Primary

Schools Data

1,219

No. of schools 2023

1,216

No. of schools 2024

1,205

No. of schools 2025

Pupils Data

252,613

All pupils

431

No. of pupils in maintained nursery

58,262

No. of pupils aged under 5

193,904

No. of pupils aged 5 to 10

16

No. of pupils aged 11 and over

20.5%

eFSM (Aged 5-15)

7.4%

EAL A-C (Aged 5-15)

10.7%

Able to speak Welsh (Aged 5-15)

9.2%

Pupils with additional learning needs (Aged 5-15)

Follow-up Data

No. in FU September 2024

ER: **15**   SM: **17**   SI: **9**

No. removed 2024-2025

SM: **6**   SI: **3**

No. downgraded from ER to SI 2024-2025: 1

Inspection activity

No. of core inspections: **207**

No. of interim visits: **178**

Welsh-medium: **116**

English-medium: **269**

No. went into FU after core
inspection 2024-2025

SM: **9**   SI: **7**

Total in FU August 2025

SM: **18**   SI: **14**

2 federated schools closed in
special measures

Summary

In September 2024, at the start of a new inspection cycle, we introduced a new streamlined approach to inspection in primary schools. We continued to evaluate and report on the quality of teaching; the progress pupils made from their individual starting points and the specific context of the school. Our focus on equity and well-being remains central to the process to reflect Curriculum for Wales values. Adopting a collaborative approach to evaluating the school's work with school leaders contributed to professional learning experiences for staff. Interim visits allowed us to engage with schools more frequently to support them with their evaluation and improvement processes.

In a majority of schools, leaders and teachers have begun to reflect meaningfully on how their curriculum helps pupils realise the four purposes. Around half of schools have evaluated their curriculum purposefully and many of these schools have adapted learning experiences thoughtfully to build on pupils' prior knowledge and consider relevant contexts for learning. A few schools provided innovative and engaging learning experiences that deepen pupils' understanding across Areas of learning. However, around a third of schools made slower progress in developing a cohesive and progressive curriculum. In these schools, planning lacked clarity and areas such as Religion, values and ethics (RVE) and Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) were underdeveloped.

A majority of schools supported pupils to become independent and reflective learners. Where practice was strongest, staff planned carefully to develop pupils' thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills. In a minority of schools, pupils had too few opportunities to develop independence due to excessive adult direction.

Teaching quality remained variable. In the strongest cases, teachers had high expectations, used assessment effectively and provided useful feedback. Where teaching was less effective, pupils' progress was limited by a lack of challenge and weak understanding of individual needs. Provision to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills was inconsistent. Most schools promoted a strong Welsh ethos, but oracy remained an area for improvement in English-medium schools.

Most schools provided effective support for pupils' well-being. Many provided effective support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). However, persistent absence remained a concern, particularly for pupils eligible for free school meals. Opportunities for meaningful pupil leadership were underdeveloped in just under half of schools.

Where leadership was effective, schools had a clear vision and strong professional learning cultures. Leaders used monitoring and evaluation to improve teaching and learning. However, a minority of schools lacked sharp self-evaluation and did not assess the impact of professional learning well enough. Many schools used grant funding strategically, although evaluation of its impact varied.

Teaching and learning

Around half of schools inspected had evaluated how well their curriculum helps pupils realise the four purposes. In many of these schools, leaders and teachers reviewed and adapted learning experiences thoughtfully, often building on the principles of the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. They considered how to help pupils make sense of their learning, linking it to previous knowledge and real-life experiences. In a few schools, staff provided meaningful topics that enabled pupils to deepen their learning over time. These schools often provided valuable opportunities for pupils to extend their knowledge and understanding of most aspects of Curriculum for Wales and gave them time to refine their skills. A few schools found innovative ways to enrich the curriculum, for example through purposeful outdoor learning or highly creative cross-curricular projects that enabled pupils to apply a wide range of skills in increasingly sophisticated contexts. Read how Oakfield Primary School in the Vale of Glamorgan developed a creative curriculum through the expressive arts and inquiry-based learning.

Around a third of schools made slower progress in developing a curriculum that is cohesive and progressive. Leaders in these schools often lacked a clear strategy for realising all aspects of the Curriculum for Wales Framework. Learning related to areas such as RVE, RSE, human rights and diversity was often underdeveloped, with experiences lacking relevance or a strong enough focus on pupils' interests and lived experiences.

