

Isle of Anglesey County Council Scrutiny Report

Committee:	Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
Date:	13.11.25
Subject:	School improvement guidance: framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability
Scrutiny Chair:	Cllr. Dylan Rees

1. Who will be the portfolio holder presenting / leading the report?

Portfolio Holder	Role
Councillor Dafydd Roberts	Portfolio Holder for Education
Service Officer (Supporting)	Role
Aaron Evans	Director of Education, Skills and Young People

2. Why the Scrutiny Committee is being asked to consider the matter

- Make clear Welsh Government expectations of local authorities in contributing to school improvement, in the context of national guidance which will soon become statutory.
- Ensure that the information presented on expectations regarding national school improvement is up to date.

3. Role of the Scrutiny Committee and recommendations

- ☒ For assurance
☐ For recommendation to the Executive
☐ For information

Recommendation(s):

The Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

R1 Consider the implications of the national guidance and expectations upon local authorities in contributing to school improvement – in particular the role for scrutiny committees

R2 Note the key function of the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee (as the designated scrutiny for education matters) to focus its scrutiny activity (through the Scrutiny Panel) on measuring the impact of support provided to schools by the Learning Service.

4. How does the recommendation(s) contribute to the objectives of the Council's Plan?

This is directly aligned to the priorities set out in the Council Plan 2023-28 – one of which is stated as 'Education – ensuring an effective provision for today and for future generations'.

5. Key scrutiny themes

Key themes the Scrutiny Committee should concentrate on:

1. How the guidance underpins the ongoing development of the self-improving system
2. The role of elected members on the Scrutiny Committee in the new school improvement guidance
3. The role of the Local Authority in supporting the improvement of schools
4. The degree to which the guidance supports the commitment to tackle the impact of poverty on attainment

6. Key points / summary

The School Improvement Guidance establishes a school-led, proportionate system for evaluation, improvement and accountability that prioritises learner progression, well-being and implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. The culture has moved from high accountability to self-evaluation processes that are based on consistent and honest evidence.

The guidance was introduced to align the system with the Curriculum for Wales and new assessment arrangements. This is reflected in the move from compliance and judgement to a sustainable, school-led improvement model that tackles inequality and the impact of poverty on attainment. It was also introduced to create coherent expectations across schools, the Local Authority, and Estyn so all tiers work together to support curriculum reform.

The Guidance was also originally produced at a time when the Local Authority focused on its support for behaviour, emotional and mental well-being, Additional Learning Needs, attendance, HR, finance, buildings, Welsh language development, and commissioning support for teaching and learning, leadership development and curriculum planning. Following change to the education system in Summer 2025, the Local Authority now provides direct support for teaching and learning, leadership, professional learning and curriculum planning and this is reflected in the guidance.

Key messages:

1. Evaluation is school-led and continuous: self-evaluation must use multiple evidence sources including progress from baseline, learning walks, work scrutiny and pupil voice and must disaggregate by key groups and language pathways.

2. The overarching areas for self-evaluation in schools are:
 - vision and leadership
 - curriculum, learning and teaching
 - well-being, equity and inclusion
3. Improvement is focused and publishable: each school produces one concise School Development Plan (SDP) with a small number of measurable priorities, named leads, resourcing, timescales and success criteria; SDP summaries must be published, and there are good examples of those on the island.
4. Accountability is proportionate and risk based: the Learning Service and schools themselves can broker tailored support to meet the needs of schools. The Local Authority is still required to ensure high standards. Inspection by Estyn acts as a backstop within a supportive system.
5. Peer to peer working is central in the new system: school to school support and system leaders deliver capacity building, reciprocal challenge and professional learning across clusters.
6. Use a mixed evidence base, not single measure: decisions, escalation and support should be based on triangulated quantitative and qualitative evidence, emphasising progression.
7. Transparency and stakeholder voice: learners, parents and communities should inform evaluation.

Strategic leaders in the Learning Service are responsible for brokering and coordinating bespoke support for schools based on their evaluated needs and priorities – such decisions are made alongside the headteachers. Senior managers within the service, alongside school leaders in some cases, will provide constructive external challenge to schools' self-evaluation and SDPs. Our system leaders, school headteachers, lead and enable peer to peer activity, ensuring support is targeted and recorded. Peer-to-peer and school-to-school activities are essential for capacity building and professional learning, sharing effective practice, and reducing dependence on central intervention. The service holds termly reviews with school headteachers to assess progress, identify risk and trigger proportionate escalation where required. This work is recorded, and the progress of schools is reported to the Director of Education, Skills and Young People, who continues to be responsible for ensuring learners make appropriate progress.

