Inspecting School Leadership in Wales

ESTYN: HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN WALES

ABSTRACT

This article attempts to show how the inspection of school leadership in Wales has changed over the last twenty-five years, reflecting changing conceptions of school leadership and in turn influencing and helping to determine those changing expectations. The history of inspecting school leadership reflects a shift from managerial concerns towards a school-improvement paradigm that sees schools as self-evaluating and self-improving organisations. Twenty-five years ago, the inspection of leadership was primarily focused on management and securing an orderly environment for children and staff. Over time, school leadership has become to be seen to be more about driving change, and improving standards and the quality of education. The focus of inspection now is on how well leaders establish and communicate a vision for the school, set high expectations for pupils and staff, and create a culture of continuous improvement. The scope of what leaders are expected to achieve within this paradigm has broadened over time. Leaders are now expected to think strategically and to possess not only the skills needed to lead and manage their own institution, but also those required for collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders, including parents and the community, other schools and external agencies. Leadership has also become a skill or competence that all staff, not only the most senior, should possess and demonstrate to varying degrees.

Key words: inspection, leadership, change, standards, Estyn.

The history of inspecting school leadership in Wales over the last quarter of a century reflects a shift from managerial concerns towards a school-improvement paradigm that sees schools as self-evaluating and self-improving organisations. Twenty-five years ago, the inspection of leadership was primarily about management and securing an orderly environment for children and staff. Over time, school leadership has become to be seen to be more about driving forward change, and improving standards and the quality of education. The focus of inspection now is on how well leaders establish and communicate a vision for the school, set high expectations for pupils and staff, and create a culture of continuous improvement. The scope of what leaders are expected to achieve within this paradigm has broadened over time. Leaders are now expected to think strategically and to possess not only the skills needed to lead and manage their own institution, but also those required for collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders, including parents and the community, other schools and external agencies. Leadership has also become a skill or competence that all staff, not only the most senior, should possess and demonstrate to varying degrees.

Inspecting school leadership during 1993–2003

The Chief Inspector's Annual Report for 1993–4 (OHMCI, 1995) included a short section on 'Leadership, organisation and management'. The bulk of the section focuses on organisation and management rather than on what we would now regard as the full range of key functions of leadership. The report starts by saying that 'nearly all primary and secondary schools are effectively organised on a day-to-day basis'. It focuses on 'clear administrative guidelines and routines', stresses the 'smooth running of schools' and the dissemination of 'clear school policies and procedures' (OHMCI, 1995: 19). There is an emphasis on school-development planning, written job descriptions and procedures for teacher appraisal. When the section focuses on school improvement, it is about the quality of support and guidance provided for class teachers by headteachers, deputy heads and curriculum leaders. While these are important managerial prerequisites, the focus suggests an educational landscape where there is relatively little demand for change compared with today, one where the emphasis was more on 'steady as she goes', and where schools were only tentatively beginning to self-evaluate.

The following year, there is a section in the annual report for the first time relating explicitly to 'school improvement' (OHMCI, 1996). The sub-section headings reflect a continuing focus on managerial aspects of improvement, for example on the quality of school-development plans, the preparation for inspection and the quality of schools' post-inspection action plans. Good leaders in primary schools are characterised as head-teachers who 'take a strong lead in curriculum planning, disseminate good practice in teaching and learning, promote close links with parents and governors and generally deal effectively with financial and administrative matters' (OHMCI, 1996: 20). The report mentions that fewer than one in ten headteachers in small primary schools had benefitted from training to help them to prepare for their duties 'as both managers and teachers'.

The notion of self-evaluation appears within annual reports throughout the 1990s, but comments tend to focus on the quality of school-development plans or post-inspection action plans. There is often discussion on how well curriculum leaders monitor teaching and learning in their subject areas, but there is nothing specifically about the quality of self-evaluation processes. The annual report for 1993–4 notes that the role of curriculum leaders 'in monitoring and evaluating standards of work in their subjects remains largely unrealised in the great majority of schools' (OHMCI, 1995: 19) and that classroom visits by senior staff, outside of formal teacher appraisal, happen 'rarely'. At this time, the term 'leader' had not become widely associated with headteachers. Inspectors used 'leadership' as a term, but headteachers were mainly 'managers'. School improvement was about development planning and providing curriculum support and guidance to staff.

In the 1998–9 annual report, the inspectorate reported, for the first time, on the quality of self-evaluation in secondary schools (Estyn, 2000). The inspectorate found that the quality of self-evaluation was good in only a third of secondary schools and was unsatisfactory in one in ten (Estyn, 2000). Around this time, the inspectorate began to focus far more explic-itly on the quality of schools' self-evaluation and on the impact of headteachers in identifying strengths and weaknesses and driving forward improvement in their schools. From 1998–9 onwards, there is a growing emphasis on the quality of self-evaluation and its role in school improve-ment. There is more commentary about schools using the inspection framework as the basis for their own self-evaluation and producing their own self-evaluation reports. The 1998–9 annual report talks about placing 'great emphasis on this central management role' (Estyn, 2000).

During this period, expectations of leadership were different in the further education (FE) sector in Wales. After their incorporation in 1992 and over a period that would continue to be characterised by a series of college mergers, FE colleges grew to have relatively large senior leadership teams and a dedicated senior leader with responsibility for managing quality. This led the inspectorate to refine its own thinking about the inspection of leadership. In collaboration with colleges, during the 1990s, Estyn also developed the role of the nominee (a representative of the provider who was a member of the inspection team) and peer assessors (representatives from other colleges joining the inspection team). Senior peer assessors, who were senior leaders from other colleges, joined Estyn inspections to inspect leadership and management alongside HMI. The inspection of curriculum areas was separated out from the inspection of educational effectiveness, which scrutinised aspects of leadership, management and governance. FE colleges were required to provide a self-assessment report (SAR) to Estyn prior to inspection and analysis of the SAR would inform the planning of inspections alongside an analysis of data on student outcomes. The introduction of these inspection practices encouraged and supported the significant development in leadership capacity across the FE sector throughout the 1990s.

Inspecting school leadership during 2003–10

With the development of a new inspection framework during 2003 and its roll-out in 2004, Estyn increasingly incorporated the inspection practices that had worked well in the FE sector, including the use of a nominee and peer assessors, into the inspection arrangements for schools. A key element within the 2004 arrangements was the requirement for schools to produce a self-evaluation report. Each school inspection now started with a consideration of the school's self-evaluation and inspectors produced a pre-inspection commentary on it to guide their work. The role of the school nominee on the inspection team became established across all the sectors that Estyn inspected and cohorts of school senior and middle managers were trained to undertake the peer assessor role. Peer assessors supported the collection of evidence, observed lessons, took part in the scrutiny of work and interviewed key staff, but did not have writing responsibilities at that stage and, while encouraged to contribute to team discussion, they did not take part in reaching final judgements.