A majority of schools continued to support pupils to become independent and reflective learners. Staff in these schools used the learning environment effectively and adapted their teaching to promote pupils' decision-making. They planned learning in a way that allowed pupils to influence their learning beyond making simple suggestions about topics. These pupils were typically better prepared to evaluate their own progress, consider how they learn, and identify ways to improve. In a few schools, staff planned carefully to develop pupils' integral skills – such as problem-solving, organisation and personal effectiveness – from an early age. However, in a minority of schools, pupils had too few opportunities to develop independence. Too much adult direction limited pupils' ability to be curious, think critically, take initiative, and manage their learning or play imaginatively. Read how Ffynnon Taf Primary School in Rhondda Cynon Taf developed rich and highly engaging learning opportunities that encourage pupils to apply their skills to new situations with growing independence.

In a majority of schools, teachers supported pupils to engage well with their learning. They showed an awareness of pupils' developmental stages and individual needs and focused learning clearly on pupils' individual progress. Where teaching was particularly strong, staff had high expectations for all learners, including those with ALN and those from low-income households. They used assessment information effectively, asked considered questions to check pupils' understanding and guided their next steps in learning appropriately. Pupils received useful feedback that encouraged them to reflect on and improve their work. In a very few schools, teachers built on pupils' strong oracy skills to implement a highly successful dialogical approach to supporting pupils' progress. This meant that pupils were active participants in their learning. Talking about their learning further developed their understanding of concepts and helped them think about them from different perspectives.

In a minority of schools, pupils' learning lacked sufficient depth, and teachers did not always have a clear understanding of individual pupils' learning needs. They often moved through content too quickly, before pupils had developed a secure grasp of the concepts. Opportunities to practise and apply skills were limited, and tasks lacked appropriate levels of challenge. As a result, pupils did not make sufficient progress.

The quality of provision for developing pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills varied. In a minority of schools, teachers planned effectively to support pupils to build on their skills and apply them in suitably challenging contexts across the curriculum. Ysgol Esgob Morgan VCP school in Denbighshire is a good example of a school where pupils develop their cross-curricular skills through authentic learning experiences.

In the most effective primary schools, reading was planned purposefully and embedded across the curriculum. These schools developed pupils' decoding and fluency skills and promoted a deeper understanding of texts. Teachers used shared and guided reading approaches effectively, modelling strategies to help pupils become critical readers. Where practice was most effective, schools made strong links between oracy, reading and writing. Pupils recognised these links and transferred their knowledge between activities that required them to apply one or more of the strands to their learning. Teachers ensured that pupils had continuously high-quality opportunities to practise, refine and develop their talk, building on their early experiences throughout the phase to form a secure basis for developing the advanced skills older pupils needed for their next phase of education. In schools where the quality of teaching in literacy needed addressing, teachers did not enable pupils to make sense of their learning or to recognise the value of literacy skills. Often, they did not identify readiness to progress suitably. This led to inappropriate approaches to teaching reading, for example, that did not align with pupils' stage of development, challenge pupils well enough or extend their skills as they demonstrated competence. In a few schools, planning for reading lacked coherence. An overemphasis on technical accuracy, insufficient focus on comprehension, and missed opportunities to embed reading across the curriculum hindered pupils' progress.

In schools where teachers focused well on developing pupils' mathematical knowledge, pupils often demonstrated a secure understanding of concepts when applying their numeracy skills. Teachers planned learning progressively and used a range of carefully considered strategies to deepen pupils' understanding. However, in a few schools, where the teaching of mathematics was not effective, pupils did not develop their knowledge of the five proficiencies well enough to ensure the depth of understanding needed to apply their mathematical knowledge effectively. Teaching often focused too heavily on showing pupils the steps to complete a task rather than developing their understanding of the underlying concepts. This limited the progress pupils were able to make. Pupils did not have sufficient opportunities to apply their skills in in meaningful contexts, or to explore concepts through both concrete and abstract methods. Often the range of pedagogy used in mathematics lessons in these schools was too narrow and did not allow pupils the time to make sense of the relationship between one concept and another. There are further insights in our thematic report (estyn.gov).

