

Supplementary guidance:

inspecting professional
learning

Autumn 2022

This guidance is also available in Welsh.

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

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

Estyn also:

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

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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What is the purpose?

This provides further guidance for inspectors to use alongside the sector guidance for inspection

For whom is it intended?

Maintained and independent schools, non-maintained settings and Post 16/FE

From when should the guidance be used?

September 2022

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Supplementary guidance

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

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

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

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

Our inspection work is based on the following principles:

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

Inspection area 5.3 Professional learning

Introduction

Current reforms within the education system in Wales represent a fundamental shift in the expectations of the teaching workforce. Several policy initiatives have been introduced to support providers to develop a culture of professional learning and enquiry. These include:

- [National Approach to Professional Learning \(NAPL\) and the Professional Learning Entitlement \(NPLE\)](#)
- [Schools as Learning Organisations \(SLO\)](#)
- [Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership](#),
- [Leading Professional Learning National Leadership Wales](#)
- [National MA \(Education\)](#)
- [Performance management arrangements and the Professional Learning Passport \(PLP\)](#)
- [National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry \(NSERE\)](#)
- [Post 16 continuing professional development](#)

These initiatives have raised the profile and expectations for continuing professional learning for educational professionals.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Common Inspection Framework, in particular section 5.3 Professional learning.

Inspecting professional learning

We inspect professional learning as part of leadership in inspection area 5. We consider the way in which providers establish a positive culture that encourages and supports practitioners to engage in professional learning. Depending on the sector, our approach to inspecting professional learning might differ to consider relevant reforms and practice specific to that sector. For example, in schools and pupil referral units, we consider whether professional learning to develop approaches to the Curriculum for Wales has a focus on improving teaching. In Initial Teacher Education (ITE), we consider ways in which providers support the development of learning communities across an ITE partnership by developing research knowledge and skills. In post-16 we might consider the impact of involvement in projects funded by the post-16 professional development fund.

We recognise that different sectors of education and training might have different priorities for professional learning but our broad approach to inspection is built upon a set of underpinning principles that characterises effective professional learning.

- Collaborative – practitioners work together within and across schools as a key feature of professional learning, including through coaching and mentoring.

- Reflective – professional learning provides opportunities for practitioners to reflect critically and candidly on current practice and being open to others' reflections on how practice can be improved or developed.
- Informed – professional learning is based on research and effective practice and it supports practitioners to build their own skills in making use of evidence, research and data.
- Evaluated and impactful – the outputs and outcomes of professional learning are evaluated to consider the impact on learner progress and learning.
- Responsive and agile – schools and providers are responsive to their evaluation of professional learning, reflecting on its value and contribution to school/provider strategic priorities and making changes so that it builds capacity to drive improvement.

What we inspect

Inspectors should evaluate the extent to which leaders have created a positive culture and ethos to promote and support the continuous professional learning of all staff. They should consider whether professional learning to improve teaching and develop the Curriculum for Wales has had a positive impact in developing classroom provision that meets learners' needs.

Section 5.3 of the Common Inspection Framework says that inspectors should consider how well the provider:

- uses, for instance, the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) model to support their approach to professional learning
- links professional learning to self-evaluation and improvement priorities
- engages all staff in purposeful activities that support the development of their professional knowledge, understanding and teaching and leadership skills
- ensures that professional learning encourages innovation and is focused consistently on securing improvements in pupils' progress and well-being
- identifies good practice within the school/provider and ensures that other staff may benefit from it
- collaborates with other schools or providers, initial teacher education providers and providers of professional learning to share and to develop professional practice
- monitors the impact of professional learning on the effectiveness of teaching and leadership, and on learners' progress and well-being

Where the school is a lead school for initial teacher education, inspectors will report on the impact of this work on the school's approaches to professional learning.

