

Supplementary guidance: listening to staff

Autumn 2017

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

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

Estyn also:

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

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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 2017

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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

Rationale

Listening to the views of a range of staff at different levels is an efficient and effective way to gain a wide range of inspection evidence. Inspectors should listen to staff in order to understand how well teachers and teaching assistants support all learners to make good progress. They should listen carefully to how well staff understand and appreciate the provider's strategic priorities and come to a view about how engaged they are in implementing them.

Inspectors should gather first-hand evidence from teachers about their routine classroom practice by speaking to teachers in their classrooms. This will help teachers to find evidence, for example samples of learners' work, to support their views and to explain issues further with inspectors.

Through interviews with teachers, inspectors will be able to see how well teachers ensure that they challenge learners of all abilities to make progress in their learning, match planned work to learners' individual starting points and take account of barriers to their learning. Inspectors will be able to see how well staff implement the provider's policies and documented procedures in their classrooms, for example by explaining and showing examples of their feedback to learners and assessment strategies.

It may also be appropriate for an inspector to listen to the views of support staff about their roles, their work, and the training and support they receive. This will help inspectors to gauge the contribution that support staff make to improving specific learner outcomes and achieving the provider's aims and targets.

In addition, the discussions should provide a purposeful opportunity for inspectors to explore the role and function of middle leaders, and the value of self-evaluation activities and improvement plans. Inspectors should explore the relevance and regularity of staff feedback and training, and the support that classroom practitioners receive from leaders, for example when they encounter difficulties in their work. The information that inspectors gather from staff will be useful in considering how well leaders and managers improve quality, bring about change and act sustainably.

These discussions should replace many of the interviews with leaders held under the previous inspection framework. Formerly, interviews gave staff (often middle leaders) opportunities to describe at length what they have done to make improvements within their area of responsibility. Undertaking interviews with staff at all levels will allow inspectors to see the impact of leaders and managers at the level of the classroom. Interviews with a range of staff will provide more of a bottom-up rather than a top-down model for gathering evidence of the impact of leaders and managers.

Arrangements for inspectors to listen to teachers

It is important that the planned discussions/interviews involve a range of teachers in the provider. The RI should select staff at different stages of their teaching career. They should take account of the individual's length of service at the provider, their experience and pay grade along with any line management, organisational or subject responsibilities, and their teaching or pastoral timetabled commitments. For example, the RI may decide to include a newly qualified teacher, an experienced teacher who has recently joined the provider, a part-time teacher and a pastoral or middle leader.

One inspector should listen to an individual teacher during each discussion session.

RIs should take account of any emerging questions through their analysis of the pre-inspection staff questionnaire. They should consider the balance of listening to the range of stakeholders, including learners, staff, governors and parents, during the inspection in order to ensure that the evidence base supports robust and valid evaluations.

As in all inspection activity, inspectors should be considerate, courteous and understanding, especially where individual staff may be anxious about the discussion. Inspectors should do everything possible to put the member of staff at their ease. For example, the interview should take place in the teacher's classroom, and it should focus on what learners do and achieve, and the contribution the teacher makes to effective learning rather than trying to ascertain and judge the teacher's methodology.

Inspectors should use open-ended questions so that the teacher has plentiful opportunities to talk freely, rather than having to respond to a list of set interview questions. There are suggested prompts later in this paper, but inspectors should follow up emerging questions when and where appropriate. As much as possible, the interview should be a dialogue between the inspector and the teacher. Inspectors should encourage teachers to use examples of learners' work, or their planning or assessment notes, to support the discussion. The balance of talk should clearly favour the teacher.

Inspectors should make it clear that there is no expectation that the teacher should speak on behalf of their colleagues.

Arrangements for inspectors to listen to support staff

Depending on the size and character of the provider, and the pre-inspection emerging questions, the RI may also want to gather the views of support staff. For example, there may be an improvement priority linked to developing the role of support staff, or the pre-inspection staff questionnaire may raise emerging questions about access to appropriate training.

Normally, a sample of support staff are invited to speak to an inspector as a group. The RI may decide that the lay inspector should complete this task may ask another member of the team to speak to support staff. If the RI plans such a meeting, they should discuss with the nominee the most convenient time and place. The RI should be mindful of the varying duties and part-time hours for many support staff when organising the time for such a meeting. It may be appropriate to invite any support staff who are able to attend, but stress that any others are welcome to speak briefly to an individual inspector at a mutually convenient moment around the provider, if they would like to.

FAQs

How much notice of the meeting should inspectors give individual teachers?

Staff should be given sufficient notice to deal with any personal arrangements or commitments so that they can attend the discussion, but not so much notice that they feel compelled to undertake unnecessary preparation. Normally, the RI will inform the nominee of the teacher interview details in the morning of the day of the interviews. For example, if listening to staff sessions are planned to take place after school on Tuesday, the RI should inform the nominee first thing on Tuesday morning. The nominee should indicate to the RI as soon as possible if, in exceptional circumstances, an individual member of staff may have personal difficulty attending a discussion, for example due to childcare or travel arrangements.

