

# [Assembly to debate Estyn Chief Inspector's 2015/16 Annual Report](#)

[Darllenwch yr erthygl yma yn Gymraeg | View this post in Welsh](#)

02/03/17

In Plenary on Tuesday (07 March 2017), Assembly Members will debate HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, Meilyr Rowlands' [2015/16 annual report](#). The annual report was published on 24 January 2017 and has already been scrutinised by the Children, Young People and Education Committee on [15 February 2017](#).

Two of the main messages are that **standards of provision remain 'variable'**, with the gap between Wales' best and worst performers 'still too wide', and that **teaching is currently the 'weakest aspect'** across most areas of education in Wales. This is all the more stark given the Chief Inspector concurs with most other educational discourse that the standard of **teaching is the 'biggest influence'** on how well children and young people learn.

## Variability

The Chief Inspector reports that 'variability' within and between schools '**remains a prominent feature**' of Wales' education system.

Mr Rowlands notes:

In all sectors there are good and excellent providers, including in relatively deprived areas, but the **gap** between providers that are doing well and those that are not is **still too wide**.

This is a **similar message to last year** when the Chief Inspector also highlighted a variability in standards, which he said was 'one of the most noticeable features of the Welsh education system'. In his 2014/15 report, he also said



the gap between the best and worst performers was 'still too wide' and 'needs to be addressed', implying it is a long-term problem stretching back before then. Indeed, the Chief Inspector reports that the '**underlying picture**' from inspections in 2015/16 is '**similar**' to the previous year.

The Chief Inspector told the Children, Education and Young People Committee that one of the main ways this variability can be seen is the **level of consistency** throughout a school.

People say, 'Well, which is the greatest problem?' The reality is that it's the same problem, because when we say that a school is performing well, or that leadership is strong in a school, or that the education is good in that school, what we're really saying is that the education, or the leadership, or the school, is consistently good. **What makes for [only] adequate provision is that it is inconsistent.** So, that inconsistency—. In schools and other providers where we note that they are adequate, there are pockets of good practice but it isn't consistent throughout the system. **That's what leads to this variability** that we see at the system level, that you have variability within those pockets from providers.

## Standards of teaching

The quality of teaching is the **biggest influence** on how well learners learn, but it is the **weakest aspect** of provision across most areas of education in Wales.

This is how [Estyn's press release](#) reported the publication of its Chief Inspector's annual report for 2015/16. It appears to reinforce the need for the **reforms that the Welsh Government is making to teachers' training and professional development.**

Indeed, there is a particular focus in the Chief Inspector's annual report this year on **better professional learning and staff development**, which the Chief Inspector describes as a '**structural requirement for improved teaching**'. His report includes ten sets of questions for schools, which are designed to aid their support for teachers' professional learning.

The Chief Inspector reports that just over three quarters of primary schools inspected in 2015/16 had good or better standards of teaching. However, this is true in only a



minority of secondary schools. Teaching is **excellent in only 'very few'** primary and secondary schools.

The Welsh Government is reforming the development opportunities on offer to teachers. It is working with 'Pioneer schools' towards the establishing of a **new single professional learning offer by July 2018**, in time for the availability of the new curriculum in September 2018. New professional standards are also being developed along with a **revamp of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes** (following the Furlong Review) with new 'transformational' versions to be **introduced in September 2019**. The Children, Young People and Education Committee is currently undertaking an [Inquiry into Teachers' Professional Learning and Education](#).

### Other key observations

- Performance is **more polarised at secondary school** level than primary school level. More secondary schools have either Excellent or Unsatisfactory performance and prospects for improvement, whereas primary schools tend to be clustered predominantly around the two middle judgements of Good and Adequate. This is a **continuing pattern** from previous years.
- There is a **growing trend of entering pupils early for exams**. Estyn find that it can be beneficial in certain subjects, particularly Mathematics but if applied more broadly to larger cohorts of pupils it **can be detrimental**. It might help pupils gain C grades and help schools' Level 2 threshold performance (5 or more GCSEs at grades A\*–C) data but Estyn say it has 'drawbacks'.
- More able learners do not achieve as well as they should. This suggests the **system is not doing enough to enable more able and talented pupils to fulfil their potential**. The OECD has observed that Wales has a comparatively inclusive system but does not stretch more able and talented pupils as well as it could.
- The proportion of pupils achieving 5 GCSEs at **grades A\*–C** has **increased** from 51.1% in 2012 to 57.9% in 2015 and 60.3% in 2016, although the proportion achieving 5 GCSEs at **grades A\*–A** has **reduced** from 17.1% in 2012 to 16.6% in 2015 and 15.9% in 2016. (Note that the Welsh Government began using a slightly different statistical method in 2016, measuring the cohort of pupils in Year 11 rather than those aged 15 at the start of the academic year.)



- The **gap** between the proportion of pupils **eligible for free school meals** achieving the Level 2 threshold inclusive (5 GCSEs at grades A\*–C including Welsh/English and Maths) and other pupils was **31 percentage points** in 2016. This is the **narrowest the gap has been in ten years**.
- Estyn [inspected each regional consortia](#) in 2015/16. The Chief Inspector reports that the **consortia do not sufficiently analyse** the progress of groups of pupils, including the more able, in enough detail. They are also **not doing enough to tackle variability in standards**, particularly between secondary schools.
- The long-term problem of **poor performance and outcomes within Pupil Referral units** continued in 2015/16. Annual reports over a number of years have highlighted this as an area of concern.

What does Estyn actually look at when it inspects schools and other settings?

Estyn uses a [Common Inspection Framework](#), which was introduced at the start of the current cycle in September 2010. This framework consists of three key questions on ‘how good’ are outcomes, provision, and leadership and management. Estyn then forms **two overall judgements about the current performance and prospects for improvement** of each setting according to a four-point scale: Excellent; Good; Adequate; Unsatisfactory.

Estyn publishes [data on its inspection outcomes](#). This provides **details of all inspection judgements** since the start of the current inspection framework cycle in September 2010. This can be filtered by specific sectors.

Tuesday’s Plenary debate (7 March 2017) will be broadcast on [Senedd TV](#) and a transcript will be available on the [Assembly’s Record of Proceedings](#).

---

Article by [Michael Dauncey](#), National Assembly for Wales Research Service.  
Image from Flickr by theilr. Licensed under the Creative Commons.