From 2003–2004 onwards, annual reports begin to focus more on the role of leaders in providing clear direction and driving improvement. They looked back at the findings on self–evaluation in the 1997–8 annual report and use those as a benchmark to judge progress. The 2003–4 annual report for the first time lists good features associated with effective leadership. Leadership is good or better where the headteacher has 'a vision of what the school can achieve'. It focuses on the development of 'a positive team spirit and a clear sense of direction', the setting of high expectations and support for 'new and exciting projects'. Good headteachers 'tackle difficult issues in a constructive way' and they 'command respect and lead by example'. The report says that 'managers at all levels' visit lessons often, inspect pupils' work, analyse pupil outcomes and draw up helpful reports on standards and quality in their areas of responsibility (Estyn, 2005: 32).

During this time, the focus of inspection moves away from managerial concerns, and leadership now becomes associated with strength of purpose and setting out a vision for the school. Inspectors focused more on the extent to which the headteacher's vision is shared among the senior leader–ship team and among staff. There is a stronger focus on consistency of purpose and values, and the extent to which all staff work towards the same end. This common ethos is seen to drive consistency of practice by staff in terms of the way they interact with learners, set high expectations, teach the curriculum and manage pupils' behaviour. The headteacher is now becoming a 'lead professional'. Inspectors look to see how involved and how knowledgeable headteachers are about what goes on in the classroom, how well they analyse performance information and monitor the progress of pupils.

In the 2004–5 annual report (Estyn, 2006) inspectors judged the quality of self-evaluation to be good with no important shortcomings or good with outstanding features in two-thirds of primary schools. The strong features of self-evaluation in these schools related to leaders who:

- carried out a whole-school review;
- involved all relevant people in the process;
- set clear goals for the school;
- noted strengths and areas that needed to be improved;
- compared their school's progress with other local schools that have pupils from similar backgrounds.

In around a third of the primary schools, there were weaknesses. Inspectors identified that schools were not:

- making effective use of assessment information about their pupils
- using assessment information to compare the performance of their school with that of other schools
- involving pupils, staff and parents in thinking about how well the school is doing
- developing the role of subject leaders in watching other colleagues teach so that they can give advice on how to improve the way pupils are learning.

By 2008–9, ensuring that effective approaches to self-evaluation and improvement are in place across all sectors is one of the four key 'challenges' identified in the annual report (Estyn, 2010). The quality of self-evaluation in primary schools was reported to have improved since 2005. Self-evaluation has now become more detailed and thorough. The outcomes of self-evaluation link better to school-improvement priorities and school-improvement planning. Self-evaluation processes are more embedded in the day-to-day work of the schools and there is a more open and self-critical ethos in schools that supports planning for improvement.

The annual report for 2008–9 (Estyn, 2010) also makes an explicit link between weak self-evaluation and a school becoming a cause for concern. It points out that, in these schools, leaders and managers often do not know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well enough and are therefore unable to plan effectively for improvement. They often do not monitor provision rigorously enough and do not have effective formal arrangements to gain the views of everyone involved in the school.

Inspecting school leadership during 2010–17

Prior to establishing new inspection arrangements in 2010, Estyn undertook an extensive public consultation that was influential in introducing several significant quality assurance measures. These included the decision to 'in-house' all school inspections and for all inspections to be led by HMI except for about half of primary school inspections led by registered inspectors directly accountable to Estyn. All inspection reports were quality assured by Estyn before publication. This gave the inspectorate full control over the quality of inspections and reports for the first time since the early 1990s.

The strengths of the inspection system developed through previous cycles were retained and built upon. In particular, the role of the nominee

continued and peer assessors became 'peer inspectors'. This change of title reflected the growing significance of this role. Peer inspectors were now full members of an inspection team and contributed to the full range of inspection work, including making judgements and writing text for reports. Over 1,200 school leaders were trained as peer inspectors. About a third of primary schools, 90 per cent of secondary schools, and 80 per cent of maintained special schools now have at least one peer inspector on their staff. This has enabled peer inspectors to contribute their up-to-date expertise to school inspections, and also to consolidate a range of leadership competencies including the skills necessary for effective self-evaluation and improvement planning in their own schools.

During this cycle of inspections, there were 1,769 inspections of maintained primary, secondary and special schools. Inspectors judged leadership as excellent in 14 per cent of secondary schools. This was higher than the proportion in primary schools (6 per cent). However, a higher proportion of secondary schools received unsatisfactory leadership judgements (8 per cent) than schools in the primary sector (4 per cent). Special schools received the highest proportion of excellent judgements for leadership (26 per cent). Inspection outcomes varied little over the cycle.

Within the 2010 inspection framework, inspectors considered four 'quality indicators' when evaluating leadership and management. These

Table 1: Percentage of schools receiving good or better judgements for leadership and aspects of leadership in maintained primary, secondary and special schools, 2010–17

	Primary (1,484 inspections)	*Secondary (238 inspections)*	*Maintained special (47 inspections)*
Key question 3: Leadership and management	74	58	83
3.1 Leadership	73	59	83
3.2 Improving quality	68	46	74
3.3 Partnership working	94	83	94
3.4 Resource management	71	47	87

were leadership, improving quality, partnership working and resource management. Table 1 shows the proportion of schools that received good or better judgements for leadership and management overall and for each quality indicator.
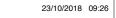
Across all sectors, the aspect of leadership with the most good or better judgements was 'partnership working'. The least positive judgements were awarded for 'improving quality'. This finding reflects the increased expectation for school leaders to identify aspects of the school's work they wished to improve and to take action to secure these improvements.

In schools where the leadership was excellent or good, senior leaders showed a commitment to supporting pupils to make strong progress and to achieve high standards. They provided a clear sense of direction and purpose for the school's work, for instance through an effective strategic vision underpinned by improvement processes. They set high expectations for themselves, their staff and pupils, particularly by making the quality of learning and teaching the top priority. In successful schools, leaders demonstrated a clear understanding of effective practice and the capacity to secure this across the school. Effective leaders balanced control and efficiency with autonomy and innovation: there were systems to support the school to run smoothly day to day and also opportunities for leaders and teachers to take risks and to innovate.

The most successful leaders were identified as having robust procedures for collecting a wide range of useful first-hand evidence that gave them a clear view of strengths and areas for improvement. Thorough analysis enabled them to identify priorities for improvement. They planned for improvement effectively and made efficient use of resources, including specific grants. They set challenging targets to improve pupils' standards and set out improvement actions in a logical, chronological order, including action to support targeted staff development. They worked with governors to ensure the allocation of funding to support improvements, and worked in partnership with a range of agencies, and with parents and carers. These leaders established effective arrangements to monitor progress against improvement targets, for example by establishing milestones that give helpful guidance as to what is expected at different points on the school's improvement journey. They established robust arrangements to hold those leading improvements to account for the impact and quality of their work.

Over the cycle, leadership required improvement in a quarter of primary schools and in four-in-ten secondary schools. In these schools, to various extents, inspectors identified a lack of strategic direction and

insufficient focus on improving outcomes for pupils. In the few instances where leadership was unsatisfactory, leaders did not have high expectations of themselves, their staff or their pupils. They did not provide sufficient direction or communicate effectively enough a vision of collective responsibility for improving standards, pupil progress and well-being. Too often in schools with weak improvement processes, self-evaluation was an event that took place for an external audience and was not seen as a valued process for identifying and acting on areas that need improvement.