Links professional learning to self-evaluation findings and improvement priorities

Inspectors should consider how well leaders use self-evaluation to help them plan professional learning that meet the improvement priorities of the school/provider. This should consider the developmental needs of the workforce and their ability to deliver the priorities. Evaluation and reflection should be an important part of professional learning rather than an activity that is done in isolation. Teachers should be supported to evaluate the difference professional learning has made to their practice and how this has an impact on the progress of learners. They should understand their role in evaluating professional learning as part of a reflective cycle of improvement. If this is done well, it should be possible to see how the evaluation of professional learning feeds into the school or providers self-evaluation and improvement planning process.

Engages all staff in purposeful activities that support the development of their professional knowledge, understanding and teaching and leadership skills, as well as subject or vocational knowledge and skills when appropriate

Inspectors should consider the extent to which the school/provider has a culture that supports professional learning and encourages practitioners to engage with a range of professional learning opportunities that meet their personal developmental needs, the priorities of the school/provider and national priorities. Leaders should ensure staff have access to high quality professional learning to develop their professional knowledge, teaching and leadership skills and subject or vocational knowledge. This might include a well-considered programme of professional learning that meets the needs of staff, contributes to ongoing improvement and does not place unjustified expectations on staff.

We should consider the way in which performance management arrangement support professional learning, including the use of the [Professional Learning Passport \(PLP\)](#)

In schools we should consider how well leaders and teachers understand and use the [Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership](#) to:

- help practitioners reflect on their practice
- support practitioners to identify areas for further development
- provide a context for performance management discussions

Ensures that professional learning is focused consistently on securing improvements in pupils' progress and well-being

One of the most powerful ways of improving pupil's progress and well-being is through effective professional learning focused on improving teaching. This includes improving the quality of classroom practice as well as to support the implementation of new initiatives, such as the Curriculum for Wales and the Welsh Government strategy for tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment. Inspectors should consider how well professional learning supports practitioners to be aware of important developments in education and the impact these will have on their

practice. We should consider the extent to which professional learning equips practitioners with the skills to become highly effective educators/teachers.

More details are available in [Effective practice: Improving the quality of teaching through professional learning](#)

Identifies good practice within the school and ensures that other staff may benefit from it

Effective professional learning requires effective leadership to create the necessary conditions (Stoll et al, 2012)

Providers that have a strong and sustained culture of professional learning systematically identify effective practice within their organisation and facilitate effective approaches to sharing this with practitioners. Inspectors should consider how well leaders build a strong professional learning community and are committed to developing a shared understanding of how professional learning contributes to improved outcomes for learners. They foster a culture that values sharing practice, collaboration and self-reflection.

Collaborates, for example, with other schools, post-16 providers, initial teacher education institutions and providers of professional learning to share and to develop professional practice

Effective professional learning provides practitioners with opportunities to work in collaboration with others to develop new approaches to learning, teaching and securing well-being through enquiry, innovation and the evaluation of impact. Collaboration might be within the organisation or involve cross school/provider collaboration or collaboration across sectors.

Monitors the impact of professional learning on the effectiveness of teaching and leadership, and on pupils' progress and well-being

Leaders continuously evaluate the impact of professional learning on the impact it has on student progress and well-being. Inspectors should consider the effectiveness of strategies used to evaluate the impact of professional learning on learner progress and well-being and how well they use the intelligence they gain from evaluation to inform strategic planning. Leaders should also evaluate professional learning to improve the quality of future learning and to help them make informed decisions about ongoing professional learning.

Additional sector specific considerations

Maintained primary and secondary schools

Where the school is a lead school for initial teacher education, inspectors will report on the impact of this work on the school's approaches to professional learning

How we inspect professional learning

An inspection team should consider how the key principles of inspection apply when evaluating professional learning.

