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National School Categorisation System



Frequently asked questions

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Audience	Primary schools; middle schools; secondary schools; governing bodies of maintained schools; local authorities; diocesan authorities; regional consortia; challenge advisers; Estyn; teaching unions; national bodies with an interest in education; and members of the public.
Overview	This document provides answers to a range of frequently asked questions about the National School Categorisation System. The document includes a brief description of the three-step model, how the school categorisation system works, what happens after a support category has been assigned, and information about specific groups of learners.
Action required	None – for information only.
Further information	Enquiries about this document should be directed to: Schools Management and Effectiveness Division School Standards and Workforce Directorate Welsh Government Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ e-mail: SMED1@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Additional copies	This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at www.gov.wales/educationandskills
Related documents	This frequently asked questions document relates to the 2015 categorisation outcomes (published in January 2016) and should be read in parallel with the documents <i>National School Categorisation System – Guidance document for schools, local authorities and regional consortia</i> (2016) and <i>National School Categorisation System – A guide for parents and carers</i> (2016) which can be accessed from the Welsh Government website at www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/schoolcategorisation/?lang=en

General

What is the National School Categorisation System?

The National School Categorisation System provides a systematic view of a school's performance, based on publicly available data and the school's own self-evaluation in respect of leadership, teaching and learning.

The system offers a holistic approach to school improvement, which allows the regional education consortia Challenge Advisers to take the context of the school into account when determining a the level of support a school requires to support it to improve.

Why do we have categorisation?

Its primary purpose is to identify schools that are most in need of support, to ensure that, in partnership with local authorities, regional education consortia and schools, we direct our support and resources most effectively to secure the improvements necessary within our school system.

National School Categorisation is not about labelling, or creating crude league tables. It is about helping schools identify what are the factors that contribute to their progress and achievement, and what areas to focus on to achieve further development. The colour code of a school tells you the level of support the school will receive in order to support its development.

Who is included in the National School Categorisation System?

All primary, middle and secondary schools are included in the system.

How about infants-only and juniors-only schools?

All infants-only and juniors-only schools are included, in addition to all primary schools. For primary schools, the end of Foundation Phase and end of Key Stage 2 results have been combined which allows all schools to be included in the system.

What about new and amalgamated schools?

For amalgamated schools, data will be produced by Welsh Government for step one but not published for the first full year of a school's operation. Step two and step three will be carried out by the consortia using step one to inform the process. Step two and step three will be published.

Year two of operation will generate a published step one which, in line with the performance measures and weightings used, will include an element of historic data within the calculation.

It will be weighted in favour of the most recent year but will still cover a three-year period.

For new schools, year two (where end of phase/assessment data is available) will generate a published step one based on two years of performance.

How does the system work?

The system is based on three simple steps:

Step one – Standards group

is a data driven element that is provided by Welsh Government based on an agreed set of criteria for both primary and secondary schools.

Step two – Improvement capacity

is led by consortia and takes into account schools' self evaluation and capacity to self-improve in relation to leadership and teaching and learning.

Step three – Support category

is led by consortia and agreed with the local authority. The coloured support category for each school triggers a bespoke programme of support, challenge and intervention. The support category is also used by consortia to plan and deploy their resources.

For step one each school is placed into one of four standards groups - numbered 1 to 4, which identify how well they are performing against a set of agreed measures. Standards group 1 is the group that performs most strongly against the agreed measures.

Whilst step one is data driven and will have generated a standards group for each schools (1–4), step two consists of a judgement (A–D) based on the school's capacity to self-improve.

Schools where the judgement is A show the greatest capacity to self-improve along with the ability to support other schools. Those where the judgement is D require the most support.

The combination of the two judgements leads to a colour support category for each school.

The categorisation colour indicates the level of support a school requires – green, yellow, amber or red (with the schools in the green category needing the least support and those in the red category needing the most intensive support).

What happens after a colour support category has been assigned?

The colour category triggers a bespoke programme of support, challenge and intervention. The categorisation is used to plan the targeting and deployment of

resources by regional education consortia and the Welsh Government in respect of national capacity building programmes.