In nearly all schools, leaders identified trends in learner outcomes through analysing information on pupil performance. They used this information to draw suitable conclusions about their school's performance. Increasingly, schools used performance data to draw comparisons between the performance of different groups of pupils, such as boys and girls, and pupils eligible for free school meals and other pupils. In less effective schools, leaders did not go beyond a basic analysis of this performance data. They did not use the full range of information available to teachers on pupils' progress to identify the underlying causes of performance trends, or highlight specific areas of weakness in learners' development, or in the quality of provision. Overall, self-evaluation was often too focused on past performance, at the expense of evaluating the progress of current learners and of carefully planning improvement activity.

Leaders were undertaking self-evaluation activities, such as listening to learners and scrutinising the work in pupils' books. However, the quality and impact of these activities varied too much across schools. Leaders in less effective schools rarely made sure that evaluative activities assessed the quality of teaching by looking at the impact it has on pupils. For example, during book scrutiny, leaders tended to check for compliance with the school's marking policy rather than evaluating the impact of feedback on securing improvements in pupils' work. Shortcomings in self-evaluation made it difficult for leaders to identify specific aspects of professional practice that require improvement at the whole-school level or by individual members of staff.

Leadership as a key factor in school improvement

The foreword to *Leadership and primary school improvement* (Estyn, 2016) says that:

normally, leadership is the most significant factor in influencing the pace, quality and sustainability of the school's improvement. Schools at different developmental stages often need different styles of leadership. For example, a school in special measures may need a different style of leadership from a school that already has strong improvement systems in place. At all stages of a school's development, leaders play a crucial role in developing the professional skills of their staff and supporting them throughout the school's improvement journey. (Estyn, 2016: 1)

Self-knowledge and external feedback can both help schools identify the strengths on which they can build and the weaknesses that require improvement. External inspection is particularly helpful where self-evaluation processes are ineffective. One of the statutory functions of inspection is to identify underperforming schools. Since 2010, inspectors have placed schools with important shortcomings into one of three categories of concern: schools requiring significant improvement and schools in need of special measures (both being long-standing statutory categories) and a new 'Estyn monitoring' category of follow-up activity. The quality of a school's leadership is an important factor in deciding the level of follow-up activity needed.

At each level of follow-up, schools are given time to formulate and implement a post-inspection action plan to secure improvements in relation to inspection recommendations. After that period of time, inspectors revisit schools to monitor progress. In nearly all cases, the leadership of the schools improves, often but not always, without the need for new appointments. During these follow-up visits, inspectors often find that staff have developed a shared sense of purpose and the collective will needed to improve provision and thus remove the school from follow-up. This new mind-set, allied to the rigorous nature of follow-up visits, and the significant support by local authorities and regional consortia, usually brings about the required improvement. The benefits of this process in improving leadership capacity are often sustainable and long term. The improvement-planning mechanisms employed to move out of a category of concern often become embedded as they embody good leadership practice. Existing leaders can often develop the leadership capability to effect change, although too many schools still need significant intervention from outside in order to bring about the necessary change.

The experience of working closely with schools causing concern has helped inspectors develop an in-depth understanding of the factors that support school improvement and the stages of development that schools typically go through as they manage change. As a result, inspectors have

been able to develop different models of 'the school improvement journey' and they have shared their findings in training events. Estyn has also published three reports about leadership development: *Twelve secondary school improvement journeys* (Estyn, 2013a), *Best practice in leadership development* (Estyn, 2015a) and *Leadership and primary school improvement* (Estyn, 2016).

These reports acknowledge that each school has a unique context and set of circumstances depending on its size, linguistic characteristics, location and the socio-economic backgrounds of its pupils. Each school has a different starting point and has to go through its own improvement journey. It is not a question of copying what another school has done, but schools in all sectors have much to learn from the experiences of others. In particular, there are common leadership actions that contribute to improvement at all stages of a school's improvement journey. These include:

- defining clearly the vision and strategic direction of the school: this vision evolves as the school improves;
- establishing and maintaining a culture where improving standards and well-being for all pupils is the main priority;
- making improving teaching the key focus for improving standards;
- delivering a curriculum that fully meets the needs of all pupils;
- sustaining a consistent focus on improving pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills;
- supporting the development of higher-order thinking and reasoning skills;
- making sure that continuous professional development of staff improves the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils;
- making all staff, especially those in leadership roles, accountable for their areas of work;
- making sure that self-evaluation is based on first-hand evidence and linked to school improvement priorities;
- providing governors with clear, understandable and honest analyses of how well the school is performing and encouraging them to challenge underperformance.

Establishing a strategic, long-term vision and plan for staged improvement that is owned by all staff is a key process for all improving schools. How the school's vision evolves over a period of change influences the rate of progress and the chances of long-term success.

Leading a school's 'improvement journey'

When schools are at a low ebb, they often have to spend time dealing with day-to-day challenges such as tackling poor behaviour and pupil absence. Under these circumstances, what effective senior leaders do is to set out non-negotiable expectations in relation to school routines and teachers' professional practice. They communicate a powerful message to all staff that pupils, regardless of background, can achieve well and that it is the responsibility of everyone in the school to enable this. They use this focus on moral purpose as a catalyst to change the culture of the school. They engage well with staff and the wider school community to gain their confidence and their commitment to a shared process of agreeing a vision for the school. They establish and model a core set of professional values that set the tone for the school's work. For example, they exemplify the professional behaviours they expect from all staff, such as interacting positively with pupils, delivering effective lessons, and implementing school policies consistently. This modelling of behaviour and values is important in ensuring that these behaviours become the expected norm.

As the school starts to improve, senior leaders continue to work interactively with staff to plot the next set of improvements to be made and establish means to hold staff more directly accountable for the quality of their work. For example, they establish clear roles and responsibilities and identify and discuss their developmental needs with staff in those roles so that they can plan ways of meeting these needs.

As momentum builds, senior leaders continue to involve staff in reviewing the strategic vision and direction for the school. The style of leadership becomes more collaborative. Clear and high expectations are discussed and agreed among staff and this work has a ripple effect throughout the school as leaders at all levels begin to implement change and involve others, for example by leading staff meetings or providing staff development. Leaders at all levels are encouraged to monitor and reflect on the impact of their work by undertaking self-evaluation activities in learning communities that identify strengths and areas that require further improvement. Over time, their observations become more precise. Leaders at all levels begin to develop and take specific responsibility for improvements in the areas of the school's work that they lead. In this way, leaders begin to deliver a curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils, in accord with the school's vision. Headteachers and senior leaders maintain a professional dialogue with leaders at all levels and monitor the impact of their work on learner outcomes and the quality of provision.

