More information on the Regional Moderation and National Verification processes is contained within the main categorisation guidance document.

What information is used to categorise schools?
A wide range of information is used to categorise schools. This includes information on how a school is led and managed, the quality of learning and teaching, and the level of support and challenge needed to improve. Other information, such as teacher assessments, attendance and examination results, is also included and this sets the background for discussions between schools and their challenge advisers.

Why does attendance data form part of the National School Categorisation System?
If children and young people are going to get the most out of their education and fulfil their potential it's important that they attend school regularly.

The inclusion of attendance data in the All Wales Core Data Sets for schools and local authorities is a key source of information for schools to use to inform discussion in the self-evaluation and improvement process.

Categorisation provides us with a constructive evaluation process to improve school outcomes and attendance plays a key part in the system for both primary schools and secondary schools.

Why aren't the National Reading and Numeracy Tests used as part of the outcomes indicators?

The National Reading and Numeracy Tests help schools across Wales assess their learners' reading and numeracy skills. It should be remembered that the tests are diagnostic and their purpose is to allow an assessment of reading and numeracy at a learner level to ensure that appropriate interventions can be made by the teacher or the school.

The results of the tests are not included in the set of performance measures for primary schools or secondary schools. There is international evidence that in countries using test results for accountability purposes there have been unintended consequences including teaching to the test. This can mean learners' wider development needs receive less attention.

Under step two of the National School Categorisation System, schools should evidence how they act on the information about learners' skills provided by the National Reading and Numeracy Tests. Effective school management and improvement should include the consideration of test information alongside teacher assessment.

What about the priority for reducing the impact of deprivation on educational attainment?

As part of a school's self-evaluation, the performance of learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) should be reviewed and analysed as an area of clear focus.

If standards are not good or not improving, then leadership, as part of step two, cannot be judged as wholly effective. This is also the case where the outcomes of eFSM learners, or any other vulnerable group is not improving at a sufficient rate.

How about those learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)?
All outcome indicators provided are inclusive of all learners, and this reflects the inclusive approach that we take to provision for ALN learners in Wales. This principle of inclusivity is not one that we would wish to move away from.
There is a wide spectrum of need. For some learners with severe and complex needs it is unreasonable to expect them to achieve the Level 2 threshold including English/Welsh first language and mathematics, however for many other learners with, for example, dyslexia or a visual or hearing impairment, it would be equally unreasonable not to have high expectations for them.

Across Wales, local policy and practice in the field of ALN differs greatly from authority to authority both in terms of application of the code of practice and provision in mainstream schools, designated classes or units. Learners with similar needs may have a statement in one authority but be supported via 'School Action Plus' in another.

We value the outcomes of all learners and therefore, all learners are included in our outcome indicators.

Step two of the categorisation system allows challenge advisers to consider the context that the school is working in as part of their assessment of the school's capacity to self- improve.

This is an opportunity for schools to discuss with challenge advisers the school's data in the context of its learners who have ALN.

Data is only ever the starting point – good self-evaluation seeks to understand the issues underlying the data in order to support better outcomes for all learners.

There is now a reliance on regional consortia and challenge advisers. How do you know whether they will be robust?

The National School Categorisation System has been co-constructed with local government and the regional consortia – they are an integral part of the system. National training for all challenge advisers has been provided along with further bespoke training provided by regional consortia. Furthermore, detailed guidance has been agreed on an all Wales basis.

The regional consortia have established a quality standards group to ensure consistency within and across the regional consortia.

The outcomes are moderated by a regional moderation board to ensure consistency within each regional consortium. A national verification process is also in place with representatives of all four regional consortia along with independent observers. This ensures that any decisions are applied consistently and not in isolation.

Publication of categories

How will the information look when published and where will it be published?

The final categorisation outcomes will be published in January each year on the My Local School website.

What support do green/yellow/amber/red schools get?

Green support category
A school in the green support category will receive up to 4 days of support.

Yellow support category
A school in the yellow support category will receive up to 10 days of support.

Amber support category
A school in the amber support category will receive up to 15 days of support.

Red support category
A school in the red support category will receive up to 25 days of support.

What does this mean for parents?
Parents will have a clear picture on the school's performance and the level of support and/or intervention being provided. In terms of transparency, information about categorisation will be published on the My Local School website in January of each year and will sit alongside the other published information on each school.

A guide for parents/carers is available on the Welsh Government website at https://beta.gov.wales/school-categorisation-system