What if a school disagrees with their outcome?

The school can speak to their Challenge Adviser who will be able to provide further advice on how to formally log the disagreement. Consortia have an agreed disagreement procedure in place which the school can follow.

Does the National School Categorisation System result in more work for schools?

No, it shouldn't. The judgement of a school's ability and capacity to self-improve by the regional education consortia's Challenge Advisers will be based on the school's own self-evaluation, which it should already be undertaking on an annual basis. The judgement on capacity to improve is to do with the school's ability to drive its own improvement for the future and focuses on leadership, and the quality of teaching and learning.

How will you guarantee consistency within and across regional consortia?

Step one is provided by Welsh Government against nationally agreed performance measures and the data model is applied consistently across Wales.

Step two and step three are led by the regional consortia. The four regional education consortia have worked closely with each other, along the Association of Directors of Education (ADEW) to ensure that step two and step three are consistently and robustly applied across Wales. One set of guidance is used by all Challenge Advisers and both regional and national moderation along with national verification is undertaken.

What data is used to categorise primary schools?

Teacher assessment data from the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 is used. The measures include Foundation Phase Indicator (FPI) and Core Subject Indicator (CSI), Language, Literacy and Communication Skills, Mathematical Development (at Foundation Phase), English/Welsh first language and mathematics (at Key Stage 2). All measures are calculated at the expected level and the expected level plus one. Attendance data is also included in the model. The measures are calculated and benchmarked against levels of free school meals to ensure that the wider social context of the school has been factored in.

Detailed guidance and a parents guide is available on the Welsh Government website at:

www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolhome/raisingstandards/schoolcategorisation/?lang=en

What data is used to categorise secondary schools?

The performance measures used in step one for secondary schools are measured against five groups of data, based on examination results and attendance data, as follows.

- Level 2 threshold including English/Welsh first language and mathematics
- Capped points score including English/Welsh first language and mathematics
- 5+ A*–A or equivalent
- Attendance
- the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) judged against a set of minimum standards. (These are set as 30% in 2015, 32% in 2016 and 34% in 2017).

Detailed guidance and a parents guide is available on the Welsh Government website at:

www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/schoolcategorisation/?lang=en

Why does attendance data form part of the National School Categorisation System?

If children and young people are going to get the most out of their education and fulfil their potential it is important that they attend school regularly.

The inclusion of attendance data in the All Wales Core Data Sets for schools and local authorities is a key source of information for schools to use in self-evaluation and improvement processes.

Categorisation provides us with a constructive evaluation process to improve school performance, and attendance plays a key part in the system for both primary schools and secondary schools.

Why is last year's attendance data used for my primary school?

When the standards group is calculated (in the autumn term) the latest attendance data available is for the previous academic year.

Why aren't the National Reading and Numeracy Tests being used as part of the performance data measures?

The National Reading and Numeracy Tests help schools across Wales assess their learners' reading and numeracy skills. It should be remembered that the tests are primarily diagnostic and their purpose is to allow an assessment of reading and numeracy at a learner level to ensure that appropriate interventions can be made by the teacher or the school.

The results of the tests are not included in the set of performance measures for primary schools or secondary schools. There is international evidence that in countries using test results for accountability purposes there have been unintended consequences including teaching to the test. This can mean that learners' wider development needs receive less attention.

However, step two of the National School Categorisation System does take the Reading and Numeracy Tests into account when looking at how schools use test data. Schools need to evidence that test results are used as part of effective school management and improvement, and that there is a correlation between teacher assessment and standardised scores.

My school's result is the same as the benchmark for the quarter above the one it's been placed in. Why is it not in that quarter?

Schools are placed into their quarters based on unrounded data. This means that although the rounded data may make it look as though the scores are the same as the benchmark boundaries the unrounded data shows otherwise.

Are the benchmark quartiles fixed or is categorisation a relative system?

Yes the benchmark quartiles are fixed for 2015 and 2016; this means that the data model is an absolute model for 2015 and 2016. This also means that all schools can improve their position.