In schools that achieve and sustain high levels of performance, all stake-holders, including pupils and parents, shape the school's vision. All share a common sense of purpose. There is a continuous drive to achieve the highest standards in all aspects of the school's work and there is a commitment to set a strategic course in the short, medium and longer terms. There is no complacency. Highly developed systems and leadership structures drive a culture where all staff contribute to improving outcomes for pupils. All school improvement processes, including self-evaluation, improvement planning, performance management and continuing professional development, are aligned, woven together to complement each other. These schools maintain a sense of order and effective day-to-day systems are often fundamental to their sustained success. As these schools continue to improve, there are extensive arrangements for leadership development to help all staff to play their part fully and an expectation that all staff should show leadership at all levels. Leaders extend their influence beyond their own school to other schools, and provide them with support. They are a positive influence on broader developments within the education system as a whole. Overall, there is a move from compliance towards collaboration.

Distributed leadership and leadership development

The Chief HMI for Wales, in the foreword of the annual report 2011–12, states that 'While this annual report celebrates the good practice that exists, there is still much to be done to improve education and training in Wales. It is in the capacity and quality of leadership that the remedy lies. By that I mean the leadership offered not only by headteachers and principals and local authority chief executive officers but in the distributed leadership offered by teachers, learning support assistants, learning coaches and everyone involved in delivering and servicing education and training in Wales. Each one can offer leadership in their actions, their behaviours and their commitment' (Estyn, 2013b: 9). Similarly, the thematic report *Best practice in leadership development* (Estyn, 2015a) highlights the effective leadership strategies and practices used in successful schools. The main findings note that, in successful schools, staff at all levels display strong leadership behaviours and senior leaders develop a strong culture where they support the professional learning of staff and promote their career development.

In schools where there is a strong culture of professional learning, staff work effectively as a team to ensure that pupils achieve well in key areas.

There is clear communication between leaders and staff to ensure that there is a common understanding and an agreed language about learning and professional development. Successful schools have effective performance management procedures in place whereby senior leaders have objectives for developing staff as potential school leaders of the future. This enables leaders to identify that leadership potential at an early career-stage and to nurture and support individuals' development, while also ensuring effective succession planning. Successful schools often provide potential leaders with key opportunities to develop their leadership capacity by shadowing experienced colleagues and by undertaking mentoring activities with their peers. These activities encourage staff to evaluate their own performance objectively and support their peers.

Where schools distribute leadership activities among many members of staff, they provide more opportunities for potential leaders to gain experience in leading specific activities under the guidance of experienced colleagues. Effective leaders often encourage staff to visit other classes within their own school and in other schools to observe good practice. They also encourage staff to take advantage of acting or temporary leadership posts internally and to take up secondments elsewhere to enhance their leadership experience. Staff benefit most from a programme of professional learning that is planned carefully to meet the individual's specific needs, relates directly to the professional leadership standards and focuses directly on teaching and learning. This range of activities usually consists of in-house professional development opportunities supplemented by external provision and by coaching or mentoring programmes.

To date, there has not been enough support at the national or local level to develop the leadership skills of aspiring and experienced senior leaders. There have been too few opportunities to develop their leadership skills in key areas, such as improving teaching and implementing new initiatives. There is often very little leadership training through the medium of Welsh, other than that provided by schools themselves. It is only in a very few schools that new headteachers receive systematic mentoring from an experienced, effective headteacher. Not all new headteachers, even those in challenging situations, receive good enough support. However, it is to be hoped that, with the development of the National Academy of Educational Leadership, more equitable support of more consistent quality will be made available to meet the challenge of leadership development for new, aspiring and experienced leaders.

Leading collaborative and partnership working

'The ability of leaders to think beyond their own institution is a key fea-
ture of what continues to be required to improve education and training
in Wales' (Estyn, 2015b: 16). In recent years, there has been a growth in
partnership and collaborative working and the development of a
self-improving system. For this trend to succeed, school leaders need to be
committed to working with others and to sharing responsibility for learners
beyond their own schools. Effective partnership and collaborative working
requires outward-looking leaders who recognise that the school's internal
capacity for improvement can be strengthened by working with others.
Estyn has reported on how well schools work with others when evaluating
leadership and the quality and impact of strategic partnerships in all inspec-
tions since 2010. Based on evidence from inspection and thematic surveys,
we can identify a number of key aspects of leadership required for suc-
cessful collaborative working.

Highly effective leaders establish a strong culture of professional
learning, where staff are reflective and work as a team. They are willing to
share their practice with and learn from others. They identify the issues
that need to improve and actively seek out effective practice. They demon-
strate and model their strong commitment to collaborative working and
develop ways of working that make shared responsibility for professional
learning possible. Building a culture of school-to-school collaboration
involves a genuine commitment to being open to learning from others and
is at its most effective when practitioners have the opportunity to work
together to achieve a specific goal. Successful school-to-school learning
arrangements also require trust and transparency. It is important that those
working together have clearly identified strategic objectives and precise
success criteria for such collaboration. The focus of the collaborative work
must be on the impact on pupils.

Effective leaders work well with their stakeholder and partners in the
community they serve. They understand the context, background and
needs of learners and their families particularly well. Often they support
improved levels of well-being within the families of learners. In a few
schools, this leads to exceptional relationships between home and school
that lay the foundations for strong levels of school readiness and participa-
tion and enjoyment in learning for pupils. This is a developing strength in
many schools that serve areas of significant disadvantage. A good deal of
organisational improvement also involves working in external partnerships

with parents and with agencies such as children's services, educational psy-chologists and education welfare officers. These partnerships are crucial and need to be managed carefully if the support being delivered jointly between the school and these agencies is going to improve children's life chances.

Leaders of high-performing schools work closely with their linked cluster schools and with networks of other providers beyond their own school. This helps them to understand the different factors that contribute to effective practice and to assess the quality of their teaching and learning accurately. They benefit from working with other schools on activities such as joint scrutiny of pupils' work or joint lesson observations with advisers from the local authority or regional consortium. These joint activities help staff to reflect on their practice and build their confidence.

There are particular skills of leadership involved in working in partner-ships and collaborative networks, and in leading across networks to achieve collective objectives. As the foreword to the annual report for 2012–13 notes:

> Working collaboratively requires skills to establish mutual understanding of the outcomes to be achieved, which means exercising skills of negotiating with and influencing others. Establishing a mutually understood sense of purpose is crucial. It means that leaders have to understand how to find and use those lines of influ-ence that lead from strategy to the operation of delivering change or innovation. (Estyn, 2014: 14)

Next steps

New inspection arrangements introduced from September 2017 aim to continue to support school leaders to build on the identified strengths of effective schools, particularly in terms of honest and robust self-evaluation, in sharing best practice, and in driving forward change and improvement. The new arrangements focus on the role of leaders in negotiating and implementing a strategic vision, their contribution to the professional learning of staff, and the impact of that learning on teaching, learning and well-being. In addition, the new arrangements encourage ambitious lead-ership behaviours, including supporting innovative curriculum and pedagogical practice, and the development of partnership working with a range of stakeholders, including other schools, parents and the community, and external agencies.

This article has attempted to show how the inspection of school leader–ship has changed over the last twenty-five years, reflecting changing conceptions of school leadership and in turn influencing and helping to determine those changing expectations. As the education landscape and scope of school and system leadership continue to evolve, inspection will have a key role both in reflecting and reporting on change and in stimu-lating further innovation.