Most schools provided regular opportunities for pupils to develop their digital competence and pupils often used digital technology to enhance and support their learning in other aspects of the curriculum. In a few schools, teachers ensured that pupils made progress in a wide range of digital skills and provided worthwhile opportunities for them to apply these skills purposefully. They began to explore the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance learning experiences. A few schools inspected received a recommendation to improve provision for supporting pupils' progress in digital competence. In these schools the curriculum did not provide a broad enough range of skills and

teachers did not consider pupils' next steps in learning effectively. Often in these schools pupils did not build on their skills at a swift enough pace to make the progress they should.

Many schools continued to promote a Welsh ethos and encouraged pupils to value and enjoy the Welsh language. Overall, pupils in Welsh-medium schools made good progress in developing their oracy skills. Pupils in Welsh-medium schools identified as latecomers to Welsh made strong progress as a result of the Welsh Immersion provision. Pupils in The Gwynedd Immersion Education System, for example, benefited from highly effective support. However, Welsh oracy remained a weakness in English-medium schools, with just over a quarter receiving a recommendation to improve pupils' Welsh language skills.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Many schools combined effective strategies to challenge poor attendance with strong support for families, and engaging learning experiences. Frequently, staff worked directly with pupils and families to reduce barriers to regular attendance. However, attendance among pupils eligible for free school meals remained a concern. In addition, a minority of schools did not address persistent absenteeism effectively, particularly among pupils with ALN. Read how a focus on pupil participation has improved attendance at Ysgol Gynradd Llanbedrgoch on Anglesey.

Most schools provided effective learning and well-being support for pupils with ALN. In many cases, these pupils made good—and sometimes strong—progress. Where provision was most effective, leaders set high expectations, ensured that staff had access to relevant professional learning, and planned support carefully. These schools worked well with external agencies and prioritised early intervention. In a very few schools, staff did not match teaching and learning approaches well enough to pupils' needs. They did not provide appropriate support or consider how children learn to ensure that pupils with ALN make the progress they should.

Pupils attending local authority specialist classes within primary schools generally developed positive attitudes to learning and benefited from valuable, tailored support. Staff in these classes created calm, safe learning environments and enhanced pupils' experiences effectively through the use of sensory rooms and outdoor areas. In a few schools, staff ensured that pupils in these classes were integrated purposefully into the life and work of the school.

Most schools created inclusive and supportive environments where pupils felt safe, respected and fairly treated. Staff had a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and contributed well to creating a strong safeguarding culture. In many schools pupils developed a sense of belonging and contributed positively to school life.

Just over half of schools provided meaningful opportunities for pupils, including those with ALN, to develop leadership skills. These pupils felt that their voices were heard and that they influenced aspects of school life. In a very few schools, pupil leadership was closely linked to raising aspirations through the curriculum. However, just under half of schools did not provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to influence decision-making or lead change. Although many had established pupil leadership groups, their role was often constrained by excessive adult direction. Too often, pupil representatives lacked opportunities to engage with the wider school community and had limited impact on school improvement.

A few schools gave pupils opportunities to learn how to recognise unhealthy relationships. However,

important areas such as Health and Well-being and the citizenship strand of the Digital Competence Framework (DCF) were not always considered carefully enough. As a result, pupils in these schools did not develop a secure understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe, particularly when online at school and at home.

Leading and improving

In many schools, leaders had a clear strategic vision aligned to national priorities and the school's own improvement plans. Where leadership was most effective, leaders used monitoring and professional learning effectively to improve the quality of teaching. Many schools involved staff in reflective practices and developed leadership at all levels through strategies such as coaching, mentoring and collaboration with partner schools. Effective school leaders viewed professional learning as central to improving outcomes. They fostered a collaborative culture and aligned staff professional learning closely to pupils' learning and well-being needs. Leaders in these schools evaluated the success of professional learning through its impact on the quality of teaching and on pupils' progress.

A minority of schools received a recommendation to improve leadership. In these schools, monitoring was often compliance-driven and lacked a sharp focus on improving outcomes. Leadership was not distributed effectively, and weak self-evaluation led to unclear professional learning priorities.

A majority of schools had clear strategies to improve leaders' and teachers' knowledge and understanding of child-centred approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. In the most effective schools, staff often demonstrated the impact of professional learning on provision for the youngest learners as a firm foundation for pupils' learning. In these schools, staff had a secure understanding of child development and considered the value of outdoor learning, observations, play and play-based learning, and authentic learning experiences. A very few schools continued to build on these vital early experiences to ensure that teachers of older pupils planned meaningful and relevant learning that enabled all pupils to make at least good progress across the curriculum. Read how leaders at Newton Primary School in Porthcawl planned professional learning to ensure high quality teaching and learning.