Governing bodies are the accountable bodies for their schools and oversee the evaluation and improvement process. Governors play a key strategic role and agree on the school's strategic aims. The headteacher and the senior leadership team are responsible for leadership, direction, and management of the school within those strategic aims. The headteacher is responsible for internal organisation and management, and for advising on the strategic aims and implementing them.

Estyn plays a key accountability role in the new system. Inspection activities are used to provide independent assurance of standards and to inform national improvement priorities. As the national education inspectorate, they also support the school system by publishing evidence, best practice, thematic reports, etc.

For elected members and those who are members of the scrutiny committee, the new guidance emphasises their key function in focusing scrutiny on the impact of support by the Learning Service (this is the through the work of the Scrutiny Panel). It should also be noted the elected members should maintain strategic separation from their governor roles, while using governor insight to inform scrutiny.

7. Impact assessments

7.1. Potential impacts on groups protected under the Equality Act 2010

Welsh Government on the school improvement guidance (<https://www.gov.wales/school-improvement-guidance-impact-assessment-html>). Could also include the following:

Positive impacts:

- Improved access and inclusion when self-evaluation explicitly identifies barriers faced by protected groups and action plans remove those barriers.
- Better-targeted support where data-led improvement planning highlights attainment gaps for groups such as pupils with disabilities or from minority ethnic backgrounds, enabling tailored interventions.

Potential negative impacts:

- Worsening attainment gaps if improvement measures rely on assumptions about access to resources without adjustments for disadvantaged pupils.

Mitigations for schools:

- Use disaggregated data to identify gaps for protected groups and monitor the effect of improvement actions on those groups.
- Embed reasonable adjustment and accessibility into curriculum planning, assessment methods, and well-being support so changes don't create barriers for pupils with disabilities.

7.2. Potential impacts on those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (strategic decisions)

Welsh Government on the school improvement guidance: <https://www.gov.wales/school-improvement-guidance-impact-assessment-html>. Could also include the following:

Potential negative impacts:

- Widening attainment gaps if actions assume equal home support or digital access.
- Reduced access to enrichment when activities require payment, transport, or equipment.
- Weaker engagement because consultation/engagement methods under-represent low-income families.

Key positive impacts:

- Targeted support driven by disaggregated data (catch-up tutoring, mentoring).
- Whole-school equity focus, with clear objectives in the School Development Plan.
- Stronger collaboration across schools to pool resources and specialist help.

Mitigation actions for schools:

- Add explicit socio-economic objectives in the School Development Plan with measurable criteria.
- Disaggregate and review data termly for disadvantaged learners.
- Ring-fence funding/staff time for targeted interventions.
- Use multiple engagement routes to include low-income families in planning.

7.3. Potential effects on opportunities to use Welsh and not treat the language less favourably than English

Welsh Government guidance does not include potential effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and not to treat the language less favourably than English. However, they could include the following:

Potential decline in Welsh use going unnoticed if monitoring is not disaggregated by language pathway/continuum.

Potentially strengthen Welsh provision by including language measures in self-evaluation and the School Development Plan.

Mitigation actions for schools:

- Disaggregating data by language pathway and reviewing termly.
- Adding clear Welsh equality objectives/targets in the School Development Plan and named leads, making it explicit, costed, monitored and protected in every improvement decision.

7.4. Potential impact on the Council's Net Zero Carbon target

Positive / Neutral / Negative and how

Welsh Government guidance does not include potential impact on the Council's Net Zero Carbon target. However, they could include the following:

Potential positive impacts include:

- Opportunities to embed low-carbon learning through curriculum planning and school improvement priorities that emphasise sustainability, green skills and behaviour change.
- Economies of scale from local collaboration: joint improvement activities can be designed to minimise travel (virtual CPD, clustered events).

- Behaviour change via whole-school approaches (active travel, reduced printing) driven by improvement monitoring and well-being priorities.

Potential negative impacts include:

- Increased energy use in schools if improvement actions lead to extended hours, e.g., community functions outside regular school hours.
- Higher travel emissions due to staff training, school-to-school working, increased parent pupil/parent interventions, meetings or enrichment activities.

Mitigation action for schools:

- Identify a school sustainability lead linked to the Council's team.
- Default to virtual or local professional learning and cluster events.

8. Financial implications

The report does not identify any specific financial implications for the Local Authority.

9. Appendices

<https://hwb.gov.wales/school-improvement-and-leadership/evaluation-improvement-and-accountability/school-improvement-guidance-framework-for-evaluation-improvement-and-accountability/>

<https://www.gov.wales/school-improvement-guidance-impact-assessment-html>

10. Report author and background papers

Aaron C Evans, Director of Education, Skills and Young People
Euros Davies, Strategic Leader (Secondary sector)