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ESTYN: HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN WALES

ABSTRACT

This article attempts to show how the inspection of school leadership in Wales has changed over the last twenty-five years, reflecting changing conceptions of school leadership and in turn influencing and helping to determine those changing expectations. The history of inspecting school leadership reflects a shift from managerial concerns towards a school-improvement paradigm that sees schools as self-evaluating and self-improving organisations. Twenty-five years ago, the inspection of leadership was primarily focused on management and securing an orderly environment for children and staff. Over time, school leadership has become to be seen to be more about driving change, and improving stand-ards and the quality of education. The focus of inspection now is on how well leaders establish and communicate a vision for the school, set high expectations for pupils and staff, and create a culture of continuous improvement. The scope of what leaders are expected to achieve within this paradigm has broadened over time. Leaders are now expected to think strategically and to possess not only the skills needed to lead and manage their own institution, but also those required for collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders, including parents and the community, other schools and external agencies. Leadership has also become a skill or competence that all staff, not only the most senior, should possess and demonstrate to varying degrees.

Key words: inspection, leadership, change, standards, Estyn.

The history of inspecting school leadership in Wales over the last quarter of a century reflects a shift from managerial concerns towards a school-improvement paradigm that sees schools as self-evaluating and self-improving organisations. Twenty-five years ago, the inspection of leadership was primarily about management and securing an orderly environment for children and staff. Over time, school leadership has become to be seen to be more about driving forward change, and improving standards and the quality of education. The focus of inspection now is on how well leaders establish and communicate a vision for the school, set high expectations for pupils and staff, and create a culture of continuous improvement. The scope of what leaders are expected to achieve within this paradigm has broadened over time. Leaders are now expected to think strategically and to possess not only the skills needed to lead and manage their own institution, but also those required for collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders, including parents and the community, other schools and external agencies. Leadership has also become a skill or competence that all staff, not only the most senior, should possess and demonstrate to varying degrees.

Inspecting school leadership during 1993–2003

The Chief Inspector's Annual Report for 1993–4 (OHMCI, 1995) included a short section on 'Leadership, organisation and management'. The bulk of the section focuses on organisation and management rather than on what we would now regard as the full range of key functions of leadership. The report starts by saying that 'nearly all primary and secondary schools are effectively organised on a day-to-day basis'. It focuses on 'clear administrative guidelines and routines', stresses the 'smooth running of schools' and the dissemination of 'clear school policies and procedures' (OHMCI, 1995: 19). There is an emphasis on school-development planning, written job descriptions and procedures for teacher appraisal. When the section focuses on school improvement, it is about the quality of support and guidance provided for class teachers by headteachers, deputy heads and curriculum leaders. While these are important managerial prerequisites, the focus suggests an educational landscape where there is relatively little demand for change compared with today, one where the emphasis was more on 'steady as she goes', and where schools were only tentatively beginning to self-evaluate.

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The following year, there is a section in the annual report for the first time relating explicitly to 'school improvement' (OHMCI, 1996). The sub-section headings reflect a continuing focus on managerial aspects of improvement, for example on the quality of school-development plans, the preparation for inspection and the quality of schools' post-inspection action plans. Good leaders in primary schools are characterised as head-teachers who 'take a strong lead in curriculum planning, disseminate good practice in teaching and learning, promote close links with parents and governors and generally deal effectively with financial and administrative matters' (OHMCI, 1996: 20). The report mentions that fewer than one in ten headteachers in small primary schools had benefitted from training to help them to prepare for their duties 'as both managers and teachers'.

The notion of self-evaluation appears within annual reports throughout the 1990s, but comments tend to focus on the quality of school-development plans or post-inspection action plans. There is often discussion on how well curriculum leaders monitor teaching and learning in their subject areas, but there is nothing specifically about the quality of self-evaluation processes. The annual report for 1993–4 notes that the role of curriculum leaders 'in monitoring and evaluating standards of work in their subjects remains largely unrealised in the great majority of schools' (OHMCI, 1995: 19) and that classroom visits by senior staff, outside of formal teacher appraisal, happen 'rarely'. At this time, the term 'leader' had not become widely associated with headteachers. Inspectors used 'leadership' as a term, but headteachers were mainly 'managers'. School improvement was about development planning and providing curriculum support and guidance to staff.

In the 1998–9 annual report, the inspectorate reported, for the first time, on the quality of self-evaluation in secondary schools (Estyn, 2000). The inspectorate found that the quality of self-evaluation was good in only a third of secondary schools and was unsatisfactory in one in ten (Estyn, 2000). Around this time, the inspectorate began to focus far more explic-itly on the quality of schools' self-evaluation and on the impact of headteachers in identifying strengths and weaknesses and driving forward improvement in their schools. From 1998–9 onwards, there is a growing emphasis on the quality of self-evaluation and its role in school improve-ment. There is more commentary about schools using the inspection framework as the basis for their own self-evaluation and producing their own self-evaluation reports. The 1998–9 annual report talks about placing 'great emphasis on this central management role' (Estyn, 2000).

During this period, expectations of leadership were different in the further education (FE) sector in Wales. After their incorporation in 1992 and over a period that would continue to be characterised by a series of college mergers, FE colleges grew to have relatively large senior leadership teams and a dedicated senior leader with responsibility for managing quality. This led the inspectorate to refine its own thinking about the inspection of leadership. In collaboration with colleges, during the 1990s, Estyn also developed the role of the nominee (a representative of the provider who was a member of the inspection team) and peer assessors (representatives from other colleges joining the inspection team). Senior peer assessors, who were senior leaders from other colleges, joined Estyn inspections to inspect leadership and management alongside HMI. The inspection of curriculum areas was separated out from the inspection of educational effectiveness, which scrutinised aspects of leadership, management and governance. FE colleges were required to provide a self-assessment report (SAR) to Estyn prior to inspection and analysis of the SAR would inform the planning of inspections alongside an analysis of data on student outcomes. The introduction of these inspection practices encouraged and supported the significant development in leadership capacity across the FE sector throughout the 1990s.

Inspecting school leadership during 2003–10

With the development of a new inspection framework during 2003 and its roll-out in 2004, Estyn increasingly incorporated the inspection practices that had worked well in the FE sector, including the use of a nominee and peer assessors, into the inspection arrangements for schools. A key element within the 2004 arrangements was the requirement for schools to produce a self-evaluation report. Each school inspection now started with a consideration of the school's self-evaluation and inspectors produced a pre-inspection commentary on it to guide their work. The role of the school nominee on the inspection team became established across all the sectors that Estyn inspected and cohorts of school senior and middle managers were trained to undertake the peer assessor role. Peer assessors supported the collection of evidence, observed lessons, took part in the scrutiny of work and interviewed key staff, but did not have writing responsibilities at that stage and, while encouraged to contribute to team discussion, they did not take part in reaching final judgements.