When and where should the meeting take place?

RIs should work with the provider's leaders to identify the best time for staff discussions. Immediately at the end of the learning day is often a good time. RIs should not timetable discussions for teachers' break times or lunchtimes. Normally, the discussion should take place in the teacher's usual teaching area to ensure easy access to learners' work and teachers' own planning and assessment notes. Inspectors should keep discussions concise and well focused. Around 30-45 minutes should be sufficient and, in some cases, the discussion may not take that long.

What should inspectors record in their JF?

Inspectors should record contemporaneous, brief, evaluative notes from the interview in their JF. Bullet points are ideal. Once back in the base room, inspectors should tidy their notes to ensure that they are an evaluative summary, not a verbatim account. They should copy and paste their notes into the relevant areas of their Input JF, for example teaching (3.1), learning experiences (3.2) and leadership (5.1).

The teacher tells me that they have been instructed by the management not to comment on particular issues

Record this information in your Input JF and bring it to the RI's attention. Listening to staff is an opportunity for staff at all levels to put their professional views across to

inspectors. The RI should also bring this to the attention of the nominee and refer the nominee to the 'Expectations of providers' in the inspection guidance handbook.

What should I do if a teacher starts to discuss their performance management?

Inspectors can and should listen to the teacher's descriptions of the arrangements for performance management, but should not enquire about an individual's ratings, targets or outcomes. They should not look at named performance management documentation, for example in conversation with individual teachers. However, leaders may choose to share blank or redacted performance management forms with inspectors, as part of a wider discussion, so that inspectors understand fully the general system that operates.

What should inspectors do if they have concerns about staff wellbeing as a result of listening to teachers or support staff?

Inspectors should raise the issue at the team meeting and with the RI, as it is important to ascertain the extent of the concern. The RI will select the best course of action to follow up on the team's findings. The RI will share concerns, as appropriate, for example with senior leaders, with the local authority link inspector or through the inspection report.

What should an RI do if individual teachers/staff ask for an interview with an inspector?

First, the RI should ascertain the reason for the interview request, ie whether it is to take part in the usual interviews with staff or whether the member of staff wishes to raise other issues. If it is the usual interviews with staff, the RI should note that there is no requirement on the inspection team to interview all staff or to agree to interview any member of staff who may volunteer. If it is to raise a specific issue, the RI may decide to arrange a brief interview with the member of staff or, due to pressure of time on the inspection team, may ask them to write a brief note of their concerns for the RI to consider. The RI should note that the inspection focuses primarily on the learners and the impact of provision and leadership on their progress. Inspectors should not investigate the individual grievances of staff.

Who can attend the support staff meeting?

For the purpose of the meeting, inspectors consider 'support staff' to include anyone employed directly by the provider who has a contract that does not refer to a teaching or leadership position. Inspectors will take account of the varied skills and backgrounds of support staff, for example those who teach full classes as HLTAs and cover supervisors, or deal directly with extremely vulnerable learners and their parents regarding attendance, exclusions or aspects of wellbeing. They will also consider the differing roles and skillsets of support staff who work in administrative posts, or as technicians. Inspectors should always be mindful that support staff have different terms, conditions of employment or accountabilities to teachers.

Appendix A

Possible questions for teachers

- Can you tell me briefly about your class(es) this year?
- What sort of progress have various groups of learners made? – ALN, MAT, EAL?
- What have been your greatest successes this year? Have you got anything with you that can show me and tell me about it?
- How do you use the evidence you pick up in learners' books to plan for their next steps?
- Have there been any particular obstacles or challenges this year that you've had to get over?
- How have you dealt with them?
- What are the provider's current priorities? What difference does that make to you in your classroom with your learners?
- What sort of training have you had to help you to deal with these priorities? What do you think has been particularly effective in helping you to work towards these priorities?
- Have you had opportunities to share any of this with colleagues in this provider and in other providers? (Alternatively, have you been involved in any sharing of this practice from other colleagues?)
- Looking forward, what do you think the challenges you might have with these learners/classes?

Appendix B

Possible questions for meeting with TAs

- What are the strengths of this provider?
- How do you know what's going on in the provider? How are you involved in the day to day planning and organisation of teaching and learning?
- How do you deal with children who have problems? What support do you get – from whom?
- Have there been any particular obstacles or challenges recently that you've had to get over? How have you deal with them?
- What are the provider's current priorities? What difference does that make to you in the classroom with learners?
- What sort of training have you had recently? What do you think has been particularly effective?
- Have you had opportunities to observe others doing a similar job to you – here or at another provider? What have you learnt from this?