Does this mean that all schools could be green?

In theory, yes. Step one of the National School Categorisation System, for both primary and secondary schools, is based on an 'absolute' model. This means that schools can demonstrate improvement without having an impact on another school's standards group. This is achieved by allocating a score to each school based on benchmark boundaries calculated at the start of a three-year period. It is designed to ensure that we incentivise co-working and embed the principles of school-to-school improvement in our system.

The model is based around the Minister's priorities for improving levels of literacy and numeracy.

What about the priority for reducing the impact of deprivation on educational attainment?

The priority to reduce the impact of deprivation on educational attainment has a very clear focus. The data measures for primary schools are calculated and benchmarked against levels of free school meals. This is to ensure that the wider social context of deprivation has been factored in.

As part of a school's self-evaluation, the performance of FSM learners should be reviewed and analysed as an area of clear focus.

If standards are not good or not improving, then leadership, as part of step two, cannot be judged as wholly effective. This is also the case where the performance of learners in receipt of free school meals (FSM learners) or any other vulnerable group is not improving at a sufficient rate.

For secondary schools, where performance of Level 2 threshold including English/Welsh language and mathematics for eFSM learners is below the agreed eFSM minimum standard (30% in 2015, 32% in 2016 and 34% in 2017) the school's standards group defaults to at most a 3 on the standards axis. If a school achieves less than the agreed eFSM minimum standard then it can not be categorised as a green school.

How about those learners with Special Educational Needs?

The publication of standard performance statistics inclusive of all learners reflects the inclusive approach that we take to provision for SEN learners in Wales. This principle of inclusivity is not one that we would wish to move away from.

There is a wide spectrum of need. For some learners with severe and complex needs it is unreasonable to expect them to achieve the Level 2 threshold including English/Welsh language and mathematics, however for many other learners with, for example, dyslexia or visual or hearing impairment, it would be equally unreasonable not to have high expectations for them.

Across Wales, local policy and practice in the field of SEN differs greatly from authority to authority both in terms of application of the code of practice and provision in mainstream schools, designated classes or units. Learners with similar needs may have a statement in one authority but be supported via 'School Action Plus' in another.

We value the performance of all learners and therefore, all learners are included in our data.

Step two of the categorisation system allows Challenge Advisers to consider the context that the school is working in as part of their assessment of the school's capacity to self-improve. This is the opportunity for schools to discuss with Challenge Advisers the data in the context of its learners who have SEN.

Data is only ever the starting point – good self-evaluation seeks to understand the issues underlying the data in order to support better outcomes for all learners.

There is now a reliance on regional consortia and Challenge Advisers. How do you know if they will be robust?

The National School Categorisation System has been co-constructed with local government and the regional consortia – they are an integral part of the system. National training for all Challenge Advisers has been provided along with further

bespoke training provided by regional consortia. Furthermore, detailed guidance has been agreed on an all Wales basis.

Consortia have established a quality standards group to ensure consistency within and across the regional consortia.

The outcomes are moderated by a regional moderation board to ensure consistency within each regional consortium. A national verification process is also in place with representatives of all four consortia along with independent observers. This ensures that any decisions are applied consistently and not in isolation.

Publication of categories

How will the information look when published and where will it be published?

The final categorisation outcomes will be published in January each year on the My Local School website. This will include the outcomes of all three steps for each school.

What support do green/yellow/amber/red schools get?

Green support category

A school in the green support category will receive up to 4 days of challenge adviser time.

Yellow support category

A school in the yellow support category will receive up to 10 days of challenge adviser time.

Amber support category

A school in the amber support category will receive up to 15 days of challenge adviser time.

Red support category

A school in the red support category will receive up to 25 days of challenge adviser time.

What does this mean for parents?

Parents will have a clear picture of the school's performance and the level of support and/or intervention being provided. In terms of transparency, information about categorisation will be published on the My Local School website in January of each year and will sit alongside the other published information for each school.

A guide for parents/carers is available on the Welsh Government Website at:
www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/schoolcategorisation/?lang=en