From 2003–2004 onwards, annual reports begin to focus more on the role of leaders in providing clear direction and driving improvement. They looked back at the findings on self–evaluation in the 1997–8 annual report and use those as a benchmark to judge progress. The 2003–4 annual report for the first time lists good features associated with effective leadership. Leadership is good or better where the headteacher has 'a vision of what the school can achieve'. It focuses on the development of 'a positive team spirit and a clear sense of direction', the setting of high expectations and support for 'new and exciting projects'. Good headteachers 'tackle difficult issues in a constructive way' and they 'command respect and lead by example'. The report says that 'managers at all levels' visit lessons often, inspect pupils' work, analyse pupil outcomes and draw up helpful reports on standards and quality in their areas of responsibility (Estyn, 2005: 32).

During this time, the focus of inspection moves away from managerial concerns, and leadership now becomes associated with strength of purpose and setting out a vision for the school. Inspectors focused more on the extent to which the headteacher's vision is shared among the senior leader–ship team and among staff. There is a stronger focus on consistency of purpose and values, and the extent to which all staff work towards the same end. This common ethos is seen to drive consistency of practice by staff in terms of the way they interact with learners, set high expectations, teach the curriculum and manage pupils' behaviour. The headteacher is now becoming a 'lead professional'. Inspectors look to see how involved and how knowledgeable headteachers are about what goes on in the classroom, how well they analyse performance information and monitor the progress of pupils.

In the 2004–5 annual report (Estyn, 2006) inspectors judged the quality of self-evaluation to be good with no important shortcomings or good with outstanding features in two-thirds of primary schools. The strong features of self-evaluation in these schools related to leaders who:

•   carried out a whole–school review;
•   involved all relevant people in the process;
•   set clear goals for the school;
•   noted strengths and areas that needed to be improved;
•   compared their school's progress with other local schools that have pupils from similar backgrounds.

In around a third of the primary schools, there were weaknesses. Inspectors identified that schools were not:

- making effective use of assessment information about their pupils
- using assessment information to compare the performance of their school with that of other schools
- involving pupils, staff and parents in thinking about how well the school is doing
- developing the role of subject leaders in watching other colleagues teach so that they can give advice on how to improve the way pupils are learning.

By 2008–9, ensuring that effective approaches to self-evaluation and improvement are in place across all sectors is one of the four key 'challenges' identified in the annual report (Estyn, 2010). The quality of self-evaluation in primary schools was reported to have improved since 2005. Self-evaluation has now become more detailed and thorough. The outcomes of self-evaluation link better to school-improvement priorities and school-improvement planning. Self-evaluation processes are more embedded in the day-to-day work of the schools and there is a more open and self-critical ethos in schools that supports planning for improvement.

The annual report for 2008–9 (Estyn, 2010) also makes an explicit link between weak self-evaluation and a school becoming a cause for concern. It points out that, in these schools, leaders and managers often do not know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well enough and are therefore unable to plan effectively for improvement. They often do not monitor provision rigorously enough and do not have effective formal arrangements to gain the views of everyone involved in the school.

Inspecting school leadership during 2010–17

Prior to establishing new inspection arrangements in 2010, Estyn undertook an extensive public consultation that was influential in introducing several significant quality assurance measures. These included the decision to 'in-house' all school inspections and for all inspections to be led by HMI except for about half of primary school inspections led by registered inspectors directly accountable to Estyn. All inspection reports were quality assured by Estyn before publication. This gave the inspectorate full control over the quality of inspections and reports for the first time since the early 1990s.

The strengths of the inspection system developed through previous cycles were retained and built upon. In particular, the role of the nominee

continued and peer assessors became 'peer inspectors'. This change of title reflected the growing significance of this role. Peer inspectors were now full members of an inspection team and contributed to the full range of inspection work, including making judgements and writing text for reports. Over 1,200 school leaders were trained as peer inspectors. About a third of primary schools, 90 per cent of secondary schools, and 80 per cent of maintained special schools now have at least one peer inspector on their staff. This has enabled peer inspectors to contribute their up-to-date expertise to school inspections, and also to consolidate a range of leader-ship competencies including the skills necessary for effective self-evaluation and improvement planning in their own schools.

During this cycle of inspections, there were 1,769 inspections of main-tained primary, secondary and special schools. Inspectors judged leadership as excellent in 14 per cent of secondary schools. This was higher than the proportion in primary schools (6 per cent). However, a higher proportion of secondary schools received unsatisfactory leadership judgements (8 per cent) than schools in the primary sector (4 per cent). Special schools received the highest proportion of excellent judgements for leadership (26 per cent). Inspection outcomes varied little over the cycle.

Within the 2010 inspection framework, inspectors considered four 'quality indicators' when evaluating leadership and management. These

Table 1: Percentage of schools receiving good or better judgements for leadership and aspects of leadership in maintained primary, secondary and special schools, 2010–17

	Primary (1,484 inspections)	*Secondary (238 inspections)*	*Maintained special (47 inspections)*
Key question 3: Leadership and management	74	58	83
3.1 Leadership	73	59	83
3.2 Improving quality	68	46	74
3.3 Partnership working	94	83	94
3.4 Resource management	71	47	87

were leadership, improving quality, partnership working and resource management. Table 1 shows the proportion of schools that received good or better judgements for leadership and management overall and for each quality indicator.

Across all sectors, the aspect of leadership with the most good or better judgements was 'partnership working'. The least positive judgements were awarded for 'improving quality'. This finding reflects the increased expectation for school leaders to identify aspects of the school's work they wished to improve and to take action to secure these improvements.

In schools where the leadership was excellent or good, senior leaders showed a commitment to supporting pupils to make strong progress and to achieve high standards. They provided a clear sense of direction and purpose for the school's work, for instance through an effective strategic vision underpinned by improvement processes. They set high expectations for themselves, their staff and pupils, particularly by making the quality of learning and teaching the top priority. In successful schools, leaders demonstrated a clear understanding of effective practice and the capacity to secure this across the school. Effective leaders balanced control and efficiency with autonomy and innovation: there were systems to support the school to run smoothly day to day and also opportunities for leaders and teachers to take risks and to innovate.

The most successful leaders were identified as having robust procedures for collecting a wide range of useful first-hand evidence that gave them a clear view of strengths and areas for improvement. Thorough analysis enabled them to identify priorities for improvement. They planned for improvement effectively and made efficient use of resources, including specific grants. They set challenging targets to improve pupils' standards and set out improvement actions in a logical, chronological order, including action to support targeted staff development. They worked with governors to ensure the allocation of funding to support improvements, and worked in partnership with a range of agencies, and with parents and carers. These leaders established effective arrangements to monitor progress against improvement targets, for example by establishing milestones that give helpful guidance as to what is expected at different points on the school's improvement journey. They established robust arrangements to hold those leading improvements to account for the impact and quality of their work.

Over the cycle, leadership required improvement in a quarter of primary schools and in four-in-ten secondary schools. In these schools, to various extents, inspectors identified a lack of strategic direction and

insufficient focus on improving outcomes for pupils. In the few instances where leadership was unsatisfactory, leaders did not have high expectations of themselves, their staff or their pupils. They did not provide sufficient direction or communicate effectively enough a vision of collective responsibility for improving standards, pupil progress and well–being. Too often in schools with weak improvement processes, self–evaluation was an event that took place for an external audience and was not seen as a valued process for identifying and acting on areas that need improvement.

