National School Categorisation System
Frequently asked questions

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, learning and teaching.

The system offers a holistic approach to school improvement, which allows the regional consortia challenge advisers to take the context of the school into account when determining 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 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, secondary and special schools are included in the system for 2016 outcomes.

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 new and amalgamated schools (where pupils have transferred in from other schools), step one data will be published along with step two and step three when two years worth of assessment data is available.

Where two years worth of assessment data is not available, step two and step three will be carried out by the regional consortia using step one to inform the process. In these cases, only step two and step three will be published.

For brand new schools (where pupils have not transferred from another school) with only one year of data, step one will not be calculated.

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

Step three – Support category

is led by regional 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 regional 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 for each school. The categorisation is also used to plan the targeting and deployment of resources by regional 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. Regional 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 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 learning and teaching.

How will you guarantee consistency within and across regional consortia?

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

Step two and step three are led by the regional consortia. The four regional consortia have worked closely with each other along with 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 http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/schoolcategorisation/?skip=1&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:
http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/schoolcategorisation/?lang=en

Why have you changed the cohort used to calculate the step one data for secondary schools?

As a result of '*the Review of Qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales'* (2012), there will be a number of changes made to the performance measures for secondary schools over the coming years. One such change amends the population used in reporting from 15-year-olds at the start of the academic year to the whole Year 11 cohort. This is applied to all Key Stage 4 performance measures and will be applied to the 2016 data in the National School Categorisation outcomes.

We will not be applying this retrospectively to previous years data in order to preserve the robustness of the historical data that has been agreed with schools.

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's 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 learners' wider development needs receive less attention.

Under step two of the National School Categorisation System, schools should evidence how they act on the information about learners' skills provided by the National Reading and Numeracy Tests. Effective school management and improvement should include the consideration of test information alongside teacher assessment.

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

Schools are placed into their quartiles 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; this means that the data model is an absolute model for outcomes published in 2015, 2016 and 2017. 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 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 meal eligibility. 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 eFSM 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 eligible for free school meals (eFSM 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 first language and mathematics for eFSM learners is below the agreed eFSM minimum standard (30% in 2015, 32% in 2016 and 34% in 2017) the schools 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 (SEN)?

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 first language and mathematics, however for many other learners with, for example, dyslexia or a visual or hearing impairment, it would be equally unreasonable not to have high expectations for the.

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 an opportunity for schools to discuss with challenge advisers the school's 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.

Why do special schools not have step one data?

Special schools are schools that are specifically designed to cater for learners with specific educational needs. They do not have an agreed all Wales set of performance measures for its learners. Therefore, at this stage, we are unable to compare them to each other and mainstream schools in relation to data and we are unable to generate step one data on that basis.

There is now a reliance on regional consortia and challenge advisers. How do you know whether 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.

The regional 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 regional 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 primary, middle and secondary school. Only step two and step three will be published for special schools.

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 support.

Yellow support category

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

Amber support category

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

Red support category

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

What does this mean for parents?

Parents will have a clear picture on 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 on each school.

A guide for parents/carers is available on the Welsh Government website at http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/schoolcategorisation/?skip=1&lang=en