

School Engagement Sessions (previously scrutiny school visits)

(For consideration from September 2021 onwards.)

Scrutiny and School Improvement

The overarching purpose of school improvement is to help schools give learners the best possible learning experiences and outcomes.

Within the context of the new curriculum, this guidance aims to clarify the role of the school engagement sessions in fostering sustainable school improvement through a clear framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability.

In our approach, there is a clear distinction between **evaluation and improvement activities** and **accountability**. The majority of the energy and focus in the Carmarthenshire schools system should be on delivering school improvement, guided by effective self-evaluation, improvement planning and support in all schools. As part of evaluation and improvement, practitioners and school leaders should have the support and confidence to learn and improve their practice continually. This will enable them to thrive in a supportive and collaborative environment that will raise standards and ensure every young person can fulfil their potential.

Fundamental to the new arrangements is robust and continuous **self-evaluation** by schools. Effective self-evaluation will be complemented by professional dialogue between schools and the local authority, to agree on schools' **improvement priorities and support**. Informed by this, all schools will have a single, School Development Plan they are working towards.

Scrutiny and Accountability

The **accountability system**, in contrast, is the safety net to ensure that evaluation and improvement is functioning effectively. It should not drive school improvement activity, although it should ensure that problems are identified and addressed.

Therefore, alongside the improvement and support roles played by the local authority, the system requires effective democratic accountability and governance arrangements.

Accountability is for governance purposes. Information available and used for this purpose will help scrutiny to oversee the quality of delivery by the local authority and, in doing so, to fulfil their democratic accountability functions.

Democratic accountability in the local authority is critical to strengthening the middle tier's role in supporting schools and to monitor, challenge and improve the work it does as part of this role.

Scrutiny School Engagement Sessions

Scrutiny should enhance both improvement, accountability, and transparency within the local authority. The Education Scrutiny Committee should focus on ensuring that schools are well supported to deliver high quality education to all pupils.

School engagement sessions should be used effectively as part of scrutiny's wider processes to:

1. hold Cabinet members to account for the quality and impact of the Council's services to support schools;
2. scrutinise the work of the Council with regard to the services provided to support schools, rather than using their accountability arrangements to hold schools to account;
3. scrutinise how effectively the local authority works with the regional consortium, understanding that accountability for regional consortia is through their Joint Committee or Company Board (see below);
4. monitor and scrutinise the use of statutory powers to support and improve schools causing concern, in particular secondary schools.
5. consider the impact of decisions to reorganise schools on the improvement of schools.

Direct and first-hand engagement with schools will provide valuable opportunities for members of scrutiny to better understand the impact that the local authority's support has on provision across our school system.

The **engagement sessions** can take the form of physical meetings to schools, use of digital technology or requesting schools to attend meetings in the council chamber.

Key themes for academic year September 2021.

	Theme	Approach
Autumn	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Recovery from covid2. Preparedness for ALN transformation3. Wellbeing of staff	Currently remotely
Spring	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Preparedness for Curriculum2. WESP3. Recovery from Covid	Currently remotely
Summer	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. MEP – buildings2. Preparedness for New Curriculum	School Visits

Estyn

Estyn's inspections of local authorities will be regular. The focus should be on the quality and impact of governance and accountability arrangements with regard to schools and the effectiveness of local authority to support schools and learners. This will include evaluating the effectiveness of democratic accountability arrangements in supporting school improvement