A minority of schools struggled to assess the impact of professional learning on pupils' progress. In a few schools, leaders did not align professional learning suitably to the school's context, pupils' needs or improving the quality of teaching. Although most schools continued to review and refine their curriculum, its successful implementation remained variable. Many prioritised pupils' Welsh language development but did not embed approaches well enough to ensure sustained progression. Estyn's review Teaching the Curriculum for Wales identifies the impact of sustained, collaborative professional learning on improving pedagogy.

In a minority of schools, governors provided effective support and oversight. They had a sound understanding of school priorities and scrutinised financial decisions well, including the strategic use of grant funding. Strong governing bodies evaluated the impact of their work, sought pupils' and parents' views and monitored key areas such as safeguarding and attendance purposefully. Although many governors were committed to school improvement, in a few schools, governing bodies relied too heavily on headteachers for information. A minority focused too much on operational issues rather than strategic development. Read how Ysgol Gymraeg Rhydaman in Carmarthenshire involves staff and governors effectively in self-evaluation.

Leaders in many schools were committed to mitigating the impact of poverty. These schools fostered inclusive environments, secured good attendance, and improved well-being for pupils from low-income households. They thoughtfully considered school improvement priorities in the context of the needs of the local community, creating supportive school and family partnerships. A few enriched the curriculum to raise aspirations.

Many schools used the Pupil Development Grant strategically, funding targeted interventions and offering support such as uniform exchanges and subsidised trips. However, in a minority of schools, leaders did not evaluate the impact of grant spending on outcomes for pupils from low-income households well enough. In these schools, funding was not always ring-fenced appropriately or used effectively to reduce barriers to learning.

Overview of recommendations from inspections

In the 2024-2025 academic year, we visited 207 providers in the primary sector. Each provider was given at least one recommendation, and in total we provided 445 recommendations to providers.

195 providers (94%) were given a recommendation relating to **teaching and learning**. Of those, 16 are in a follow-up category.
- 66 providers (32%) had at least one recommendation about improving the quality of teaching or reducing its variability across the school to ensure that pupils make progress
- 59 providers (29%) had a recommendation about ensuring an appropriate level of challenge for pupils' learning
- 45 providers (22%) had a recommendation relating to independent learning skills

32 providers (16%) were given a recommendation related to **well-being, care, support and guidance**, of which 7 are in a follow-up category.
- 19 providers (9%) received a recommendation about improving attendance and punctuality

A total of 82 providers (40%) were given a recommendation related to **leading and improving**, of which 16 are in a follow-up category:
- 62 providers (30%) were given a recommendation relating to developing or strengthening self-evaluation and improvement
- 19 providers (9%) were given a recommendation about strengthening leadership

In total, across all three inspection areas, 28 providers were recommended to improve attendance and/punctuality.

Follow-up

At the start of the academic year, there were 17 primary schools in special measures, nine in need of significant improvement, and 15 subject to Estyn review. During the academic year, a further nine schools were placed into special measures, and a further eight schools deemed in need of significant improvement. This included one school that was previously placed in Estyn review, but following a monitoring visit was found to require significant improvement. Over the year, the proportion of primary schools found to require statutory follow-up at their core inspection was similar to that in previous years, at around 8%.

Inspectors removed six schools from special measures this year, where leaders had secured appropriate improvements. A further two federated schools closed in special measures. Inspectors found that three schools in significant improvement made sound progress in addressing the recommendations set out in their most recent core inspection, and these were removed from further monitoring. However, when inspectors monitored a further three schools requiring significant improvement, they found that early progress had stalled due to leadership turbulence. These schools were given an additional period of time to improve further.

Overall, taking account of the above, by the end of the academic year, 18 primary schools require special measures and 14 require significant improvement. The additional number is due to the slower pace of progress in a few schools placed in statutory follow-up.

In all cases where schools were placed into statutory categories, we noted concerns about the impact of leadership. In these schools, leaders did not identify or address weaknesses in provision well enough. As a result, leaders had not addressed the high proportion of poor teaching, which in turn meant that pupils did not make enough progress. In a minority of cases, working relationships had broken down, and the lack of stable leadership at a senior level had a negative impact on staff morale and engagement.