

His Majesty's Chief Inspector, Estyn
Owen Evans

19 March 2026

General Scrutiny Session – Follow-up q

Dear Owen,

Thank you to you and your colleagues for attending the general scrutiny session on 11 March 2026. We are grateful for the time you gave and for your constructive engagement with the issues raised and the clear and candid assessment you provided of the education system in Wales. Despite the two hours allocated, the breadth and importance of Estyn's work meant that we were unable to cover all the intended areas of questioning, and several further points arose from the evidence you shared. We are therefore writing to place the outstanding questions on record and to seek your written responses for consideration by the relevant successor committees.

Please could you respond to the following questions:

Further questions arising from the evidence you shared

1. You noted in your evidence that continuing pressures around teacher recruitment and retention could be eased through improvements in both pupil behaviour and teacher workload. Could you expand on how you believe progress in behaviour management could be accelerated, what specific gains might be achievable in reducing workload, and whether - and in what form - these reflections have already been shared with the Welsh Government?
2. You consistently highlighted strong leadership as the foundation for school improvement and learner progress, including the embedding of literacy and numeracy cultures, the delivery of high-quality teaching, effective self-evaluation, and meaningful engagement with professional learning. Recognising that time is a significant constraint for school leaders, how do you think leaders can best be supported or given the space to be genuinely progressive in their practice?

3. During the session, you referred to international systems - such as those in Ireland and Estonia - that offer clearer, more ambitious progression steps and more useful assessment information. While international examples are helpful, we are keen to understand what this would mean in practice for Wales. Could you therefore set out which elements of these international approaches are genuinely comparable to the Welsh context, the evidence base that underpins them, and what specific changes you believe could realistically and effectively be adopted in Wales to improve the consistency and usefulness of assessment information across the system?
4. You've identified that the system needs a narrower set of priorities, alongside clearer national direction and more defined roles and responsibilities for Dysgu, local authorities and national bodies. Could you set out, in concrete terms, what you believe the initial three priorities should be, which areas require national leadership rather than local variation, and what changes would most quickly bring coherence to the system without adding new layers? And given the scale of change you've described, what would be a realistic timescale for achieving that coherence?

Questions we were unable to cover during the session

5. Your annual report notes that the financial position facing the FE sector in particular has become more challenging this year. Could you expand on what has made it more challenging and where are the pressure points within the sector?
6. Several schools and FE colleges are now facing serious budget constraints. What evidence has Estyn gathered on how financial pressures are affecting curriculum breadth, support services and staffing stability?
7. What steps are being taken to reflect trauma-informed practice from PRUs and special schools in mainstream schools, and how can this link back to professional learning opportunities for education staff?
8. You report that well-being support is generally strong, but demand is rising. What pressures are Estyn seeing most frequently, and how are these shaping inspection findings? How can the system ensure consistent access to counselling, pastoral and mental-health support across all sectors?
9. What progress is being made towards addressing the isolated site-security weaknesses Estyn identified through the joint inspection in Gwynedd with Care Inspectorate Wales, following the Neil Foden case, and how is Estyn adjusting its inspection focus as a result?

10. It has been several years since the move away from summative grading toward narrative reporting following inspections. How has this been received in practice? How do you ensure urgency in settings with weak self-evaluation, and what evidence suggests the new model is improving professional dialogue?
11. Looking back on your inspections carried out throughout the course of the Sixth Senedd, what do you feel have been the education system's key achievements, and what areas do you wish had been explored and addressed further? What would you liked to see addressed as a priority in the Seventh Senedd?

During the session, you also committed to providing us with a timeline for the completion and publication of Estyn's findings from the themed inspection of the National Centre for Learning Welsh.

We would welcome this information at your earliest convenience, and if possible by 2 April 2026, to ensure that we can publish the response before the end of this Senedd term.

Thank you again for your ongoing engagement with our work and for your continued contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people in Wales.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.