Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT
BY
THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE   **National School Categorisation System**

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BY   **Huw Lewis, Minister for Education and Skills**

I announced in a Written Statement on 7 May 2014 that the development of a primary grading model was underway along with a review of the performance measures currently included in secondary school Banding.

We know that using performance data to drive school improvement has made positive strides for many schools and learners. Since Banding was introduced we have seen schools in Band 4 and 5 make real progress year on year. Band 5 schools in 2012 have seen the overall percentage of pupils achieving the Level 2 threshold including English/Welsh First Language and Mathematics increase from 35.0 per cent in 2012 to 45.0 per cent in 2013. Similarly Band 4 schools in 2012 have gone from 45.8 per cent to 49.5 per cent in 2013.

Robert Hill's report on 'The future delivery of education services in Wales' noted that regional consortia should achieve a common understanding on how to apply a four-level categorisation to school performance. As part of the agreed National Model for Regional Working, work has developed to ensure a national approach in relation to how they categorise their schools. Officials and officers from local government, consortia and WLGA have worked together to bring all of these elements together.

We have listened to the feedback received since the introduction of Banding and we have built on this when developing a model for primary schools and in amending the secondary school measures. My department has also worked closely with local authorities, consortia and schools to ensure we develop a system-wide approach to support and challenge schools, bringing together the principles of Banding with the Hill report recommendation. This new system is a system which is not purely data-driven but also takes into account the leadership, teaching and learning that goes on in our schools. A system where the principles of Banding are embedded.

To build on the improvements achieved by Banding and to include primary schools, I am today announcing a new National School Categorisation System which will

cover both primary and secondary schools and be based upon three steps. The new system will assess schools on the following intelligence:

- a range of performance measures provided by Welsh Government;
- robust self-evaluation from schools on their ability to improve in relation to leadership, learning and teaching; and
- corroboration of the school's self-evaluation by education consortia Challenge Advisers.

The outcome of the performance data and self-evaluation will generate a categorisation for each school. This will be determined by consortia, discussed with the school and moderated by a quality assurance and standardisation group to ensure consistency within and across consortia. My officials will attend each of these meetings.

The three steps of the system are:

Step One: consists of data in relation to standards and performance. The first step in the process identifies how well the school is performing. An agreed set of data measures will be generated by Welsh Government and used by each consortium as part of the process to categorise schools. The agreed set of measures will be used by consortia from September and verified by Welsh Government in December/January of each year. A judgement of 1-4 will be generated in relation to standards.

Step Two: having made the first objective, data-driven judgement on a school's categorisation – based on the performance of pupils; the second judgment is based on the school's ability and capacity to self-improve. The process of coming to a judgement on its ability to bring about improvement will begin with the school's own self-evaluation, which it should already be undertaking on an annual cycle. The judgement on capacity to improve is to do with the school's ability to drive its own improvement for the future and will focus on leadership, learning and teaching.

Following the self-evaluation, consortia Challenge Advisers will have to be assured, and see evidence, that all school leaders use performance data robustly as part of effective school management and improvement. This will include governors, head teachers, middle and subject leaders. There must be evidence of the effective use of accurate data at individual pupil, class, group, cohort, subject and school level. Challenge Advisers will consider the performance of all learners and groups of learners and the quality of teaching and learning within the school. In particular, the performance of learners in receipt of free school meals will be reviewed and analysed – a school's context will not be used as an excuse for poor performance. A judgement of A-D will be generated.

Step Three: the combination of the two judgements will lead to a colour categorisation of the school which will trigger a bespoke programme of support, challenge and intervention. This will need to be agreed between the Local Authority and the regional school improvement service. The categorisation will be used to plan the targeting and deployment of resources by consortia and the Welsh Government in respect of national capacity building programmes.

A definition of each category is included at the end of this Written Statement.

Primary Schools

In the first year the National School Categorisation System for primary schools will operate on a pilot basis and will be reviewed if necessary. The performance data for Step One will include:

Overall achievement
- Proportion of pupils achieving the Foundation Phase Indicator at the end of the Foundation Phase and the Core Subject Indicator at the end of Key Stage 2.