Professional learning is intended to have an impact on the progress and well-being of learners. We do not judge professional learning by the number of staff engaging with a programme or the amount of professional learning opportunities available to them. When inspecting professional learning we should always ask questions about the impact on practice, progress and well-being. However, we should bear in mind that, at times, the impact of professional learning might not be evident immediately. Therefore, we could ask questions about how teachers have changed their practice and how leaders know that this is likely to have an impact on progress and well-being. When observing lessons, we should be aware of how any professional learning might have had an impact on classroom practice and consider how well this is working. When we speak to leaders who are engaging in professional learning to develop their leadership skills, we should consider how well the professional learning is equipping them with the knowledge and skills to have a positive impact on the progress and well-being of learners. We should also consider how leaders are engaging in professional learning to develop their understanding and leadership skills to respond to new developments in education in Wales. For instance, in the leadership of community schools or working in partnership with a range of agencies through a community hub.

Research and evidence tell us that the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning has the greatest impact on learner progress. When inspecting professional learning we should consider how professional learning contributes to improving teaching and draws on evidence of effective pedagogy to ensure that practice is critically informed. Effective professional learning should provide rich opportunities for practitioners to develop their practice through enquiry and critical evaluation.

When we inspect professional learning, we should draw on a range of evidence that helps us gain an insight into the appropriateness, quality and impact of professional learning experiences. For instance, if a school/provider is part of a specific professional learning initiative, we should aim to observe the outputs/impact of this work through classroom observation or dialogue with teachers and other staff. It is not sufficient to only discuss this with school/provider leaders without following through by looking at the output, the difference it has made to practice and progress and well-being.

Useful information

[Effective Professional Development | EEF \(educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk\)](https://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

[Evaluating the impact of professional learning \(aitsl.edu.au\)](https://aitsl.edu.au)

Aide Memoire: Inspecting Professional Learning

Section 5.3 of the Common Inspection Framework says that inspectors should consider how well the provider:

Links professional learning clearly to self-evaluation findings and improvement priorities

- How well do leaders use self-evaluation to help them plan professional learning that meets the improvement priorities of their school/provider?
- How well does the school ensure that reflection and evaluation is a key element within professional learning programmes or initiatives?
- How well do participating practitioners understand their role in evaluating professional learning as part of a reflective cycle of improvement?

Engages all staff in purposeful activities that support the development of their professional knowledge, understanding and teaching and leadership skills

- What principles underpin the professional learning culture in the school/provider? Is there a clear strategy?
- How has this culture been established and sustained?
- Has the provider established a well-considered, programme of professional learning that meets the needs of practitioners and contributes to ongoing improvement?

Ensures that professional learning encourages innovation and is focused consistently on securing improvements in pupils' progress and well-being

- How does professional learning ensure that practitioners are aware of important developments in education and the impact these will have on their practice?
- How does professional learning provide practitioners with the knowledge and skills to develop new approaches to their practice?
- Does the school have professional learning groups or communities that are focused on innovation and improvement?
- How are practitioners encouraged and supported to engage in professional enquiry?

Identifies good practice within the school/provider and ensures that other staff may benefit from it

- How do leaders identify good practice? What informs their view?
- How is good practice shared across the school/provider?
- How do leaders know that this has led to change and improvement in the school?
- How are leaders ensuring that good practice becomes the usual practice within the school?

Collaborates with other schools or providers, initial teacher education providers and providers of professional learning to share and to develop professional practice

- To what extent does the school/provider work with another provider to involve practitioners in joint professional learning?
- Does the school/provider provide professional learning for other schools/providers? How has this been beneficial for the school/provider being inspected?
- How do leaders encourage collaborative approaches to professional learning?

Monitors the impact of professional learning on the effectiveness of teaching and leadership, and on learners' progress and well-being

- How does the school/provider evaluate the impact of professional learning on improving teaching?
- What strategies does the school use to evaluate the impact of professional learning on learner progress and well-being?
- How does the school/provider know that professional learning has improved the leadership skills of practitioners?
- How does the school/provider evaluate how well funding for professional learning has been used to improve the effectiveness of teaching, leadership and the impact on learner progress and well-being?
- How well does the school/provider use evidence to review and refine its approach to professional learning?
- Can the provider give any examples of how practice has changed because of professional learning and how they know that improvements have been made?