In nearly all schools, leaders identified trends in learner outcomes through analysing information on pupil performance. They used this information to draw suitable conclusions about their school's performance. Increasingly, schools used performance data to draw comparisons between the performance of different groups of pupils, such as boys and girls, and pupils eligible for free school meals and other pupils. In less effective schools, leaders did not go beyond a basic analysis of this performance data. They did not use the full range of information available to teachers on pupils' progress to identify the underlying causes of performance trends, or highlight specific areas of weakness in learners' development, or in the quality of provision. Overall, self–evaluation was often too focused on past performance, at the expense of evaluating the progress of current learners and of carefully planning improvement activity.

Leaders were undertaking self–evaluation activities, such as listening to learners and scrutinising the work in pupils' books. However, the quality and impact of these activities varied too much across schools. Leaders in less effective schools rarely made sure that evaluative activities assessed the quality of teaching by looking at the impact it has on pupils. For example, during book scrutiny, leaders tended to check for compliance with the school's marking policy rather than evaluating the impact of feedback on securing improvements in pupils' work. Shortcomings in self–evaluation made it difficult for leaders to identify specific aspects of professional practice that require improvement at the whole–school level or by individual members of staff.

Leadership as a key factor in school improvement

The foreword to *Leadership and primary school improvement* (Estyn, 2016) says that:

normally, leadership is the most significant factor in influencing the pace, quality and sustainability of the school's improvement. Schools at different developmental stages often need different styles of leadership. For example, a school in special measures may need a different style of leadership from a school that already has strong improvement systems in place. At all stages of a school's development, leaders play a crucial role in developing the professional skills of their staff and supporting them throughout the school's improvement journey. (Estyn, 2016: 1)

Self-knowledge and external feedback can both help schools identify the strengths on which they can build and the weaknesses that require improvement. External inspection is particularly helpful where self-evaluation processes are ineffective. One of the statutory functions of inspection is to identify underperforming schools. Since 2010, inspectors have placed schools with important shortcomings into one of three categories of concern: schools requiring significant improvement and schools in need of special measures (both being long-standing statutory categories) and a new 'Estyn monitoring' category of follow-up activity. The quality of a school's leadership is an important factor in deciding the level of follow-up activity needed.

At each level of follow-up, schools are given time to formulate and implement a post-inspection action plan to secure improvements in relation to inspection recommendations. After that period of time, inspectors revisit schools to monitor progress. In nearly all cases, the leadership of the schools improves, often but not always, without the need for new appointments. During these follow-up visits, inspectors often find that staff have developed a shared sense of purpose and the collective will needed to improve provision and thus remove the school from follow-up. This new mind-set, allied to the rigorous nature of follow-up visits, and the significant support by local authorities and regional consortia, usually brings about the required improvement. The benefits of this process in improving leadership capacity are often sustainable and long term. The improvement-planning mechanisms employed to move out of a category of concern often become embedded as they embody good leadership practice. Existing leaders can often develop the leadership capability to effect change, although too many schools still need significant intervention from outside in order to bring about the necessary change.

The experience of working closely with schools causing concern has helped inspectors develop an in-depth understanding of the factors that support school improvement and the stages of development that schools typically go through as they manage change. As a result, inspectors have

been able to develop different models of 'the school improvement journey' and they have shared their findings in training events. Estyn has also published three reports about leadership development: *Twelve secondary school improvement journeys* (Estyn, 2013a), *Best practice in leadership development* (Estyn, 2015a) and *Leadership and primary school improvement* (Estyn, 2016).

These reports acknowledge that each school has a unique context and set of circumstances depending on its size, linguistic characteristics, location and the socio-economic backgrounds of its pupils. Each school has a different starting point and has to go through its own improvement journey. It is not a question of copying what another school has done, but schools in all sectors have much to learn from the experiences of others. In particular, there are common leadership actions that contribute to improvement at all stages of a school's improvement journey. These include:

• defining clearly the vision and strategic direction of the school: this vision evolves as the school improves;
• establishing and maintaining a culture where improving standards and well-being for all pupils is the main priority;
• making improving teaching the key focus for improving standards;
• delivering a curriculum that fully meets the needs of all pupils;
• sustaining a consistent focus on improving pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills;
• supporting the development of higher-order thinking and reasoning skills;
• making sure that continuous professional development of staff improves the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils;
• making all staff, especially those in leadership roles, accountable for their areas of work;
• making sure that self-evaluation is based on first-hand evidence and linked to school improvement priorities;
• providing governors with clear, understandable and honest analyses of how well the school is performing and encouraging them to challenge underperformance.

Establishing a strategic, long-term vision and plan for staged improvement that is owned by all staff is a key process for all improving schools. How the school's vision evolves over a period of change influences the rate of progress and the chances of long-term success.

Leading a school's 'improvement journey'

When schools are at a low ebb, they often have to spend time dealing with day-to-day challenges such as tackling poor behaviour and pupil absence. Under these circumstances, what effective senior leaders do is to set out non-negotiable expectations in relation to school routines and teachers' professional practice. They communicate a powerful message to all staff that pupils, regardless of background, can achieve well and that it is the responsibility of everyone in the school to enable this. They use this focus on moral purpose as a catalyst to change the culture of the school. They engage well with staff and the wider school community to gain their confidence and their commitment to a shared process of agreeing a vision for the school. They establish and model a core set of professional values that set the tone for the school's work. For example, they exemplify the professional behaviours they expect from all staff, such as interacting positively with pupils, delivering effective lessons, and implementing school policies consistently. This modelling of behaviour and values is important in ensuring that these behaviours become the expected norm.

As the school starts to improve, senior leaders continue to work interactively with staff to plot the next set of improvements to be made and establish means to hold staff more directly accountable for the quality of their work. For example, they establish clear roles and responsibilities and identify and discuss their developmental needs with staff in those roles so that they can plan ways of meeting these needs.

As momentum builds, senior leaders continue to involve staff in reviewing the strategic vision and direction for the school. The style of leadership becomes more collaborative. Clear and high expectations are discussed and agreed among staff and this work has a ripple effect throughout the school as leaders at all levels begin to implement change and involve others, for example by leading staff meetings or providing staff development. Leaders at all levels are encouraged to monitor and reflect on the impact of their work by undertaking self-evaluation activities in learning communities that identify strengths and areas that require further improvement. Over time, their observations become more precise. Leaders at all levels begin to develop and take specific responsibility for improvements in the areas of the school's work that they lead. In this way, leaders begin to deliver a curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils, in accord with the school's vision. Headteachers and senior leaders maintain a professional dialogue with leaders at all levels and monitor the impact of their work on learner outcomes and the quality of provision.

