



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

2 October 2017

Dear Colleague,

In February 2017 the Cabinet Secretary for Education announced a fundamental review of our education accountability system. In doing so, the Cabinet Secretary set out a vision for a new system that would be fair, coherent, proportionate, transparent and based on our shared values for Welsh education. This work is now well underway and aligned with the key principles of our developing curriculum.

Since making the announcement, we have worked with the teaching profession, local government, consortia, unions and international experts to undertake a fundamental review of the accountability system. As set out in our action plan '*Education in Wales: Our National Mission*', we will publish a new assessment and evaluation framework for the entire education system during autumn 2018.

'*Our National Mission*' also sets out the actions that we will take between now and next year. International evidence, and the message within Wales, is clear. We must ensure a coherent approach that avoids unintended consequences and contributes towards the raising of standards in every classroom and for all our learners. Raising standards, reducing the attainment gap and ensuring a system that enjoys public confidence and is a source of national pride is at the heart of our action plan.

Ensuring coherence was a key finding in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) rapid policy assessment "*The Welsh Education Reform Journey*". While recognising our important progress towards a long term vision for Welsh education, it made a number of recommendations aimed at supporting us on our journey of continuing improvement. One of the report's recommendations was the need for Wales to move towards a new system of assessment, evaluation and accountability that aligns with the new 21st century curriculum, possibly by removing the calculation for school performance data (Step 1) altogether.

Canolfan Cyswilt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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In 'Our National Mission', for this autumn, we committed to *"transitional evaluation arrangements with schools in order to support deeper collaborations between schools and secure the raising of standards for all learners during autumn 2017"*.

As part of our fundamental review of the accountability system, it is clear that robust and continuous self-evaluation, along with professional dialogue, are key tools to support improvement. We fully accept the OECD recommendation and will, therefore, be removing the data-driven judgement that places schools into a standards group as part of Step 1 of the National Schools Categorisation System from this point on. Instead, self-evaluation will be the central feature of the model for the next period. School data, including that which was part of Step 1, will continue to be shared with the regional consortia and used to form the starting point of discussions within the school, and with their Challenge Adviser, about their capacity to improve in relation to leadership, teaching and learning.

Working with schools, local authorities and regional education consortia, we have strengthened Step 2 of the process, making sure that any judgements of a schools capacity to improve are applied fairly and consistently to all schools in Wales. The timelines and processes for the National Schools Categorisation System remain the same. We will publish updated guidance on this in due course.

### **What this means for your school**

**Primary Schools:** The data that previously informed Step 1 of categorisation will not be used to calculate a standards group for your school. Instead, it will be used to inform discussions as part of Step 2 of the process – the self-evaluation of the school's capacity to improve.

**Secondary Schools:** As with primary schools, the data that previously informed Step 1 of categorisation will not be used to calculate a standards group for your school. Instead, it will be used to inform discussions as part of Step 2 of the process – the self-evaluation of the school's capacity to improve.

**Middle Schools or schools catering for pupils aged 3 to 16/18:** The data that previously informed step one of categorisation will not be used to calculate standards groups for your 3-11 or 11-16/18 provision. Instead, it will be used to inform your discussions as part of Step 2 of the process – the self-evaluation of the school's capacity to improve. The data will continue to be used separately, relating to provision for pupils aged 3-11 and then again to relate to provision for pupils aged 11-16/18. In line with current arrangements only one judgement will be made about the school's improvement capacity and only one relating to its support category.

**Nursery, Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units:** The current system will continue – standards groups are not published for these schools. The outcomes of Steps 2 and 3 will not be published on My Local School for nursery and pupil referral units. However, outcomes will be published for special schools in line with current arrangements.

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These steps support self-evaluation to become a truly continuous process, emphasising its importance in our approaches going forward, and ensures that schools are able to access the appropriate level of support as needs emerge.

## **Ensuring consistency**

Members of the Quality and Standardisation Group have worked in partnership with schools, local authorities and regional education consortia to strengthen Step 2 of the process, ensuring that any judgements of a school's capacity to improve are made fairly, and applied consistently to all schools in Wales. In undertaking this work, they have also produced an addendum (Annex A) to highlight elements of the existing guidance that relate to some of our national priority areas. This addendum was the focus of discussions with Challenge Advisers at training events over the summer and will feature as part of their discussions with schools going forward. The methodology for Step 2 of categorisation has therefore not changed; the addendum provides greater clarity on key areas that will support continued improvement.

These areas are:

- Reducing within school variation
- School to school working
- Improving teaching performance
- The use of and impact of early entry (at Key Stage 4)
- KS5 provision and outcomes (for schools with 6<sup>th</sup> forms only)

To further ensure consistency in determining categorisation outcomes for schools, a two step process remains:

- 1) The Regional Standardisation and Moderation Process – whereby a Regional Moderation Board moderate a sample of schools from across the range of categorisation outcomes to ensure consistent implementation within their region and undertake any follow up action; and
- 2) The National Verification Process – whereby the Quality and Standardisation Group moderate a sample of schools selected from each region; sample the outcomes of the regional moderation process to verify its consistency, quality and rigour; and provide written feedback and recommendations to each region to ensure further consistency of judgements.

Schools will still be given a colour coding for the level of support that they need and this will continue to be published on My Local School.

This is part of the transitional arrangements as we move forward in our mission to reform accountability within our education system and ensure that schools, and ultimately learners, are given the right support at the right time to enable them to fully realise their potential. I will keep you updated with further developments as our review progresses throughout this new academic year.

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Yours sincerely,



**Steve Davies**  
**Director of Education**

**Annex A - Addendum**

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