Language
- Proportion of pupils achieving the expected outcome or above in Language, Literacy and Communication Skills (English or Welsh) at the end of the Foundation Phase and the expected level or above in English or Welsh First Language at the end of Key Stage 2 (where a pupil has been assessed in both English and Welsh First Language at the end of Key Stage 2, the highest of the two is counted);
- Proportion of pupils achieving the expected outcome plus one or above in Language, Literacy and Communication Skills (English or Welsh) at the end of the Foundation Phase and the expected level plus one or above in English or Welsh First Language at the end of Key Stage 2 (where a pupil has been assessed in both English and Welsh First Language at the end of Key Stage 2, the highest of the two is counted).

Mathematics
- Proportion of pupils achieving the expected outcome or above in Mathematical Development at the end of the Foundation Phase and the expected level or above in Mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2;
- Proportion of pupils achieving the expected outcome plus one or above in Mathematical Development at the end of the Foundation Phase and the expected level plus one or above in Mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.

Attendance
- Proportion of half-day sessions attended.

Each of the measures will be placed into benchmark quarters based on their Free School Meal (FSM) group. The FSM groups will be the same groups as those in the All Wales Core Data Sets.

The benchmark boundaries calculated in the base year, to place schools in their quarters, will remain fixed for a period of three years. This is to ensure that schools will be able to demonstrate progress through the system, with their improvements reflected in their total score. This means that one school moving up in the system will not mean that another school will have to move down.

However, not all schools will be included in the model. Only schools with three years of performance data will be included.

Secondary Schools

The National School Categorisation System will also include secondary schools and will build on the success of Banding to deliver a more holistic approach to school improvement.

As with Banding, we will not waiver from using school performance data to make a judgement on a school through our new system. The principles of Banding remain an integral part of the wider National School Categorisation System. The new system will use this performance data to make a judgement on a school and also include a judgement of the school's self-evaluation on leadership, learning and teaching. The two judgements will result in one of four categorisation colours being given to the school in the same way I have described above for primary categorisation.

As with primary schools, this will be an absolute model. This will mean that schools that can demonstrate improvement against their own baseline can move up in the system and will not mean that another school will have to move down in the system. Whilst work has been completed in relation to Step Two and Three, my officials continue to review the range of secondary data measures and I intend to make a further announcement in relation to this in October.

The new National School Categorisation System will have a relentless focus on those schools where groups of learners are underperforming or where teachers are not able to consistently ensure that all pupils fulfil their potential. Those schools will not be able to be categorised as 'Green'. This is a step change where context cannot be used as an excuse and 'coasting' schools will not be tolerated.

Finally, consortia have a crucial role to play. Brokering support for schools will be a key function of the regional consortia, and I am very encouraged by the fact that head teachers of our best schools around Wales are already responding to the call for their schools to support schools that have identified areas for development. I am also pleased that both national and regional training has taken place to support them. Estyn, as part of their inspection of consortia, will have a key role to ensure that regional implementation of the National School Categorisation System accurately reflects the position and direction of travel for each school.

Definition of categories:

Green Categorisation – these are our best schools who:

- know themselves well and identify and implement their own priorities for improvement;
- have resilience within the staff team;
- are rewarded by greater autonomy;
- will be challenged to move towards or sustain excellence; and
- have the capacity to lead others effectively (school to school support).

Yellow Categorisation – these are our good schools who:

- will know and understand most of the areas in need of improvement;
- have many aspects of the schools performance which are self-improving; and

- will receive bespoke challenge and support deployed according to need.

Amber Categorisation – these are our schools in need of improvement who:

- do not know and understand all the areas in need of improvement;
- have many aspects of the schools performance which are not improving quickly enough;
- will receive bespoke challenge and intervention deployed according to need
- will receive an automatic letter from consortium;
- self-evaluation and school improvement plan will be signed off by consortium;
- will be expected to remain in an amber category for only the short-term; and
- will receive time limited, focused challenge and intervention to support improvement or and be at the risk of dropping to the red category.

Red Categorisation – these are our schools in need of greatest improvement who:

- will receive critical intervention;
- receive an automatic warning letter from LA and subsequent use of statutory powers where necessary;
- trigger intensive and effective collaboration between LA and consortium;
- trigger the all-Wales common school causing concern arrangements; and
- will lose autonomy and be subject to a more directed approach.

Following the verification of data with Step One of the model, the categorisation of all schools will be published in January of each year.