In schools that achieve and sustain high levels of performance, all stakeholders, including pupils and parents, shape the school's vision. All share a common sense of purpose. There is a continuous drive to achieve the highest standards in all aspects of the school's work and there is a commitment to set a strategic course in the short, medium and longer terms. There is no complacency. Highly developed systems and leadership structures drive a culture where all staff contribute to improving outcomes for pupils. All school improvement processes, including self-evaluation, improvement planning, performance management and continuing professional development, are aligned, woven together to complement each other. These schools maintain a sense of order and effective day-to-day systems are often fundamental to their sustained success. As these schools continue to improve, there are extensive arrangements for leadership development to help all staff to play their part fully and an expectation that all staff should show leadership at all levels. Leaders extend their influence beyond their own school to other schools, and provide them with support. They are a positive influence on broader developments within the education system as a whole. Overall, there is a move from compliance towards collaboration.

Distributed leadership and leadership development

The Chief HMI for Wales, in the foreword of the annual report 2011–12, states that 'While this annual report celebrates the good practice that exists, there is still much to be done to improve education and training in Wales. It is in the capacity and quality of leadership that the remedy lies. By that I mean the leadership offered not only by headteachers and principals and local authority chief executive officers but in the distributed leadership offered by teachers, learning support assistants, learning coaches and everyone involved in delivering and servicing education and training in Wales. Each one can offer leadership in their actions, their behaviours and their commitment' (Estyn, 2013b: 9). Similarly, the thematic report *Best practice in leadership development* (Estyn, 2015a) highlights the effective leadership strategies and practices used in successful schools. The main findings note that, in successful schools, staff at all levels display strong leadership behaviours and senior leaders develop a strong culture where they support the professional learning of staff and promote their career development.

In schools where there is a strong culture of professional learning, staff work effectively as a team to ensure that pupils achieve well in key areas.

There is clear communication between leaders and staff to ensure that there is a common understanding and an agreed language about learning and professional development. Successful schools have effective performance management procedures in place whereby senior leaders have objectives for developing staff as potential school leaders of the future. This enables leaders to identify that leadership potential at an early careerstage and to nurture and support individuals' development, while also ensuring effective succession planning. Successful schools often provide potential leaders with key opportunities to develop their leadership capacity by shadowing experienced colleagues and by undertaking mentoring activities with their peers. These activities encourage staff to evaluate their own performance objectively and support their peers.

Where schools distribute leadership activities among many members of staff, they provide more opportunities for potential leaders to gain experience in leading specific activities under the guidance of experienced colleagues. Effective leaders often encourage staff to visit other classes within their own school and in other schools to observe good practice. They also encourage staff to take advantage of acting or temporary leadership posts internally and to take up secondments elsewhere to enhance their leadership experience. Staff benefit most from a programme of professional learning that is planned carefully to meet the individual's specific needs, relates directly to the professional leadership standards and focuses directly on teaching and learning. This range of activities usually consists of inhouse professional development opportunities supplemented by external provision and by coaching or mentoring programmes.

To date, there has not been enough support at the national or local level to develop the leadership skills of aspiring and experienced senior leaders. There have been too few opportunities to develop their leadership skills in key areas, such as improving teaching and implementing new initiatives. There is often very little leadership training through the medium of Welsh, other than that provided by schools themselves. It is only in a very few schools that new headteachers receive systematic mentoring from an experienced, effective headteacher. Not all new headteachers, even those in challenging situations, receive good enough support. However, it is to be hoped that, with the development of the National Academy of Educational Leadership, more equitable support of more consistent quality will be made available to meet the challenge of leadership development for new, aspiring and experienced leaders.

Leading collaborative and partnership working

'The ability of leaders to think beyond their own institution is a key feature of what continues to be required to improve education and training in Wales' (Estyn, 2015b: 16). In recent years, there has been a growth in partnership and collaborative working and the development of a self-improving system. For this trend to succeed, school leaders need to be committed to working with others and to sharing responsibility for learners beyond their own schools. Effective partnership and collaborative working requires outward-looking leaders who recognise that the school's internal capacity for improvement can be strengthened by working with others. Estyn has reported on how well schools work with others when evaluating leadership and the quality and impact of strategic partnerships in all inspections since 2010. Based on evidence from inspection and thematic surveys, we can identify a number of key aspects of leadership required for successful collaborative working.

Highly effective leaders establish a strong culture of professional learning, where staff are reflective and work as a team. They are willing to share their practice with and learn from others. They identify the issues that need to improve and actively seek out effective practice. They demonstrate and model their strong commitment to collaborative working and develop ways of working that make shared responsibility for professional learning possible. Building a culture of school-to-school collaboration involves a genuine commitment to being open to learning from others and is at its most effective when practitioners have the opportunity to work together to achieve a specific goal. Successful school-to-school learning arrangements also require trust and transparency. It is important that those working together have clearly identified strategic objectives and precise success criteria for such collaboration. The focus of the collaborative work must be on the impact on pupils.

Effective leaders work well with their stakeholder and partners in the community they serve. They understand the context, background and needs of learners and their families particularly well. Often they support improved levels of well-being within the families of learners. In a few schools, this leads to exceptional relationships between home and school that lay the foundations for strong levels of school readiness and participation and enjoyment in learning for pupils. This is a developing strength in many schools that serve areas of significant disadvantage. A good deal of organisational improvement also involves working in external partnerships

with parents and with agencies such as children's services, educational psy-chologists and education welfare officers. These partnerships are crucial and need to be managed carefully if the support being delivered jointly between the school and these agencies is going to improve children's life chances.

Leaders of high-performing schools work closely with their linked cluster schools and with networks of other providers beyond their own school. This helps them to understand the different factors that contribute to effective practice and to assess the quality of their teaching and learning accurately. They benefit from working with other schools on activities such as joint scrutiny of pupils' work or joint lesson observations with advisers from the local authority or regional consortium. These joint activities help staff to reflect on their practice and build their confidence.

There are particular skills of leadership involved in working in partner-ships and collaborative networks, and in leading across networks to achieve collective objectives. As the foreword to the annual report for 2012–13 notes:

> Working collaboratively requires skills to establish mutual understanding of the outcomes to be achieved, which means exercising skills of negotiating with and influencing others. Establishing a mutually understood sense of purpose is crucial. It means that leaders have to understand how to find and use those lines of influ-ence that lead from strategy to the operation of delivering change or innovation. (Estyn, 2014: 14)

Next steps

New inspection arrangements introduced from September 2017 aim to continue to support school leaders to build on the identified strengths of effective schools, particularly in terms of honest and robust self-evaluation, in sharing best practice, and in driving forward change and improvement. The new arrangements focus on the role of leaders in negotiating and implementing a strategic vision, their contribution to the professional learning of staff, and the impact of that learning on teaching, learning and well-being. In addition, the new arrangements encourage ambitious lead-ership behaviours, including supporting innovative curriculum and pedagogical practice, and the development of partnership working with a range of stakeholders, including other schools, parents and the community, and external agencies.

This article has attempted to show how the inspection of school leader-ship has changed over the last twenty-five years, reflecting changing conceptions of school leadership and in turn influencing and helping to determine those changing expectations. As the education landscape and scope of school and system leadership continue to evolve, inspection will have a key role both in reflecting and reporting on change and in stimu-lating further innovation.

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